

THE END OF A LITERARY MYSTERY

BY FREDERICK P. HIER, JR.

WHEN John Burroughs died the way was opened for publishing a curious story which had lain in secret since 1867, when Burroughs published his first book, "Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person." This story, involving Whitman and Burroughs in one of the strangest literary ventures on record, would never have become known but for a series of accidents. For the book itself dropped out of print in 1871 and Whitman's instruction to one of his literary executors, to write the story after Burroughs' death, survived that executor only by the narrowest margin.

My curiosity was aroused by this book, when, on reading it in conjunction with Burroughs' "Whitman, A Study," published in 1896, I was struck by the marked difference in their styles. The greater vigor of the former I at first attributed to Burroughs' youth, but after maturer reflection the difference did not seem explicable on any theory of natural development. At the time I left the question open, but with the conviction that the first book, contrary to what might be expected, was much stronger and more original than the later one. Subsequently a more careful analysis convinced me that "Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person" was not what it appeared to be on its face, the veritable first book of John Burroughs, but that it was something else—that the strange circumstances surrounding its first publication and unexplained disappearance sufficed to make it one of the mystery books of American literature.

It became clear to me, for example, that the author of the "Notes" had not only an

accurate knowledge of the general facts of Whitman's life, but also an uncanny grasp of the undercurrents of his personal growth and integration and an attitude too familiar and nonchalant to have been acquired in the three years of Burroughs' acquaintance with him. The unmasking aptness of the quotations, unimprovable after half a century's study, argued too great a perception in a beginner. The sure extravagance of certain statements about Whitman, which brought down on Burroughs immediate criticism in some quarters as hopelessly prejudiced, made it look doubtful if Burroughs himself would have put things so abruptly. Most significant of all was the manner of expression. There was a vigorous breadth and sweep and a native, poetic feeling, arriving at an orchestral total effect, which was not the manner of Burroughs at all.

These hints led to an extended search. It was found that Burroughs' style during the same period was characteristically different from that of the 1867 "Notes." There was a gentle, contemplative moderation in it, like a ship under easy sail, as, for example, in his Whitman piece written for the *Galaxy* in 1866, quite in contrast with the bluff vehemence of the Whitman book. Burroughs had a meandering touch, part of his attraction, whereas the flight of the "Notes" was that of the eagle. "Wake Robin," published in 1871, which Burroughs had written from 1863 onward, during the very period of the "Notes," announces in the second paragraph of its preface:

Though written less in the spirit of exact science than with the freedom of love and old acquaint-

ance, yet I have in no instance taken liberty with facts, or allowed my imagination to influence me to the extent of giving a false impression or a wrong coloring. I have reaped my harvest more in the woods than in the study; what I offer, in fact, is a careful and conscientious record of actual observations and experiences, and is true as it stands written, every word of it. But what has interested me most in Ornithology is the pursuit, the chase, the discovery; that part of it which is akin to hunting, fishing and wild sports, and which I could carry with me in my eye and ear wherever I went.

In the preface to the Whitman "Notes," the second paragraph is in the same general form, but note the difference:

In History, at wide intervals, in different fields of action, there come (it is a thrice told tale,) special developments of individualities, and of that something we suggest by the word Genius—individuals whom their own days little suspect, and never realize, but who, it turns out, mark and make new eras, plant the standard again ahead, and in one man personify vast races and sweeping revolutions. I consider Walt Whitman such an individual, I consider that America is illustrated in him; and that Democracy, as now launched forth upon its many-vortexed experiment for good or evil, (and the need whereof no eye can foresee,) is embodied, and for the first time in Poetry grandly and fully uttered, in him.

Here in the latter quotation, is the barbarous and elaborate interpolation unmistakably characteristic, not of Burroughs surely, but of Whitman himself. The words genius, history, and democracy are capitalized, as was Whitman's practise with these and other words he considered important—and not Burroughs'. The punctuation is singularly his, especially in the two parentheses, for as Emory Holloway observes in his recent work, "The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman," "his system of punctuation was unique. . . A parenthesis seldom sufficed, but must be reinforced with commas." Practically all the parentheses in the book are thus reinforced.

In fact, the style of the "Notes" is like Whitman everywhere. His personality underlined his commonest utterance, and in his more deliberate efforts, especially those pronouncing his deeper purposes, it assumed the peculiar forms which have become known as Whitmanesque. His first three articles about himself (to be regarded

further), his explanatory projection of the poet's mission in the introduction to his first edition of "Leaves of Grass," the reply to Emerson in 1856, and, in fact, the full course of his collected prose, are one in blood, bone, body and soul with the "Notes." Here, for example, is a quotation from page 39:

We have swarms of little poetlings, producing swarms of soft and sickly little rhymelets, on a par with the feeble calibre and vague and puerile inward melancholy, and outward affectation and small talk, of that genteel mob called "society." We have, also, more or less of statues and statuettes, and plenty of architecture and upholstery and filigree work, very pretty and ornamental, and fit for those who are fit for it.

In precisely like measure and voice, Whitman said in his "Democratic Vistas" (1871):

Do you call those genteel little creatures American poets? Do you term that perpetual, pistareen, paste-pot work, American art, American drama, taste, verse? I think I hear, echoed as from some mountain-top afar in the west, the scornful laugh of the Genius of these States.

One native and exclusive Whitman phrase, "spinal marrow," occurs throughout his writing. He used it typically in his Shakespeare essay (Collected Prose, page 283), and again in his last explanation of his meanings (Collected Prose, page 527): "If I am to give impromptu a hint of the *spinal marrow* of the business." He wrote of "my *spinal* and deliberate request," in a letter to Dr. Bucke in September, 1888. Very indicative therefore is the appearance of this phrase in the "Notes," where, on page 119, one reads: "This is the *spinal marrow* of the various poems."

As a result of all this intrinsic evidence, here only partly represented, I concluded that "Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person," alleged to be John Burroughs' first book, was really his only in very small part,—that it was mostly written by Walt Whitman himself.

II

External evidence bearing upon this conclusion soon added to its weight. Whit-

man's essay on Burns, first printed in 1882 (Complete Prose, page 395), is called, "Robert Burns as Poet and Person"; the same peculiarity of title. The only other extended piece on Whitman during the 1867 period, O'Conner's "The Good Gray Poet," was, like the "Notes," published under the name of one of Whitman's closest friends during a time of continual association; yet every line is as different from Whitman as could be. Whitman's letters to his mother during 1866-67-68, contain references to Burroughs' *Galaxy* article on himself, enclose a special copy to her, talk of his forthcoming 1867 edition of "Leaves of Grass," but never once mention the 1867 "Notes on Walt Whitman." Recall that this was the first book about him, 108 pages in length, and that Burroughs' 9-page magazine piece was referred to in at least three separate letters. Very curious, too, is the letter Whitman wrote to A. K. Butts on February 8, 1874, referring to copies of his books:

O'Kane has undoubtedly sent you *all* the copies of my books remaining in his possession—he received originally—239 Leaves of Grass, 100 As a Strong Bird, 92 Democratic Vistas, 45 Notes by John Burroughs, etc.—You now have *all* my books in the market.

It is not so important, perhaps, that in a list of what Whitman twice called "my books," "Notes by John Burroughs" should appear. But it is very notable that this was the only book about himself that Whitman ever handled and sold personally. Why was not Burroughs, the supposed author, or Redfield, the publisher, in possession of and engaged in the sale of the book? In 1871, Whitman brought out three books; a new "Leaves of Grass," "Passage to India," and "Democratic Vistas"; and Burroughs two, "Wake Robin" and the second edition of the "Notes on Walt Whitman." All the Whitman volumes *and* the "Notes," were published by Redfield, Whitman taking personal charge; whereas "Wake Robin" was put into the hands of another house, which has printed all of Burroughs' subsequent

books and continues to publish them to this day.

Among the scores of conversations about Burroughs recorded by Traubel there is not a single definite averment by Whitman regarding the "Notes." There is one, however, in a little-known book, a highly pointed, personal fragment, which to those acquainted with Whitman's method of production will come as an intimate disclosure. It is known that he made notes beforehand in which he projected roughly and in the largest suggestiveness the general drift of a poem or article. These notes often contain in a few lines the germ and scope of an elaborate piece. After his death these notes were divided among his executors. The share that fell to Dr. Richard M. Bucke was edited and published by him in a volume entitled "Notes and Fragments" in 1899. In his preface Dr. Bucke says that "every word printed in the body of this book is before me in the handwriting of Walt Whitman." On page 64, in the section relating to the meaning and intention of "Leaves of Grass," appears the following:

CURRENT CRITICISM

Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person. By John Burroughs. New York: American News Co., 1871.

It seems as if the debate over Walt Whitman and his "Leaves of Grass" were not only going to be kept up with more and more animation and earnestness every year, but that the discussion is to bring (and indeed has so brought already) an examination unwonted among us, of the very bases of the art of poetry, and of the high original laws of ethics and criticism. These bases—how do they refer to our social age and country? These laws—what are they, as applied to the poets and artists of the first class, for America and for the wants of the American people? Such are the questions which the advent of Walt Whitman has evidently roused and of which these notes are attempts to at least suggest the answer.

This might have been a forenote or an afternote to the book (the date, 1871, was evidently filled in later) but in either event it is certainly one of Whitman's musing notes on one of his *own* productions, containing in a single paragraph the funda-

mental design of the whole so-called Burroughs book!

III

Now let us see what was Burroughs' overt reaction to the situation. Happy at the time in getting the publicity of association with the greater name of Whitman and of saying something for the man he loved, he would no doubt in maturer years repudiate, in his consciousness at least, the book that was not wholly his own. That is exactly what he did. For the 1871 edition of "Notes on Walt Whitman" was its last one. That year, Burroughs' authentic first book, "Wake Robin," came out. It has gone through innumerable editions since then, but the Whitman book was allowed to fall out of print and sight and has never reappeared. It is the single and only title in Burroughs' long list of twenty-one volumes which was never and is not today included in his collected works. He would never consent to another edition after the second of 1871, though strongly urged to do so in the eighties and after Whitman's death.

But even this fact might not be conclusive if Burroughs' "Walt Whitman, A Study," published 25 years later, in 1896, was an enlargement of, or superseded the earlier and smaller work. In that case it would be only natural for one to wish his mature work perpetuated and his early attempts forgotten. But such is not the case and Burroughs knew it, as we shall presently see. The 1896 "Study" is written on an entirely new plan, which does not resemble that of the early book. It is in no sense an augmentation of the original scheme, corrected and amplified in the light of more complete knowledge. In fact, the "Study" does not even refer to the former book, directly or indirectly. To my knowledge there is no other case in literature where an author has written (to all appearances) two books on the same subject or person, and in the second book completely ignored the first. Some explanation or hint is always given, in a preface or introduc-

tion, as to why the second book is necessary and how it adds to the first or provides a more deliberate judgment. To cite a former book, in matters it is not desired to repeat, is a natural and common practise. But Burroughs, in his "Study," says on page 7 that he has no apology to offer for making another addition to the growing Whitman literature without breathing a word about his previous book. More, he told W. B. Harte in 1896 that "he had for some time cherished the idea of writing a book upon Whitman"—as though he had held a project in his heart which he had never yet accomplished!

As the evidence indicating Whitman's authorship of the "Notes" piled up, my astonishment grew that the masquerade should not have been discovered long ago. It would be inexplicable were it not for the fact that the book is so rare and difficult to obtain; most of the writers on Whitman, I presume, have never seen a copy. At any rate, the assumption that the book was Burroughs' own has been practically universal, and both Whitman and Burroughs fostered it. Burroughs, nowhere that I have found, makes the out and out avowment that the book was his, but he allowed his biographer and close personal adviser to call it his first volume. And we find Whitman writing to W. M. Rossetti on December 3, 1867: "I sent you hence Nov. 23,—a copy of Mr. Burroughs' Notes," and on May 9, 1868, to Charles Hine: "I send you by same mail as this—a little book, written by Mr. Burroughs (a second Thoreau)—the book—all about my precious self."

Whitman's closest friends repeat the same thing. O'Connor wrote to Whitman, May 9, 1867: "He (Allen) doesn't say a word about John Burroughs' book, etc. I have written to him saying that John will at once put the book to press himself." Dr. Bucke in his "Walt Whitman," 1883, quotes the "Notes" as Burroughs's. The standard biographies and studies are no exception; Perry, Platt, Kennedy, Carpenter, all credit Burroughs with the book.

All the bibliographies which include biographical material, save that of Wells and Goldsmith (1922), list the book in like manner. But elsewhere there are hints at the truth, usually somewhat guarded. Whitman's literary executors—two of whom knew the facts—speak in the introduction to the ten-volume Camden edition of his works (page xxxiii) of "John Burroughs, in his book about Whitman—a book to which Whitman himself contributed invaluable features in advice and revision . . .," and again (page lxiii) of: "'Walt Whitman as Poet and Person,' a biographic and philosophic statement of the case of the 'Leaves' by John Burroughs—who had the advantage in the project mention of Whitman's counsel and endorsement . . ." and Emory Holloway, in the "Cambridge History of American Literature" says that "the substance if not the phrasing" of a passage he quotes "was supplied by Whitman himself." But that is all.

IV

Before, however, all of this evidence and corroboration had been assembled, positive information came to me unexpectedly from Horace Traubel, one of the executors. We were speaking of the books about Whitman and I remarked that Burroughs' first book appeared to me abler than his lengthier work of 1896. Traubel incisively agreed. I continued and said that the manner of the early book was really more like Whitman than Burroughs and that if Burroughs wrote it he had duplicated Whitman with marvelous success. Traubel ejaculated a characteristic short "Yes!" and for some time sat silent. Then he looked up and said:

I want to tell you something. But I don't want you to say anything till the time comes. You deserve to know because you guessed it. Walt wrote Burroughs' book for him; maybe not all of it, but most of it. Bucke told me and I asked Walt and he said it was so. We thought the book was invaluable and ought to be reprinted and Bucke approached Burroughs on the subject but Burroughs wouldn't consent. It was then that

Walt told Bucke that he wrote the book and that that was the reason Burroughs didn't want it republished. When I talked to Walt he said he wrote most of the book and wanted me to tell about it some day to get things straight, but not to do it till after Burroughs died. Now I guess Burroughs is going to live longer than I am and I want you to do it.

I suggested to Traubel that owing to the nature of the information, my say-so might be questioned, and asked him to make a written statement. He signed the following declaration:

"Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person," which was published in its first edition in 1867, was mostly written by Walt Whitman. Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke got this information first from Whitman, and Walt himself told me that it was true. This is probably the reason that Burroughs never allowed an edition of the book to be printed after the second one of 1871, though he was several times approached for the purpose. I do not want this information used till after Burroughs' death, but whatever anyone says, it is true.

(Signed) HORACE TRAUBEL

Literary Executor of Walt Whitman.

Dated June 10, 1919, New York City.

Only four men had known this, Whitman, Burroughs, Bucke and Traubel, and the latter's death in 1919 left Burroughs alone surviving. The case was complete except for his word; consideration convinced me that perhaps it was unfair to hold such information while he was alive without giving him a chance to be heard. He was the only person who knew at first hand the original facts and his word would add the final authentication. In reply to an inquiry he wrote to me as follows on October 15, 1920:

Roxbury, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have received your letter of the 10th relative to my little book, "Notes on WW as Poet and Person." There is a modicum of truth in what you have been told. Whitman's mark is on several of my books and magazine articles which were written during the Washington days. He was a great critic, and I was in the habit of submitting my MSS. to him for his strictures.

The first thing I wrote about him was in the *Galaxy* in the late sixties, and was called "Walt Whitman and His Drum Taps." This was written while Whitman was absent in N. Y., and he never saw it till it was in print. My next piece was called "The Flight of the Eagle," (in "Birds and Poets"). This he named, and there are a few sentences scattered through it from his pencil.

Page 197 was written by him. He told me the incident and I asked him to write it out, which he did, and I put it in.

I have not a copy of my "Notes on WW" here, and I have not looked in it for years, but I know it abounds in the marks of Whitman's hand. I had a more ambitious title, I forget what, and he renamed it, and pruned it, and reshaped many paragraphs. The most suggestive and profound passage in it is from his hand, nearly a whole page, but I cannot refer you to the page. Whitman named my first volume, "Wake Robin," for me. I took a number of titles to him and he held me to that one. It is certain that my "Notes" would not have been what they are without his help. If I remember rightly the supplement to the last edition was entirely written by him.

My volume, "Whitman, A Study" would have been of much greater value could he have pruned it. It is too heady and literary.

When I go back to West Park I will look over the "Notes," and if I can throw any new light on the subject, I will write you again.

Sincerely yours,

JOHN BURROUGHS

This statement is so candid that it shames criticism. Certainly if it was the first time Burroughs had ever been confronted with the facts, he came through with that high punctilio for which he was distinguished. And it must not be forgotten that he was an aged man, over half a century away from those facts and without the documents at hand.

It is notable, however, that he writes, "my first volume 'Wake Robin,'" and, referring to his Whitman writing after the *Galaxy* article of 1866, skips over the "Notes" and calls "The Flight of The Eagle" of 1877, "my next piece." It is probable that Whitman's part in this "next piece" has never been known before. Burroughs admits, what is evident upon examination, that the eighteen-page supplement in the second edition was entirely written by Whitman, though the introductory note to this edition, signed "J. B., June, 1871," says: "The Supplementary Notes commencing page 109 present what I have to say of the book 1871-2."

Further query followed concerning the "most suggestive and profound passage" mentioned in the letter's third paragraph and Mr. Burroughs replied, this time with the "Notes" before him:

West Park, N. Y.,

Nov. 6, 1920.

Dear Sir:—I have been looking over my little booklet "Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person" & am a great deal at sea about it. I find it hard to separate the parts I wrote from those he wrote. The fine passage I referred to by him begins on p. 37, chapter xxi, & includes the whole of that chapter. In other places I see where he has touched up my work, leaving the thought my own. The chapters on Beauty, & on "Drum Taps" are all my own. The Biographical Notes he enlarged and improved in the proof, from notes which he had given me verbally. I have no doubt that half the book is his. He was a great critic & he did me great service by pruning and simplifying. The title, too, is his. I had a much more ambitious title.

Very Respy.

JOHN BURROUGHS

Putting the two letters together, we get the following results. Burroughs wrote unaided the chapters on "Beauty," pp. 50-57, and on "Drum Taps," pp. 97-108, a total of nineteen pages. Whitman provided the title and wrote chapter XXI, pp. 37-39, and the supplement, pp. 109-124, and supplied the personal sketch, pp. 77-96; a total of thirty-nine pages. About half the book, 58 out of 124 pages, is thus accounted for by Burroughs. Whitman's hand is so spread over the remainder that he could not separate the parts. There will never be perfect agreement, I suppose, as to all the parts exclusively Whitman's but in view of the entire data, it may be said fairly that the book is virtually his.

V

There are delicate implications in the matter which may cause misconstruction unless the whole thing is placed in its natural setting among the forces and elements out of which it grew. The most potent of these were Whitman's tendency to mysterious concealment and the public's early antagonism, which together gave birth to his anonymous self-advertising; and the psychology of the Whitman-Burroughs friendship in its relation to their personal dilemmas and the outward events of 1867.

Whitman's hiding of things, which con-

tinued throughout his life, began in his earliest boyhood, when his own family was perplexed by it. His mother testified that he came and went as he pleased, taking everything for granted and accounting for nothing. He always had reticences, and however we lift the curtains the residue of mystery is great. Set the man and his great book side by side. "Leaves of Grass" is probably as naked and complete an expression of a total man as was ever written, but Whitman's own intimate life is almost unknown. He not only thought and acted behind the scenes, but often wrote anonymously in favor and defense of his book. This sly advertising began about two months after the ill-fated first edition of "Leaves of Grass" was placed on sale, with a long piece in the *United States Review* for September, 1855, entitled, "Walt Whitman and His Poems." Then followed a short notice in the Brooklyn *Daily Times* on September 29, with the ingenuous heading, "Walt Whitman, a Brooklyn Boy." The third was a review of "An English and an American Poet" in the *American Phrenological Journal* for 1856; Lennyson's "Maud" and "Leaves of Grass" being the subject matter. The three pieces were reprinted as part of a supplement added to the second issue of the first edition of "Leaves of Grass" in 1856, and two of them reappeared in the appendix to the second edition later in the same year. When the third edition was published in 1860-61, the publishers, Thayer and Eldridge, distributed gratuitously a little brochure of sixty-four pages, "Leaves of Grass Imprints," containing a number of criticisms of "Leaves of Grass," including Whitman's three articles. It is now known that Whitman arranged and edited the booklet, though his name did not appear.

In 1883, "Walt Whitman, a Brooklyn Boy" was included in Dr. Bucke's book on Whitman, still with no hint of its authorship, in spite of the fact that Whitman himself revised and authenticated the whole volume. Not until 1893, the year after Whitman's death and thirty-seven

years after the articles were written, did it become generally known that Whitman himself wrote them. His literary executors then published a miscellaneous collection, "In re Walt Whitman," and the first three articles were these early attempts of the poet to justify himself, then printed under his name for the first time. Whitman's last venture of this kind, entitled, "Walt Whitman in Camden," appeared in the *Critic* for February 28, 1885, under the pseudonym of "George Selwyn." This painstaking exposition of himself, begun in 1855, did not end till the posthumous volume of 1893, but it is notable that Whitman did no extensive anonymous writing during the later years, but confined himself to suggestion, counsel and revision. What then, were the earlier causes, which pulling and pushing "Leaves of Grass" through its many vicissitudes, induced him to advocate his own work?

The first edition of 1855, stepping out imperious and magisterial, met with almost unanimous scorn and mockery. Of the one hundred and twenty copies placed on sale in New York and Brooklyn, only one was sold, and the dealers, after two months' display, insisted upon the book's withdrawal. Complimentary and review copies were burned or thrown away. Whitman was driven into solitary contemplation at the far end of Long Island. The second edition of 1856 had a slightly larger sale, but the howl of the critics increased. All of the arrogant disdain in Whitman was aroused and this, together with his profound confidence in the ageless truth of his book, set him at work, not on virulent attacks upon his calumniators but on lusty and sinewy expositions of himself. He thought that his book was being not only assaulted but misunderstood, and with indefatigable diligence he tried to direct attention to the actual issue and to shift the battle to his own ground.

The palpable success of the third edition in 1860, for the first time in the hands of good publishers, was interrupted by the Civil War. After these three successive

attempts had all been frustrated, it is small surprise that Whitman stirred himself. He said later: "I was then in the struggle, fought desperately for my life." And when he consented to the publication of his three early pieces in "In re Walt Whitman," he told his executors, "that in a period of misunderstanding and abuse their publication seemed imperative." Of the "In re" book itself, Whitman observed that it "seemed necessary to the fuller elucidation of the critter and his cause." The "Notes on Walt Whitman" was simply the most elaborate of Whitman's early justifications, and it is necessary, if we would understand it, not only to appreciate Whitman's cryptic tendencies and the reasons for his propaganda, but to conceive his environment and his relationship to Burroughs at the time.

In 1858, when he was only twenty-one years old, Burroughs had become acquainted with Whitman's work. Whitman then gave him, as he wrote later, the broadest outlook of any poet of his time. The two men did not meet, however, until the Autumn of 1863, when Burroughs, crushed by the events of the war, went to Washington to enter the ranks, but instead became Whitman's fellow clerk in the government service. An immediate intimacy sprang up, for Burroughs had, besides his enthusiasm for "Leaves of Grass," strong, outdoor qualities and sanities which Whitman felt and responded to. It is not strange, therefore, to find Whitman speaking of "the high lasting quality of John's best work," which Whitman considered to be in those regions where the best of the man was: outdoors. But he did not give unqualified

adherence to Burroughs as a writer. Amidst Whitman's more remote creative imaginings, Burroughs felt uneasy and bewildered, and he admitted that "Leaves of Grass" itself had left him uncertain, until he had experienced Whitman's personal reassurance. Whitman saw this and while he was quick to grasp Burrough's fine and vital enthusiasm, he himself drew the horizon and main outlines of Burroughs' picture of "Leaves of Grass" and its author when the time came.

It did come four years after their first meeting. They were then in the nervous midst of the after-strain and turbulence of the war. Whitman, the discouraging difficulties of his first three editions behind him, was preparing his enlarged fourth edition of 1867. Only two years before he had been discharged from his government position through "dastardly official insolence," as he later described it. The time was critical for him, and with the impress of the terrible struggle just past in hot scars upon his spirit he projected a rounded and final fabric of his song. He was forty-eight years old and in grand maturity. Burroughs, on the other hand, was in his commencement days. He was only thirty years old and not yet on his own or established in the literary field. He had published little except miscellaneous essays and verses and his *Galaxy* piece on Whitman. Both men were natural writers, suddenly released from the war's engrossment. Burroughs looked to Whitman as a friend and master; Whitman to Burroughs as a friend and helper. "Notes on Walt Whitman" was the spontaneous fruit. It gave Whitman the needed push and it gave Burroughs the needed pull.

WOODROW WILSON

BY HARRY ELMER BARNES

THE vast amount of anecdotal and eulogistic material which appeared after the recent death of Mr. Wilson suggests the desirability of attempting a preliminary estimate of his personality, achievements and place in history. Many would urge that we must wait for years before making any effort to pass even a tentative judgment upon his career, on the familiar ground that no one who has lived in a period can write about it intelligently—that to get sound history we must delay until someone entirely ignorant of the passions of the era discussed can study the documents embodying its dead enmities and biases, and thus construct an adequate, penetrating and absolutely impartial exposition and interpretation of it. This position is based on two errors. The first lies in the assumption that a later generation will never share the prejudices of its predecessors. If you believe it, try to imagine a Boston aristocrat of 1924 writing fairly of Thomas Jefferson, or Maurice Barrès of Bismarck or Moltke! The second is found in the theory that a person living later will have a better perspective and keener insight than a contemporary. This implies a tacit acceptance of a theory of historical causation long ago disproved by Hume—that subsequent events are necessarily results of earlier ones—and also of the notion that a consideration of the remote results of a period is more valuable for estimating it than a clear view of its actual events. It is the writer's contention that while contemporaneity may possibly intensify hatreds and affections, yet the type of person likely to show a reasonable

impartiality under any circumstances at all will make better use of the same evidence if he has lived through the period he deals with.

In this article there is little space for description. Some effort will be made to suggest plausible explanations and interpretations, but there will be no attempt at personal praise or blame. The writer does not pretend to any finality of estimate. He merely claims to be free from a few of the more atrocious distortions of the Drool Method in regard to the subject chosen, and to have canvassed a great variety of written and oral estimates of the late ex-President as scholar, writer and public figure.

II

The extreme divergence of opinion as to Mr. Wilson's personality and achievements, and the intensity of the apologies and accusations launched by his friends and foes have astonished many impartial observers, but all of them are probably adequately explained by the luxuriating of the herd instinct during the World War. The passions of the Civil War produced like results. We are apt to forget that Congressmen wrote home in April, 1865, that Booth had been an instrument in God's hand, and that clergymen in the North thanked God publicly for the nation's deliverance from Lincoln. It may, however, be instructive to reproduce typical examples of the encomium and the indictment in the case of Mr. Wilson. I shall choose those which are made impressive by reason of their extreme deviation from plausibility and by the fact that