

easily as an educated Englishman, when the fancy strikes him, learns Italian. Its real benefits are after all for a comparatively select few. Those few will not be done away with, if Greek is presented to their free choice at a later stage. It is curious to reflect how hopelessly alien to the Greek conception of education would have been the idea of compulsory Greek. The very features of Greek literature which

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make some of us value passionately its influence in modern life should assure us of its power to endure, and should warn us also that we do it a disservice when we make any needless insistence on it a stumbling-block in any earnest student's path. In any case, long live the Humanities! The immediate tendency of educational reform among us seems likely to prolong and also to invigorate their life.

THE WHITMAN CENTENARY

BY EDMUND GOSSE

THE other day we celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Walt Whitman, about whom criticism is far from having said the last word. He is the perpetual crux, the unsolved problem of literature, and probably his strange writings will be still looked upon as a riddle in A.D. 2019. In his old age, Whitman adopted a droll attitude of remoteness toward his own reputation; he affected to contemplate it from a distance. He said, with a smile, 'The University bosses find me very hard to handle'; and when people wrote to ask him what he meant by this or that, he replied, softly, for he was extremely gentle, that they really must find out for themselves.

I have been looking over my examples of Whitman, of whom I possess the first slim folio, *Leaves of Grass*, of 1855, now extremely rare. A great many years ago I was visiting the bookshop of Mr. Bain, when George Howard, the landscape painter (afterwards

Lord Carlisle), came in with this volume, which he offered to the bookseller for sale. 'It is a book one can hardly leave about,' he said. It was not, on that occasion, long 'left about,' for within five minutes it became my property, and has remained one of my main treasures ever since.

This original edition of *Leaves of Grass* contains a long prose preface, which Whitman suppressed, and which, so far as I know, has not since then been restored. I have never seen this introduction quoted or even mentioned, but its existence gives the volume of 1855 a peculiar interest. In particular, it explains why Emerson wrote so sympathetically to the author, since the violent transcendentalism of this prose would be much more intelligible to the Sage of Concord than the rhapsodical verse which follows it. To the author of the preface, America seemed 'not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations,' and the genius of it was exhibited 'most in the

common people.' The poet for whom the highest honors are claimed, is to concentrate his genius on 'the freshness and candor of the physiognomy' of rural persons. He is to celebrate their doings and sayings, their appearance and their vitality. 'The expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new'; it is not necessary that he should 'trot back generation after generation to the eastern records.' Above all, he is to be without fear or shame; he is to cultivate the simplicity of nakedness; 'I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains.' This suppressed preface of 1855 ought to be reprinted, if it never has been; it gives an extraordinarily vivid impression of the writer's intrepidity when he first confronted the public.

In another place I have given an account of a visit I paid to Whitman in his little two-story house on Mickle Street, Camden, more than thirty years ago. He was then writing what he afterwards called *November Boughs*, and he was anxious about its reception; not in America, which he knew was hostile to him, but in England, where he had once had warmer supporters and a fonder welcome than he found in 1885. He said 'The young fellows seem rather bowled over by me, and then they get respectable or something, and I will no longer do.'

There had been a time when the vogue of Walt Whitman was very active in a small but resolute band of pre-Raphaelites. Looking back on those years, it is easy to understand what it was that attracted these Englishmen to the 'barbaric yawp' of the Long Island carpenter. They were simple, passionate people themselves, and filled with ardent curiosity. They lived intensely in a sharply outlined circle of their own, and cared nothing about social opinion outside

it. They were, in the æsthetic sphere, peaceful revolutionaries, as Whitman was in his other sphere of resistance to futility. When the American wrote poetry about 'the white and red pork in the pork store, the tea-table, the home-made sweetmeats,' the British public might laugh, but such themes would not seem ridiculous to admirers of Coventry Patmore, and the early Millais.

So long, therefore, as admiration of *Leaves of Grass* was a flame confined to one esoteric group of young men in London, it burned brightly enough. But there came a fatal day when the world took up the fashion of reading Walt Whitman, and straightway his influence declined. Looking back to that time, we may perceive that it was never the attacks upon his 'style,' nor the shrieks of an outraged Mrs. Grundy which reduced his power, but the popular tendency to apologize for him. What lowered the prestige of Whitman was the timidity of his friends when they took to excusing the libertinage of *Enfans d'Adam*, and *Calamus*, by pointing to later proofs of his civic and literary virtue. How gallant were the numbers of *Drum Taps*, they said; how touching the elegy on Lincoln, how estimable the poet's activity in the hospitals!

But, if we will clear our minds of cant, these appendices to his work, charming in themselves, were so much barley water mixed with the strong wine of his message. If it be worth while to study Walt Whitman at all, it is not in the anodyne edges of his nature that we must begin, but at his uncompromising centre. 'I loaf and invite my soul,' he sings, and we must not shrink, if we wish to penetrate that soul, from the coarse and bracing perfume of its illustration. The one thing we must never do is to persuade ourselves that Whitman was, 'after

all,' respectable. He was not; he rolled on the carpet of the world like a grown-up naked baby. But what is decency? It is a vague and fugitive quality, affected not merely by tradition but by geography, and 'those who piddle and patter here in collars and tailed coats' must hardly be permitted to define it for the ages.

In one of his conversations, Whitman has said that he received great encouragement out of the gift which reached him, in 1876, after his stroke of paralysis, from his admirers in England. He was grateful, I am afraid, for small mercies, since the collection was rather a poor affair, and the entire subscription did not approach one hundred pounds. But we meant it ardently and kindly, and none of the subscribers were wealthy; among them — the list is before me — were the

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Rossettis, Swinburne, Leicester Warren (Lord De Tabley), Edward Dowden, Roden Noel, and John Addington Symonds.

Whitman wished the gifts to be considered purchase money for books, and each subscriber received two rather gaudily-bound gilt-edged volumes — *Leaves of Grass* and a new miscellany, called *Two Rivulets*, each book, when it ultimately reached London, containing an inscription in the author's hand. Into my *Two Rivulets* he had also stuck a signed photograph, in which he looked quite *The Great Camerado*, and wherever there was a blank space there had been gummed in fresh printed pieces. There is something extraordinarily naïve and cordial about these queer volumes; they are what Leigh Hunt would call 'to-the-heart-ish.'

RAPUNZEL

BY J. MACONECHY

CANON LAYNE had finished his sermon for Sunday. He sat in the library, leaning back in his armchair, tired out with writing, listening with the drowsy inattention of old age to the sounds of a summer afternoon in the country in June.

Outside in the garden the jobbing gardener was leisurely mowing the grass on the lawn. There was the buzzing of insects, the murmur of bees, the whispering rustling of flowers fanned by the soft summer breeze.

An adventurous butterfly flew in through the open French windows and

disturbed the sleeping Rapunzel. Rapunzel ran round and round the room barking in shrill fury, exhausting her energy in a futile chase.

The Canon looked on in contented amusement, casting his mind back over past years in idle reverie. Lately he had felt rather anxious about Rapunzel's health. She had seemed tired and languid. He had feared lest perchance she was beginning to grow feeble in old age, just as he was. For he had passed his seventieth birthday and Rapunzel was ten years old.

Rapunzel had been given to the