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SOME FRIENDS OF WALT WHITMAN
A STUDY IN SEX-PSYCHOLOGY.

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In jotting down some notes about Walt Whitman's friends I have felt that these may not be without value on account of the light they throw upon the Poet himself. As is well known Whitman's friendships were of an ardent character and bulked largely in his life - and that fact is illustrated by the many passages in his poems referring to the subject - notably by the group entitled Calamus, to which I shall have to refer more than once.

I need hardly say that in most biographies, the friendship side of the subject is passed by in a somewhat casual manner as a matter of little importance; which I regard as a great mistake - but though personally I regard it as a mistake yet it may carry with it this advantage that in that way we are spared a good deal of annoyance; for to have ignorant and importunate critics rummaging in the vitals of men and women we love and revere, with the view of exposing them to the common gaze would indeed add a new terror to life.

In the case of Whitman his love-nature, by all accounts,

was singularly grand and noble. When we think of his labours and ministrations in the Army Hospitals during the American Civil War, of the hundred thousand or so wounded soldiers who passed through his hands, of the countless stories of personal affection and devotion at that time given and received, and of the many poems in Leaves of Grass itself which run to the same motive, the grandeur and nobility of his mind become apparent. Dr. Bucke - who knew Whitman so intimately as a personal friend - says of him after describing their first meeting: "Any attempt to convey to another even the faintest notion of the effect upon me of that short and seemingly commonplace interview would be certainly hopeless, probably foolish. Briefly, it would be nothing more than the simple truth to state that I was, by it, lifted up and set upon a higher plane of existence, and one upon which I have more or less continuously lived ever since - that is, for a period of eighteen years. And my feeling towards the man, Walt Whitman, from that day to the present has been and is that of the deepest affection and reverence."

Of course it may be said, and probably will be said that in Bucke, Whitman met with a man of ability and culture in whom he discovered a response and an appreciation which he would not have found in an ordinary and perhaps uneducated son or daughter of the people - and that this accounts for the extraordinary

impression produced. But I do not think this explanation is by any means adequate; for as a matter of fact (as is well known) the response to him from the roughest and most uncultured individuals or classes was quite as warm and vivid as that from the educated - in fact generally more so. And if there is to be an 'explanation' of this I suggest that it will be found in a certain quality of Whitman's mind which lay below all ordinary observation; but on this subject I cannot dwell at present, though I will try to disentangle and make it clear at some later time.

At this point I may perhaps insert a few words from my own account of my first meeting with the Poet (Days with Walt Whitman, London, George Allen and Unwin, p. 5.) "Meanwhile in that first ten minutes I was becoming conscious of an impression which subsequently grew even more marked - the impression, namely, of immense vista or background in his personality. If I had thought before (and I do not know that I had) that Whitman was eccentric, unbalanced, violent, my first interview certainly produced a quite contrary effect. No one could be more considerate, I may almost say courteous; no one could have more simplicity of manner and freedom from egotistic wriggings; and I never met any one who gave me more the impression of knowing what he was doing than he did. Yet away and beyond all this I was aware of a certain radiant power in him, a large benign effluence and inclusiveness.

as of the sun, which filled out the place where he was - yet with something of reserve and sadness in it too, and a sense of remoteness and inaccessibility."

To clinch what I have just said about the direct attraction which Walt exercised on plain unsophisticated folk, I may quote a few words from an Interview with Pete Doyle, which is printed in a little book entitled Calamus.^x Doyle had been baggage-man on one of the trains plying between Washington and New York, and at a still earlier date had been conductor of a horse (tram) car at Washington. It was in this earlier capacity that Doyle met Whitman. "You ask me where I first met him? It is a curious story. We felt drawn to each other at once. I was a conductor. The night was very stormy, - he had been over to see Burroughs before he came down to take the car - the storm was awful - Walt had his blanket - it was thrown round his shoulders - he seemed like an old sea-captain. He was the only passenger, it was a lonely night, so I thought I would go in and talk with him. Something in me made me do it and something in him drew me

Calamus: a series of letters written during the years 1863-1880 by Walt Whitman to a young friend (Peter Doyle) - edited with an introduction by Richard Maurice Bucke, M.D., one of Whitman's literary executors. Published by Laurens Maynard at 287, Congress Street, in Boston 1897.

that way. Anyway I went into the car. We were familiar at once - I put my hand on his knee - we understood. He did not get out at the end of the trip - in fact went all the way back with me. I think the year of this was 1866. From that time we were the biggest sort of friends. I stayed in Washington until 1872, when I went on the Pennsylvania Railroad."

In another portion of the same interview, speaking of Whitman's relation to women, Pete says in his rough lingo: - "I never knew a case of Walt's being bothered up by a woman. In fact he had nothing special to do with any woman except Mrs. O'Connor and Mrs. Burroughs. His disposition was different. Woman in that sense never came into his head..... I ought to know about him those years - we were awful close together. In the afternoon I would go up to the Treasury building and wait for him to get through if he was busy. Then we'd stroll out together after, without any plan, going wherever we happened to get. This occurred days in and out, months running. Towards women generally Walt had a good way - he very easily attracted them. But he did that with men too. And it was an irresistible attraction. I've had many tell me - men and women. He had an easy gentle way - the same for all, no matter who they were or what their sex."

The series of letters (to Pete) which follow in this book are full of interest and repay a careful study on account of the sidelight which they throw upon both characters (Walt and Pete) and on their relation to each other. Here is one (letter VIII) which returns to the same subject, namely his relation to women, and which, notwithstanding its somewhat jaunty air, impresses the reader with the sense that Walt's so-called flirtations were not very serious. He is speaking of some evening party, and says:- "I also made love to the women, and flatter myself that I created at least one impression - wretch and gay deceiver that I am! The truth is, Peter, that I am here at the present time mainly in the midst of female women, some of them young and jolly, and meet them most every evening in company; and the way in which this aged party comes up to the scratch and cuts out the youthful parties and fills their hearts with envy is absolutely a caution. You would be astonished, my son, to see the brass and coolness and the capacity of flirtation and carrying on with the girls - I would never have believed it of myself!"

This letter seems to me very characteristic, with its slightly histrionic air, and enjoyment of the Don Juan pose, and its perfect understanding (as between Pete and himself) that it was only a pose. Looking through the whole series

of over 100 letters, there emerges just such a figure as one might expect from such a correspondence - humorous, shrewd, motherly, and intensely real in its forethought and devotion for a younger friend.

There are plenty of other letters in the same book from which one might make extracts which would yield effective pictures. This for instance speaking of his giddy fits. "I have felt unwell almost every day - some days not so bad. Besides, I have those spells again, worse, last longer, come sudden, dizzy and sudden sweat. It is hard to tell exactly what is the matter or what to do. The doctor says these dizzy spells are all from that hospital malaria, hospital poison absorbed in the system years ago..... I have taken three or four of my favorite rides on Broadway, I believe I described them to you in my letter a year ago. I find many of my old friends, and new ones too, and am received with the same warm friendship and love as ever..... Tell Johnny Lee I send him my love, and hope he is well and hearty."

Thus far we have the poet's love-nature portrayed mainly from the man's side - portrayed, that is, by himself or by friends like Dr. Bocke who were closely in touch with him or who understood his temperament. It may interest us to approach the subject from the woman's side.

In 1918 there came out a book entitled: The Letters

of Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman, which for our present purpose is extremely interesting and helpful, though sometimes almost painful to read. It contains 76 letters in all - five being from Whitman to Mrs. Gilchrist, and some 64 from Mrs. Gilchrist to the Poet, while the remaining seven are from outsiders. Anne Gilchrist, as we know from independent considerations, was a woman of fine instinct and considerable literary ability - the widow of Alexander Gilchrist who wrote the life of Blake. At her first reading of Whitman's Leaves of Grass, in about 1869, she practically fell in love with the Poet (whom up to that time she had never seen, and whom she did not even meet till 1876 (or seven years later) when she came to Philadelphia).

Her intense enthusiasm for Leaves of Grass may be judged from the letters she wrote to William Rossetti, and which appeared under the title A woman's estimate of Walt Whitman, in the Boston Radical of May 1870:- "I had not dreamed that words could cease to be words, and become electric streams like these. I do assure you that, strong as I am, I feel sometimes as if I had not bodily strength to read many of these poems. In the series headed "Calamus", for instance, in some of the "Songs of Parting," the Voice out of the Sea", the poems beginning "Tears, Tears" etc., there

is such a weight of emotion, such a tension of the heart, that mine refuses to beat under it - stands quite still- and I am obliged to lay the book down for a while." As she grew more familiar with the poems her devotion grew more definite and urgent; and before long she made up her mind to cross the Atlantic and make Whitman's personal acquaintance.

This resolution to cross the Atlantic was, as may be imagined, no small matter. It included the idea of taking her three young children with her, and planting them out at School and College in Philadelphia. Naturally the scheme could not be carried out at once, and, as a matter of fact it was not till 1876 that she actually made the passage. It was early in September 1871, I believe, that she first wrote to Whitman - a truly ardent letter, inspired by what she had read of the Poems - and even then casting herself, so to speak, at his feet: "O come my darling and look into these eyes and see the loving ardent aspiring soul in them." But he had delayed to answer. Perhaps the offer was too sudden and unexpected! Then she wrote again: "I wrote you a letter the 6th September and would fain know whether it has reached your hand. If it have not I will write its contents again quickly to you - if it have, I will wait your time with courage and patience for an answer; but spare

me the needless suffering of uncertainty on this point, and let me have one line, one word, of assurance that I am no longer hidden from you by a thick cloud - I that love thee day and night, last thoughts, first thoughts, my soul's passionate yearning towards thy divine soul, every hour, every deed and thought - my love for my children, my hopes, aspirations for them, all taking new shape, new height through this great love."^x

One must remember, in reading this letter, what makes it the more impressive, that Anne Gilchrist, at the time of writing it, was no mere juvenile enthusiast but a literary woman of considerable experience, some 40 years of age, who had assisted her husband during his lifetime in an important literary work and now after his death was engaged in preparing a second and enlarged edition for publication, who was full of plans and activities, including the rearing and education of three children, and had no little experience of the world and the vicissitudes of life and fortune. These considerations help us to realise what such a letter meant and the light it necessarily throws back on the personality and character of the man who inspired it.

^x

Letters of Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman. Letter III
p. 65 Edited by Thomas B. Harned. T. Fisher Unwin, London.
(No date).

Again, however, there was a long delay. But at last, in November of the same year, the reply arrived. It was kindly, but obviously not on the same plane of intensity. He says he has been waiting quite a while for time and the right mood for answering her letter. "I wish to give it a day, a sort of Sabbath or holy day, apart to itself, under serene and propitious influences, confident that I could then write you a letter which would do you good, and me too. I too send you my love. And do you feel no disappointment because I now write so briefly. My book is my best letter, my response, my truest explanation of all. In it I have put my body and spirit. You understand this better and fuller and clearer than any one else. And I too fully and clearly understand the loving letter it has evoked. Enough that there surely exists so beautiful and delicate a relation, accepted by both of us with joy."

"There is always," as the French say, "one who loves and the other who consents to be loved." And in all such cases it is the most difficult thing in the world for the passionate lover, who of course desires an ardent return of affection, to believe (what is so often the fact), that there is in the heart of the other party no true reciprocity, but only a passive acquiescence. In the case before us the real nature of the

relation is evident, Anne Gilchrist loved W. W. with all the force of a highly-strung and powerful nature, and she could not, would not, believe that her passion was merely accepted and not really reciprocated. Realising the true situation, as we can do, one reads the correspondence with a painful ^{conviction} sinking of the heart. It happened to me at that time to be in touch with both parties. I was staying in Mrs. Gilchrist's house (1929 N. 22nd Str: Philadelphia), having indeed been introduced to the Gilchrists by Whitman himself; and Whitman for a few days was also staying there. I of course knew nothing about the said correspondence (which was private, and only saw the light years afterwards), but the general situation was evident enough - it could hardly be concealed. I saw that Anne Gilchrist was suffering. I saw that Whitman was all kindness - kindness itself towards her; but at the same time that his relation to her did not go farther than that word would indicate. One would have thought that she also would have perceived the truth; and doubtless she would have but that love itself, as we all know, is in such cases blind.

It was really a tragic situation; but there was no escape. Gradually, thro' weeks and months of pain - exquisite pain, no doubt, the conviction must have grown and established itself in her mind that he did not, and could not, love her

in the way she so fondly hoped - that her dreams of a heart-response from this magical friend, of a perfect understanding, of a union of lives, of a final settlement with her children in the New World, were all destined to be utterly dashed. It must have been a frightful blow (and no doubt many wise-acres would say it was very foolish of her to expose herself to the possibility of such a thing), but we all do foolish things, and - noble and courageous woman as she was - she took the blow without a murmur; and to the end of the volume her letters though sad, are strong and dignified and entirely free from words of reproach.

Nevertheless, the blow was too heavy for her to recover from it. She returned to England in June 1879; a most serious complaint fastened itself upon her, ran its malign course for five or six years, and she died in November 1885.

Such was the tragic end, on one side at any rate, of the relationship between two very noble characters. It is sad to think of because in many ways (tho' certainly not in all) these two were so well fitted to become life long friends. No doubt many critics following the story have been inclined to dismiss Whitman as an impassive slow-moving character incapable of passionate and absorbing emotion. Yet in the latter part of their judgment they would be quite astray, as my next

few words will show. Whitman as a matter of fact was subject to strong and passionate love-affairs, which were sometimes - especially in his earlier years - almost violent in their intensity.

In the 1860 edition of Leaves of Grass there is a poem (p. 355, of that edition^x) written on the occasion of his desertion or betrayal by some one whom he loved very dearly, which is almost painful to read on account of the weight of feeling with which it is charged. In later editions this and one other similar poem are excised and omitted - probably

I should say on account of that very weight of feeling which they reveal (for Whitman - great artist that he was - could never bear to have anything excessive or unbalanced in his work), though to us that weight of feeling makes them all the more indispensable and precious. Who that 'someone' was to whom Walt was, for the time being, so devoted, we do not know; but the internal evidence points conclusively to a man friend; and some of the points to which I shall refer presently makes the situation easier to understand.

The poem in question is as follows:-

^x See also p. 56 of My Days with Walt Whitman by E. Carpenter, where the poem is quoted in full.

Hours continuing long, sore and heavy-hearted,

Hours of the dusk, when I withdrew to a lonesome and unfrequented spot, seating myself, leaning my face in my hands;

Hours sleepless, deep in the night, when I go forth, speeding swiftly the country roads, or through the city streets, or pacing miles and miles, stifling plaintive cries;

Hours discouraged, distracted - for the one I cannot content myself without, soon I saw him, content himself without me;

Hours when I am forgotten (O weeks and months are passing, but I believe I am never to forget!)

Sullen and suffering hours! (I am ashamed - but it is useless - I am what I am;)

Hours of my torment - I wonder if other men have the like, out of the like feelings?

Is there even one like me - distracted - his friend, his lover lost to him?

Is he too as I am now? Does he still rise in the morning, dejected, thinking who is lost to him? and at night awaking, thinking who is lost?

Does he too harbor his friendship silent and endless? harbor his anguish and passion?

Does some stray reminder, or the casual mention of a name, bring the fit back upon him, taciturn and deprest?

Does he see himself reflected in me? In these hours does he see the face of his hours reflected?

No one can doubt the intensity of feeling and the anguish of mind from which that poem sprang. But in this case we

see that that flood of emotion was roused by what some folk would call an unusual passion - the passion namely for another man. We in this Society, who have studied the byways of Sex-psychology are not surprised at this. We know now that although love between persons of opposite sex is as a rule the most powerful and absorbing, that^{it} is by no means always so, and that there are cases of overwhelming passion between those of the same sex. The whole of that section of Leaves of Grass which is called "Calamus" illustrates this fact, and it would seem that Whitman by collecting out of the great mass of his poems just this group was able to illustrate and give expression to what we should now call the homosexual passion - which passion, though at that time ignored and unacknowledged by the world, was burning fiercely within him and pressing for deliverance.

The whole section "Calamus" is as I say occupied with this subject, and to those who wish to gain an insight into Whitman's inner nature I strongly recommend a reading through of that section. At the present moment it may suffice to quote two or three of the poems contained in it. Here for instance is one entitled A Glimpse:-

A glimpse through an interstice caught,

Of a crowd of workmen and drivers in a bar-room around
the stove late of a winter night, and I unremark'd
seated in a corner,

Of a youth who loves me and whom I love, silently
approaching and seating himself near, that he may
hold me by the hand,

A long while amid the noises of coming and going, of
drinking and oath and smutty jest,

There we two, content, happy in being together, speaking
little, perhaps not a word.

Or this:-

When I peruse the conquer'd fame of heroes and the
victories of mighty generals, I do not envy the
generals.

Nor the President in his Presidency, nor the rich in his
great house,

But when I hear of the brotherhood of lovers, how it
was with them,

How together through life, through dangers, odium,
unchanging, long and long,

Through youth and through middle and old age, how
unfaltering, how affectionate and faithful they were,

Then I am pensive - I hastily walk away filled with the
bitterest envy.

Or this:-

Earth, my likeness,

Though you look so impassive, ample and spheric there,

I now suspect that is not all;

I now suspect there is something fierce in you eligible
to burst forth,

For an athlete is enamour'd of me, and I of him,
But towards him there is something fierce and terrible
in me eligible to burst forth,
I dare not tell it in words, not even in these songs.

John Addington Symonds, as we all know, wrote a great deal about Whitman, and about the homosexual temperament generally manifested both in the Greek world and in modern times, and his work has been most valuable, but it has been somewhat vitiated - and its value decreased - by a certain lack of solidity and self-reliance in Symonds' nature. Symonds' visits to England were but rare, and for myself I actually met him only once - though we corresponded occasionally; but I have no doubt at all about his attitude to homosexuality. He shared the temperament completely, and everything which threw light on the subject interested him. But in his expressions about it he vacillated somewhat. (We must remember that he wrote at a time when people were more hesitating and less outspoken on such subjects than they are now.) And while sometimes he wrote with ardour as almost a propagandist of the faith, at other times he hedged and went backwards on himself as one alarmed at his own temerity. This change of attitude is for instance very conspicuous in the ^{last} pages of his Problem in Greek Ethics, for while through-

out the body of that brochure he handles the question magnificently and lays out his description of the Greek customs like one intent only on arriving at an accurate statement of them and with no parti pris on either side, in those last pages he almost runs away from himself, and might be accused by an unfriendly critic of throwing dust in the eyes of the reader and deliberately causing the latter to mistake his real meaning. When I say this I am sure my audience will not charge me with unfriendly sentiments towards Symonds, for whose memory I have the greatest respect; but this is a case in which absolute truthfulness must not be dispensed with, and I feel sure that by his occasional vacillation and timidity Symonds did as a matter of fact do a certain amount of injury to the cause which really lay so close to his heart.

The same trouble may be observed in Symonds' dealing thro' correspondence with Whitman himself and (consequently) in his book about Whitman.^x After reading and studying for some time the group of poems entitled "Calamus," Symonds felt uncertain (as no doubt many other people have felt uncertain) how far the natural inferences from these poems about physical relationships among men were distinctly contemplated and envisaged by the author. He therefore wrote to Whitman - not once only

^x Walt Whitman, a Study, by John Addington Symonds (London George Routledge and Sons).

but several times - posing this question. I think most people will admit that this was a very foolish and mistaken thing to do. No one cares to be pinned down to a statement in black and white of his views on a difficult and complex subject. Least of all was Whitman open to such treatment. He hated snap questions and snip answers generally, knowing how seldom such things arrive anywhere near the real truth. But here was Symonds putting him in a very awkward position. He, Whitman, could hardly with truthfulness deny any knowledge or contemplation of such inferences; but if on the other hand he took what we might call the reasonable line, and said that, while not advocating abnormal relations in any way, he of course made allowance for possibilities in that direction and the occasional development of such relations, why, he knew that the moment he said such a thing he would have the whole American Press at his heels, snarling and slandering, and distorting his words in every possible way. Things are pretty bad here in this country; but in the States (in such matters) they are ten times worse. Symonds ought to have known and allowed for this, but apparently did not do so. In the end Whitman wrote a letter (which is quoted in part by Symonds) in which he expressly repudiates, disowns, and brands as damnable all 'morbid inferences' which may be drawn from the gospel of

comradeship. That of course was a perfectly safe and correct line to take, but it does not bring us much farther on our way, as it still leaves open the question what inferences are really morbid and what are not so. It is evident that Symonds' ill-judged letter annoyed and irritated the Poet - and very naturally - and I (for one) can only regret that S. ever wrote it; for the incident has given a handle to the reactionary folk and a push in the direction of Comstock and all his crew. We must remember too how different the atmosphere on all these matters was then, especially in the U. S. from what it is now in the centres of modern culture and in places like Oxford and Cambridge and London where you can nowadays talk as freely as you like, and where sex variations and even abnormalities are almost a stock subject of conversation.

Personally having known Whitman fairly intimately I do not lay any great stress on that letter. W. was in his real disposition the most candid, but also the most cautious of men. An attempt was made on this occasion to drive him into some sort of confession of his real nature; and it may be that that very effort aroused all his resistance and caused him to hedge more than ever. In the book entitled Walt Whitman in Camden, there is a report of an after dinner speech in which W. speaks of Symonds as being of a very "suspicious"

disposition. At first I was baffled by the expression, but on a second reading the context led me to suppose that this was said in allusion to these repeated enquiries on Symonds' part, and that Whitman interpreted them as conveying the idea that he (Whitman) had things (memories, motives, etc) which he was anxious to conceal.

Then there is our friend Leon Bazalgette who has written an excellent book on Whitman (Sa Vie et son Oeuvre), and who is an enthusiastic disciple of the Poet, but who is also (curiously enough) a strenuous opponent of the theory that Whitman himself had any homosexual tendencies or sympathies. Thus we are left divided in opinion and a good deal mystified. But I can not help thinking - though I may of course be wrong - that Bazalgette has been swayed in his judgment by the domination of French public opinion which is and generally has been so much inclined towards the adoration of the Female and so adverse to or negligent of romantic attachments between men.

There is also a little book, lately published, entitled Walt Whitman's Anomaly, which though not by any means very scientific in Treatment is stated in the Introduction to be by "a Medical Man", and is published by George Allen and Co., of London. It embodies again the same defect which we find in the French school - a defect which I can only describe as

a certain vulgarity of view. The author, in fact, in alluding to or trying to describe the particulars wherein Whitman's nature differs from the normal temperament is content all along to accentuate the petty or pathological marks but fails altogether to realise that the feminine characteristics in such a case may have a most important meaning as pointing to the evolution of a higher type of humanity than that which we are accustomed to, and may indicate an effort of Nature towards a superior form - a form inclusive of the feminine as well as the masculine. I say the author passes by all such superior considerations and dwells with a certain vulgarity of outlook on the meaner and pettier aspects possible to the subject. One can hardly hope to arrive at true or far-reaching conclusions by such a method. In fact we see plainly enough that if ever there is to be evolved a higher type of humanity of such a nature as to include male and female characteristics it is pretty certain that on the way to that ideal there will occur lopsided and unbalanced types straying far in one or the other direction, but that we need not on that account abandon our faith in an ultimate and admirable result.

Summarizing our conclusions we may certainly say without fear of contradiction that Walt Whitman was a great lover of mankind - one of the greatest that has ever appeared. In the

nobility of his devotion, in the tenderness of its expression, in the width of its embrace, in reaching to the poorest and most ignorant, to all classes and both sexes, in intense humanity and freedom from anything like aloofness and patronage, he stands almost without a rival. And here the word "Man" must of course be taken to include Woman. He was an ardent and faithful lover of humanity in its every phase. At the same time—and we must thank him for this — there is nothing woolly and vague about his expression, or so lofty and other-worldly that it will do to mean anything — or nothing! It has definite form and outline. When you hear of people who love everybody, somehow you instinctively shrink from them, fearing and indeed feeling that such a person must be terribly dull and depressing — not to say devoid of character. And nine times out of ten that instinct is correct. It is definiteness and decision that attract; and Whitman had that power to a quite remarkable degree, of holding people off and at a distance, and at the same time of drawing them to himself by invisible and almost irresistible bonds.

I say he was a passionate lover of mankind. But although I have just used the word (mankind) in its more general and vague application as to the human race at large I must now explain that I mean it also and particularly in its application to one section of the race. There is no doubt in my

mind that Walt was before all a lover of the Male. His thoughts turned towards Men first and foremost, and it is no good disguising that fact. A thousand passages in his poems might be quoted in support of that contention — passages in which the male, perfectly naturally and without affectation, figures as the main object of attention, and as the ideal to which his thoughts are directed. These passages are convincing I think in their scope, their power and their sincerity. In such a case as that it is useless to rush in with some tag of warning or talk about propriety or morality. What we have to do first is to establish a fact, and then afterwards to analyse and discuss that fact; and it seems to me — though of course I may be wrong — that the plain fact is his pre-occupation, throughout his poems, with the male rather than with the female.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that according to the usual standards of Life this is a strange preoccupation — something not easy to classify — something dislocated, out of joint. Still there it is, and we have to reckon it up and take account of it. Here was a man who notwithstanding the obvious superiority of the female as a mate, her superior adaptation in the matter of physical structure, mental build and temperament etc., — did actually prefer the male, and

continued all through life to favour and give expression to that preference. Here we seem to come face to face with a strange anomaly. But we who have studied the phenomena of sex-inversion are already accustomed to the existence of the anomaly. The further question which challenges us here is:- Can we explain it - this anomaly? or at least - since we cannot really explain anything - can we by due consideration of these numerous exceptions to a great general law, succeed in giving to our statement of the law a new and a better form? I think we can. I think we may say that the widespread existence of this anomaly (common not only in man, but in various animals) by which the male prefers the male and the female the female proves to us that perhaps after all the continuation of the race is not the main object of love and sex intercourse, but that some other aspect or explanation of the matter is needed. Undoubtedly the continuation of the race is important. Undoubtedly one of the results of mating throughout the animal kingdom is the production of offspring. But is this the sole or even the main result? I doubt it. It seems to me much more reasonable and even logical to regard the offspring of the sexes as a bye product - a valuable and beautiful bye product if you like - but not necessarily the main thing. The main thing is the actual establishment and consolidation of a

new form of life - the double life. When two people love each other to that degree that they become in effect one person they take on this new character, and may almost be said to enter into a new order of existence. It is that - the new and double life - which is the main thing, and if that can be attained without marriage, or apart from what is usually called marriage, why, the main purpose of marriage is already fulfilled. In the case of Whitman - united as he was by most intimate ties to one or more men-friends, we see already the emergence of a new organic inspiration and a new power of life. His poems radiate this power in all directions. Thousands of people date from their first reading of them a new era in their lives just as decidedly as they might date a similar era from the arrival of their first child. Thousands date from the reading of them a new inspiration and an extraordinary access of vitality carrying their activities and energies into new channels. How far this process may go we hardly yet know, but that it is one of the factors of future evolution we can hardly doubt. I mean that the loves of men towards each other - and similarly the loves of women for each other - may become factors of future human evolution just as necessary and well-recognized as the ordinary loves which lead to the birth of children and the propagation of

the race. If so, we may safely say that we see here in operation a great power which is already playing its part in moulding the world, and one which we are morally bound not to deny and disown, and not to run away from, at risk of denying our humanity and committing the sin, so execrated in the N. T. of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

Walt Whitman never married, nor is there as far as I am aware, a suggestion anywhere that he ever thought seriously of marrying. He leaves us a problem the answer to which, if ever found, will probably contain in itself the key to some ages of future development. We cannot at our present stage say exactly what that key is or where to be found. But what I think is incumbent on us to do is to confront the problem in question as directly and sanely as we can; not to blink it or dodge it, (or pass by in blameless security on the other side;) but as far as it touches our own lives to acknowledge it boldly and serenely - as if we indeed were that person concerned, and convinced that in solving the problem in any degree for ourselves we shall be solving it for thousands and millions of others and so helping to lighten a great load which to-day presses upon humanity.

²¹
p. 28.

Consult the book Walt Whitman in Camden, for an after-dinner speech in which W.W. speaks of Symonds as being of a very "suspicious" disposition.

²²
Also p. 28. Title & estimate of book by Leon Bazalsette (Sa Vie et son Oeuvre).