PREFACE TO

"LEAVES OF GRASS"

By Walt Whitman
AMERICA does not repel the past, or what the past has produced under its forms, or amid other politics, or the idea of castes, or the old religions—accepts the lesson with calmness—is not impatient because the slough still sticks to opinions and manners in literature, while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms—perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house—perceives that it waits a little while in the door—that it was fittest for its days—that its action has descended to the stalwart and well-shaped heir who approaches—and that he shall be fittest for his days.

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth, have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here is action untied from strings, necessarily blind to particulars and details, magnificently moving in masses. Here is the hospitality which for ever indicates heroes. Here the performance, disdaining the trivial, unapproach’d in the
tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings, and the push of its perspective, spreads with crampless and flowing breadth, and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground, or the orchards drop apples, or the bays contain fish, or men beget children upon women.

Other states indicate themselves in their deputies—but **the genius of the United States is not** best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors, or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors—but always most in the common people, south, north, west, east, in all its States, through all its mighty amplitude. The largeness of the nation, however, were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. Not swarming states, nor streets and steamships, nor prosperous business, nor farms, nor capital, nor learning, may suffice for the ideal of man—nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. **A live nation can always cut a deep mark, and can have the best authority the cheapest**—namely, from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states, and of present action and grandeur, and of the subjects of poets. (As if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records! As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery, and what has transpired in North and South America, were less than the small theater of the antique, or the aimless sleep-walking of the middle ages!) The pride of the United States leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities, and all returns of commerce and agriculture, and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory, to enjoy the sight and realization of full-sized men, or one full-sized man unconquerable and simple.

**The American poets are to inclose old and new, for America is the race of races. The expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new.** It is to be indirect, and not direct or descriptive
or epic. Its quality goes through these to much more. Let the age and wars of other nations be
chanted, and their eras and characters be illustrated, and that finish the verse. Not so the great psalm
of the republic. Here the theme is creative, and has vista. Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or
obedience or legislation, the great poet never stagnates. Obedience does not master him, he masters
it. High up out of reach he stands, turning a concentrated light—he turns the pivot with his finger—
he baffles the swiftest runners as he stands, and easily overtakes and envelopes them. The time
straying toward infidelity and confections and persiflage he withholds by steady faith. Faith is the
antiseptic of the soul—it pervades the common people and preserves them—they never give up
believing and expecting and trusting. There is that indescribable freshness and unconsciousness
about an illiterate person, that humbles and mocks the power of the noblest expressive genius. The
poet sees for a certainty how one not a great artist may be just as sacred and perfect as the greatest
artist.

The power to destroy or remould is freely used by the greatest poet, but seldom the power of
attack. What is past is past. If he does not expose superior models, and prove himself by every step
he takes, he is not what is wanted. The presence of the great poet conquers—not parleying, or
struggling, or any prepared attempts. Now he has passed that way, see after him! There is not left
any vestige of despair, or misanthropy, or cunning, or exclusiveness, or the ignominy of a nativity
or color, or delusion of hell or the necessity of hell—and no man thenceforward shall be degraded
for ignorance or weakness or sin. The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he
breathes into anything that was before thought small, it dilates with the grandeur and life of the
universe. He is a seer—he is individual—he is complete in himself—the others are as good as he,
only he sees it, and they do not. He is not one of the chorus—he does not stop for any regulation—
he is the president of regulation. What the eyesight does to the rest, he does to the rest. Who knows
the curious mystery of the eyesight? The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is
removed from any proof but its own, and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world. A single glance of it mocks all the investigations of man, and all the instruments and books of the earth, and all reasoning. What is marvelous? what is unlikely? what is impossible or baseless or vague—after you have once just open’d the space of a peach-pit, and given audience to far and near, and to the sunset, and had all things enter with electric swiftness, softly and duly, without confusion or jostling or jam?

The land and sea, the animals, fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests, mountains and rivers, are not small themes—but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects—they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Men and women perceive the beauty well enough—probably as well as he. The passionate tenacity of hunters, woodmen, early risers, cultivators of gardens and orchards and fields, the love of healthy women for the manly form, seafaring persons, drivers of horses, the passion for light and the open air, all is an old varied sign of the unfailing perception of beauty, and of a residence of the poetic in out-door people. They can never be assisted by poets to perceive—some may, but they never can. The poetic quality is not marshal’d in rhyme or uniformity, or abstract addresses to things, nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else, and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws, and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs and roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges, and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations, are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. If the greatnesses are in conjunction in a man or woman, it is enough—the fact will prevail through the universe; but the gaggery and gilt of a million years will not prevail. Who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost. This is what you shall do: Love the earth
and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and
crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience
and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man
or number of men—go freely with powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and with the
mothers of families—re-examine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and
dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the
richest fluency, not only in its words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the
lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body. The poet shall not spend his time
in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is already plow’d and manured; others may not
know it, but he shall. He shall go directly to the creation. His trust shall master the trust of
everything he touches—and shall master all attachment.

The known universe has one complete lover, and that is the greatest poet. He consumes an
eternal passion, and is indifferent which chance happens, and which possible contingency of fortune
or misfortune, and persuades daily and hourly his delicious pay. What balks or breaks others is fuel
for his burning progress to contact and amorous joy. Other proportions of the reception of pleasure
dwindle to nothing to his proportions. All expected from heaven or from the highest, he is rapport
with in the sight of the daybreak, or the scenes of the winter woods, or the presence of children
playing, or with his arm round the neck of a man or woman. His love above all love has leisure
and expanse—he leaves room ahead of himself. He is no irresolute or suspicious lover—he is
sure—he scorns intervals. His experience and the showers and thrills are not for nothing. Nothing
can jar him—suffering and darkness cannot—death and fear cannot. To him complaint and
jealousy and envy are corpses buried and rotten in the earth—he saw them buried. The
sea is not surer of the shore, or the shore of the sea, than he is of the fruition of his love, and of all perfection and beauty.

The fruition of beauty is no chance of miss or hit—it is as inevitable as life—it is exact and plumb as gravitation. From the eyesight proceeds another eyesight, and from the hearing proceeds another hearing, and from the voice proceeds another voice, eternally curious of the harmony of things with man. These understand the law of perfection in masses and floods—that it is profuse and impartial—that there is not a minute of the light or dark, nor an acre of the earth and sea, without it—nor any direction of the sky, nor any trade or employment, nor any turn of events. This is the reason that about the proper expression of beauty there is precision and balance. One part does not need to be thrust above another. The best singer is not the one who has the most lithe and powerful organ. The pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and sound.

Without effort, and without exposing in the least how it is done, the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons, some more and some less, to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow Time. What is the purpose must surely be there, and the clew of it must be there—and the faintest indication is the indication of the best, and then becomes the clearest indication. Past and present and future are not disjoin’d but join’d. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be, from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet. He says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson—he places himself where the future becomes present. The greatest poet does not only dazzle his rays over character and scenes and passions—he finally ascends, and finishes all—he exhibits the pinnacles that no man can tell what they are for, or what is beyond—he glows a moment on the extremest verge. He is most wonderful in his last half-hidden smile or frown; by that flash of the moment of parting the one that sees it shall be encouraged or terrified afterward for many years. The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals—he knows
the soul. The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons or deductions but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride, and the one balances the other, and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other. The inmost secrets of art sleep with the twain. The greatest poet has lain close betwixt both, and they are vital in his style and thoughts.

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity—nothing can make up for excess, or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations, are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art. If you have look’d on him who has achiev’d it you have look’d on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the gray gull over the bay, or the mettlesome action of the blood horse, or the tall leaning of sunflowers on their stalk, or the appearance of the sun journeying through heaven, or the appearance of the moon afterward, with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. The great poet has less a mark’d style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance, or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe, I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I
experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.

The old red blood and stainless gentility of great poets will be proved by their unconstraint. A heroic person walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that suits him not. Of the traits of the brotherhood of first-class writers, savans, musicians, inventors and artists, nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms. In the need of poems, philosophy, politics, mechanism, science, behavior, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand opera, shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest for ever and ever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself, and makes one.

The messages of great poems to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, what we inclose you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumber’d Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another—and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them. What do you think is the grandeur of storms and dismemberments, and the deadliest battles and wrecks, and the wildest fury of the elements, and the power of the sea, and the motion of Nature, and the throes of human desires, and dignity and hate and love? It is that something in the soul which says, Rage on, whirl on, I tread master here and everywhere—Master of the spasms of the sky and of the shatter of the sea, Master of nature and passion and death, and of all terror and all pain.

The American bards shall be mark’d for generosity and affection, and for encouraging competitors. They shall be Kosmos, without monopoly or secrecy, glad to pass anything to anyone—hungry for equals night and day. They shall not be careful of riches and privilege—they shall be riches and privilege—they shall perceive who the most affluent man is. The most affluent
man is he that confronts all the shows he sees by equivalents out of the stronger wealth of himself. The American bard shall delineate no class of persons, nor one or two out of the strata of interests, nor love most nor truth most, nor the soul most, nor the body most—and not be for the Eastern States more than the Western, or the Northern States more than the Southern.

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there—there the arms that lifted him first, and braced him best—there he returns after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler—the anatomist, chemist, astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician, historian, and lexicographer, are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is utter’d, they sent the seed of the conception of it—of them and by them stand the visible proofs of souls. If there shall be love and content between the father and the son, and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of the greatness of the father, there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of poems are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science.

Great is the faith of the flush of knowledge, and of the investigation of the depths of qualities and things. Cleaving and circling here swells the soul of the poet, yet is president of itself always. The depths are fathomless, and therefore calm. The innocence and nakedness are resumed—they are neither modest nor immodest. The whole theory of the supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it, departs as a dream. What has ever happen’d—what happens, and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws inclose all. They are sufficient for any case and for all cases—none to be hurried or retarded—any
special miracle of affairs or persons inadmissible in the vast clear scheme where every motion and
every spear of grass, and the frames and spirits of men and women and all that concerns them, are
unspeakably perfect miracles, all referring to all, and each distinct and in its place. It is also not
consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more
divine than men and women.

Men and women, and the earth and all upon it, are to be taken as they are, and the
investigation of their
past and present and future shall be unintermitted, and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon
this basis
philosophy speculates, ever looking towards the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all
toward
happiness, never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul. For the eternal
tendencies of
all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy. Whatever comprehends less
than that—
whatever is less than the laws of light and of astronomical motion—or less than the laws that
follow the
thief, the liar, the glutton and the drunkard, through this life and doubtless afterward—or less
than vast
stretches of time, or the slow formation of density, or the patient upheaving of strata—is of no
account.

Whatever would put God in a poem or system of philosophy as contending against some being or
influence, is also of no account. Sanity and ensemble characterize the great master—spoilt in one
principle, all is spoilt. The great master has nothing to do with miracles. He sees health for himself
in being one of the mass—he sees the hiatus in singular eminence. To the perfect shape comes
common ground. To be under the general law is great, for that is to correspond with it. **The master knows that he is unspeakably great, and that all are unspeakably great—that nothing, for instance, is greater than to conceive children, and bring them up well—that to be is just as great as to perceive or tell.**

In the make of the great masters the idea of political liberty is indispensable. Liberty takes the adherence of heroes wherever man and woman exist—but never takes any adherence or welcome from the rest more than from poets. They are the voice and exposition of liberty. They out of ages are worthy the grand idea—to them it is confided, and they must sustain it. Nothing has precedence of it, and nothing can warp or degrade it.

**As the attributes of the poets of the kosmos concenter in the real body, and in the pleasure of things, they possess the superiority of genuineness over all fiction and romance,** As they emit themselves, facts are shower’d over with light—the daylight is lit with more volatile light—the deep between the setting and rising sun goes deeper many fold. Each precise object or condition or combination or process exhibits a beauty—the multiplication table its—old age its—the carpenter’s trade its—the grand opera its—the huge- hull’d clean-shap’d New York clipper at sea under steam or full sail gleams with unmatch’d beauty—the American circles and large harmonies of government gleam with theirs—and the commonest definite intentions and actions with theirs. The poets of the kosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles. They are of use—they dissolve poverty from its need, and riches from its conceit. You large proprietor, they say, shall not realize or perceive more than anyone else. The owner of the library is not he who holds a legal title to it, having bought and paid for it. Anyone and everyone is owner of the library, (indeed he or she alone is owner,) who can read the same through all the varieties of tongues and subjects and styles, and in whom they enter with ease, and make supple and powerful and rich and large.

**These American States, strong and healthy and accomplish’d, shall receive no pleasure from violations of natural models, and must not permit them.** In paintings or mouldings or carvings in
mineral or wood, or in the illustrations of books or newspapers, or in the patterns of woven stuffs, or anything to beautify rooms or furniture or costumes, or to put upon cornices or monuments, or on the prows or sterns of ships, or to put anywhere before the human eye indoors or out, that which distorts honest shapes, or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies, is a nuisance and revolt. Of the human form especially, it is so great it
must never be made ridiculous. Of ornaments to a work nothing outre can be allow’d—but those ornaments can be allow’d that conform to the perfect facts of the open air, and that flow out of the nature of the work, and come irrepressibly from it, and are necessary to the completion of the work. Most works are most beautiful without ornament. Exaggerations will be revenged in human physiology. Clean and vigorous children are jetted and conceiv’d only in those communities where the models of natural forms are public every day. Great genius and the people of these States must never be demean’d to romances. As soon as histories are properly told, no more need of romances.

The great poets are to be known by the absence in them of tricks, and by the justification of perfect personal candor. All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor. Henceforth let no man of us lie, for we have seen that openness wins the inner and outer world, and that there is no single exception, and that never since our earth gather’d itself in a mass have deceit or subterfuge or prevarication attracted its smallest particle or the faintest tinge of a shade—and that through the enveloping wealth and rank of a state, or the whole republic of states, a sneak or sly person shall be discover’d and despised—and that the soul has never once been fool’d and never can be fool’d—and thrift without the loving nod of the soul is only a fœtid puff—and there never grew up in any of the continents of the globe, nor upon any planet or satellite, nor in that condition which precedes the birth of babes, nor at any time during the changes of life, nor in any stretch of abeyance or action of vitality, nor in any process of formation or reformation anywhere, a being whose instinct hated the truth.

Extreme caution or prudence, the soundest organic health, large hope and comparison and fondness for women and children, large alimentiveness and destructiveness and causality, with a perfect sense of the oneness of nature, and the propriety of the same spirit applied to human affairs, are called up of the float of the brain of the world to be parts of the greatest poet from his birth out of his mother’s womb, and from her birth out of her mother’s. Caution seldom goes far enough. It (even if you have achieve’d a secure 10,000 a year, or election to Congress or the Governorship,) and the
has been thought that the prudent citizen was the citizen who applied himself to solid gains, and
did well for himself and for his family, and completed a lawful life without debt or crime. The
greatest poet sees and admits these economies as he sees the economies of food and sleep, but has
higher notions of prudence than to think he gives much when he gives a few slight attentions at the
latch of the gate. The premises of the prudence of life are not the hospitality of it, or the ripeness
and harvest of it. Beyond the independence of a little sum laid aside for burial-money, and of a few
clap-boards around and shingles overhead on a lot of American soil own’d, and the easy dollars that
supply the year’s plain clothing and meals, the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such
a great being as a man is, to the toss and pallor of years of money-making, with all their scorching
days and icy nights, and all their stifling deceits and underhand dodgings, or infinitesimals of
parlors, or shameless stuffing while others starve, and all the loss of the bloom and odor of the
earth, and of the flowers and atmosphere, and of the sea, and of the true taste of the women and men
you pass or have to do with in youth or middle age, and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at
the close of a life without elevation or naïveté,
ghastly chatter of a death without serenity or majesty, is the great fraud upon modern civilization and
forethought, blotching the surface and system which civilization undeniably drafts, and
moistening with tears the immense features it spreads and spreads with such velocity before the
reach’d kisses of the soul.

Ever the right explanation remains to be made about prudence. The prudence of the mere
wealth and respectability of the most esteem’d life appears too faint for the eye to observe at all,
when little and large alike drop quietly aside at the thought of the prudence suitable for immortality.
What is the wisdom that fills the thinness of a year, or seventy or eighty years—to the wisdom
spaced out by ages, and coming back at a certain time with strong reinforcements and rich presents,
and the clear faces of wedding-guests as far
as you can look, in every direction, running gayly toward you? Only the soul is of itself—all else has reference to what ensues. All that a person does or thinks is of consequence. Nor can the push of charity or personal force ever be anything else than the profoundest reason, whether it brings argument to hand or no. No specification is necessary—to add or subtract or divide is in vain. Little or big, learn’d or unlearn’d, white or black, legal or illegal, sick or well, from the first inspiration down the windpipe to the last expiration out of it, all that a male or female does that is vigorous and benevolent and clean is so much sure profit to him or her in the unshakable order of the universe, and through the whole scope of it forever. The prudence of the greatest poet answers at last the craving and glut of the soul, puts off nothing, permits no let-up for its own case or any case, has no particular sabbath or judgment day, divides not the living from the dead, or the righteous from the unrighteous, is satisfied with the present, matches every thought or act by its correlative, and knows no possible forgiveness or deputed atonement.

The direct trial of him who would be the greatest poet is to-day. If he does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides—if he be not himself the age transfigur’d, and if to him is not open’d the eternity which gives similitude to all periods and locations and processes, and animate and inanimate forms, and which is the bond of time, and rises up from its inconceivable vagueness and infiniteness in the swimming shapes of to-day, and is held by the ductile anchors of life, and makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be, and commits itself to the representation of this wave of an hour, and this one of the sixty beautiful children of the wave—let him merge in the general run, and wait his development.

Still the final test of poems, or any character or work, remains. The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead, and judges performer or performance after the changes of time. Does it live through them? Does it still hold on untired? Will the same style, and the direction of genius to similar points, be
satisfactory

now? Have the marches of tens and hundreds and thousands of years made willing detours to the right hand

and the left hand for his sake? Is he beloved long and long after he is buried? Does the young man think

often of him? and the young woman think often of him? and do the middle-aged and the old think of him?

A great poem is for ages and ages in common, and for all degrees and complexions, and all departments and sects, and for a woman as much as a man, and a man as much as a woman. A great poem is no finish to a man or woman, but rather a beginning. Has anyone fancied he could sit at last under some due authority, and rest satisfied with explanations, and realize, and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest poet bring—he brings neither cessation nor shelter’d fatness and ease. The touch of him, like Nature, tells in action. Whom he takes he takes with firm sure grasp into live regions previously unattain’d—thenceforward is no rest—they see the space and ineffable sheen that turn the old spots and lights into dead vacuums. Now there shall be a man cohered out of tumult and chaos—the elder encourages the younger and shows him how—they two shall launch off fearlessly together till the new world fits an orbit for itself, and looks unabash’d on the lesser orbits of the stars, and sweeps through the ceaseless rings, and shall never be quiet again.

There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. A new order shall arise, and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest. They shall find their inspiration in real objects to-day, symptoms of the past and future. They shall not deign to defend immortality. The English language befriends the grand American expression—it is brawny enough, and limber and full enough. On the tough stock of a race who through all change of circumstance was never without the shall arise in America, and be responded to from the remainder of the earth.
idea of political liberty, which is the animus of all liberty, it has attracted the terms of daintier and gayer and subtler and more elegant tongues. It is the powerful language of resistance—it is the dialect of common sense. It is the speech of the proud and melancholy races, and of all who aspire. It is the chosen tongue to express growth, faith, self-esteem, freedom, justice, equality, friendliness, amplitude, prudence, decision, and courage. It is the medium that shall wellnigh express the inexpressible.

No great literature nor any like style of behavior or oratory, or social intercourse or household arrangements, or public institutions, or the treatment by bosses of employ’d people, nor executive detail, or detail of the army and navy, nor spirit of legislation or courts, or police or tuition or architecture, or songs or amusements, can long elude the jealous and passionate instinct of American standards. Whether or no the sign appears from the mouths of the people, it throbs a live interrogation in every freeman’s and freewoman's heart, after that which passes by, or this built to remain. Is it uniform with my country? Are its dispositions without ignominious distinctions? Is it for the ever-growing communes of brothers and lovers, large, well united, proud, beyond the old models, generous beyond all models? Is it something grown fresh out of the fields, or drawn from the sea for use to me to-day here? I know that what answers for me, an American, in Texas, Ohio, Canada, must answer for any individual or nation that serves for a part of my materials. Does this answer? Is it for the nursing of the young of the republic? Does it solve readily with the sweet milk of the nipples of the breasts of the Mother of Many Children?

America prepares with composure and good-will for the visitors that have sent word. It is not intellect that is to be their warrant and welcome. The talented, the artist, the ingenious, the editor, the statesman, the erudite, are not unappreciated—they fall in their place and do their work. The soul of the nation also does its work. It rejects none, it permits all. Only toward the like of itself will it advance half-way. An individual is as superb as a nation when he has the qualities which make a superb nation. The soul of the largest and wealthiest and proudest nation may well go half-way
to meet that of its poets.