

THE ARTS AND SCIENCES

Bibliography

WALT WHITMAN AND THE *ARISTIDEAN*

BY THOMAS OLLIVE MABBOTT

It is not likely that many people would think of a literary association between Thomas Dunn English and Walt Whitman. A search of available works does not reveal any mention of one by the other in later life. A note by Whitman in the Brooklyn *Eagle* acknowledging receipt of the first number of English's paper, the *John Donkey*, reprinted in "The Gathering of the Forces" is merely perfunctory. It is thus hardly a reflection on Whitman's editors and biographers that they make no mention of his four contributions to English's magazine, the *Aristidean*. Indeed, even had the existence of these contributions been suspected, they could hardly have been consulted, for a tolerably thorough search by Poe specialists failed to locate a complete file of the magazine, and it is only recently that I have been enabled to examine one in the hands of a private collector in New York.

In 1845 English, who had come to New York a year or so previously to edit a Tyler newspaper, the *Aurora*, with which Whitman also may have been associated, was inspired by the success of the *American Whig Review* (which published Poe's "Raven") to found on a somewhat similar plan a five dollar magazine called the *Aristidean*, with a motto from Bulwer's "Richelieu" "Men call me cruel, I am not—I am just." The next year Poe quarreled with English, and in "The Literati" suggested that the motto might have been improved by the addition of the words "an ass," but if unfriendly to the editor, he was accurate enough in describing the

Aristidean. "This work," he wrote, "although professedly a monthly was issued at irregular intervals, and was unfortunate, I fear, in not attaining at any period a very extensive circulation." All the contributors were originally anonymous, but with the last number was issued an index, wherein initials followed most of the titles, and an accompanying card gave the names in full. Of these names two are notable—that of Poe, who had contributed three reviews, of great interest to the specialist, but in two cases partly accessible in other versions, and that of Whitman, who had written four pieces of unusual interest.

Since Poe's contributions are unknown to his editors, it is perhaps worth while to list them. In March appeared a review of a strange book written to prove the American Indians to be a remnant of the Lost Tribes of Israel, George Jones' "Ancient America." This review, in Poe's tomahawk style, he himself said in the *Broadway Journal* "might have been written by Aristides himself." In April appeared "Longfellow's Poems," an elaborate attack, similar to more accessible articles of Poe's, but with emphasis on the "Poems on Slavery." Finally, in November, came "American Poetry," largely made up of the earlier review of Wilmer's "Quacks of Helicon."

Whitman's writings for the magazine include some of the most interesting of his early work, and his second longest prose narrative is among them. Two of his contributions appear in the first issue, that of March 1845—the longer a story of nearly seventeen thousand words, entitled "Arrow Tip." This is in some sense a plea for the abolition of capital punishment, to which both Whitman and the editorial

policy of the *Aristidean* were at the time opposed. The story takes its name from an Indian chief, friendly to the whites, who accompanies his pioneer neighbors on a hunting expedition. Alone with a certain Peter Brown, the Indian is angered and knocks his companion down, apparently killing him. Other settlers take Arrow Tip a prisoner to the village, charged with Brown's murder, but returning for Brown's body, find no trace of it. As a matter of fact the victim has not been killed but stunned; coming to himself he is taken to the secret haunt of a hermit, who cares for him and sends a message of explanation to the settlers by a deformed half-breed named Boddo. But Arrow Tip is hated by Boddo, who does not deliver the message, and Brown, at last learning of the treachery, arrives at the settlement a moment too late to save the unfortunate chief, who has been condemned and hanged for murder. The tale is interesting as a hitherto unknown example of Walt's Indian stories, of which "The Death of Wind-Foot" is the most familiar. It shows that he was at this period of his life capable of telling a long story with a fairly well managed plot. "Arrow Tip" is very different from the chaotic "Franklin Evans," which alone exceeds it in length. Some of the minor characters are well drawn, and one of them, Caleb, the village teacher, is perhaps a self-portrait of the former Long Island school-master.

A companion piece, "Shirval, A Tale of Jerusalem," is a brief and reverent expansion of a portion of the seventh chapter of St. Luke, and relates how Christ raised the son of the widow of Nain. Whitman gives the anonymous Bible characters curious names of his own choosing—Shirval, Unni, and Zar—and opens with a passage on the presence of the dead throughout the world which recalls the sixth and seventh sections of "Song of Myself." The thing is written in a style of much dignity, of which the concluding sentences may serve as an example:

His limbs felt the wondrous impulse—he rose, and stood up among them, wrapped in his shroud and the white linen. "I have slept!" said he, turning to his mother, "but there have been no dreams."

And he kissed the widow's cheek, and smiled pleasantly on Zar. Then the awe of the presence of the Stranger gathered like a mantle upon him—and the three knelt upon the ground and bent their faces on the earth-worn sandals of the Man of Woe.

In the issue for April appeared "Richard Parker's Widow," a sketch of the wife of the celebrated admiral-mutineer who led the sailor's rebellion in the British navy at the Nore in 1797. This article, admittedly derived from "English authorities" in large part, nevertheless raises a most important question for the consideration of the biographer, for in the course of it the writer mentions having himself seen the woman in London in 1836. There are three possible solutions of the problem—first, that Whitman was not the writer, and that W. W. was an error for C. W. W. (C. Wilkins Webber) another contributor to the *Aristidean*, a somewhat unlikely hypothesis; second, that the remark is mere local color, though the narrative has no fictional element and gains nothing by this touch; third, that Walt really sailed to England as a boy of seventeen, in a year during which we know nothing of his doings.

The last issue of the magazine, that for December, 1845, contained "Some Fact Romances," five narratives of varied lengths, some of which were later reprinted by Whitman in the *Eagle*, whence Mr. Holloway gathered them for his recent volumes. These serve to confirm Whitman's authorship of the whole series of contributions, should anyone demand confirmation. One of them throws no little light on the genesis of such poems as "You Felons on Trial in Courts." The episode is as follows:

Saunders, that unhappy boy, now in the State's Prison for his forgeries on his employers, Austin & Wilmerding, once boarded in the same house with me. Soon after his arrest, I visited the Centre-street "Tombs," and went into his

cell to see him. He gave me a long account of the commission of the crime, and of his doings down to the time of his capture at Boston. It was all a disgusting story of villany and conceit. He was a flippant boy, whose head, I think, was turned by melo-dramas and the Jack Sheppard order of novels—all but one little item. When he had received the money, and every moment was worth diamonds to him—

he intended to sail in the *Great Western*, it will be remembered—he spent an hour in going up to a pawnbroker's shop in the Bowery, to get a little piece of jewellery he had in pledge there—a *keepsake from his dead mother*. He told me in his cell that he would have given a thousand dollars for another half hour, *yet he could not go away without that locket*. That half hour cost him the doom he afterwards had meted out to him.

Ethnology

WHAT IS A RACE?

BY MELVILLE J. HERSKOVITS

THERE are two fundamental assumptions which all the current protagonists of racial superiority make, both of which are unproved and probably completely fallacious. The first is that race and culture can be related, one to the other. The second, upon which the first should rest, is that we are able to give a reasonably complete definition of the term "race."

The books that have dealt with the subject of late range all the way from the fulminations of Madison Grant, Lothrop Stoddard and Professor MacDougall, to Dr. Carl C. Brigham's careful "Study of American Intelligence." Dr. Brigham, in this work, utilizes the result of the Army Intelligence Tests to argue, first, that the Nordic "race," when compared to other groups, is superior in intelligence and in adaptability to our culture, and, second, that the general intelligence of the immigrants who have come to this country has decreased with each five-year period for the last twenty years. No one can read his book without admiring the cleverness with which his hypotheses are advanced and maintained; nevertheless, his fundamental assumptions must be questioned. For example, consider the table he prints, purporting to exhibit the percentages of Alpine, Nordic, and Mediterranean blood in each of the countries of Europe. The figures range from Sweden, with 100 per cent Nordic, to Portugal, with 95 per cent Mediterranean. Where this table was procured, and how it was worked out, I do

not know, for Dr. Brigham merely says that it was compiled "in collaboration with students of the subject." If one may judge from quotations, the principal authority was probably William Z. Ripley, whose work on the races of Europe was standard until his methods were attacked and shown to be fallacious. Ripley, and those who follow him, have used a scheme of classification which is roughly this: One trait, that of head-form, is determined for as many of the peoples as there are data available, and they are then classified as to whether, on the average, they are round-headed (brachycephalic), long-headed (dolichocephalic) or medium-headed (mezzocephalic). The obvious presumption is that there is a constant relation between race and the distribution of this trait. But it has been shown by Dr. Franz Boas in his investigation for the Immigration Commission of 1910 that head-form tends to change under a changed environment. Moreover, we do not really know just how head-form is inherited—that is, whether it assumes the form of a Mendelian unit-character or not. Thus, race classification based on the distribution of this one trait cannot be sustained.

A recent attempt by Dr. Roland B. Dixon to use the three criteria of head form, head-height, and nose-form has had the surprising result of revealing Negroid characteristics among the Iroquois Indians, and Mongoloid traits in the heart of the Congo. Dr. Dixon's work, indeed, was received with almost unanimous adverse criticism in anthropological circles on the ground of the method employed.