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'To All the People of Brooklyn': Whitman as Editor of 'The Brooklyn Eagle,' 1846-1848.

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"TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF BROOKLYN": WHITMAN AS EDITOR OF THE BROOKLYN EAGLE, 1846-1848

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of English

by

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B. A., Hardin-Simmons University, 1949
M. A., Hardin-Simmons University, 1951
June, 1956
We really feel a desire to talk on many subjects, to all the people of Brooklyn; and it ain't their nines-pences we want so much either. There is a curious kind of sympathy (haven't you ever thought of it before?) that arises in the mind of a newspaper conductor with the public he serves. . . . Daily communion creates a sort of brotherhood and sisterhood of the two parties.

--Walt Whitman, "Ourselves and the Eagle," Brooklyn Daily Eagle, June 1, 1846.
To Chris and Mark
with gratitude
for
their forbearance
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am indebted to Dr. Lewis P. Simpson, under whose sympathetic and instructive guidance this study was prepared; and to Professor William D. Bond, of the Hardin-Simmons University English Department, whose interest and pleasure in Walt Whitman was communicated to me as one of his students a number of years ago. I am also under obligation to the Executive Committee of The Long Island Historical Society for their permission to have microfilmed those issues in their files of the Eagle from March 2, 1846 to January 31, 1848.
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ABSTRACT

No complete portrait has been drawn of the Walter Whitman who edited *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* during two years, 1846-48, which lay in the decade preceding his self-apotheosis as "Walt Whitman, a kosmos." Several valuable selected collections of the *Eagle* writings exist, but their incompleteness has led those who have depended upon them for interpretations of the Whitman of the *Eagle* to draw insufficiently supported or mistaken conclusions. This study proposes, by an exhaustive examination of the *Eagle* for 1846-48, to present a thorough picture of Whitman as editor of the *Eagle*, and, in so doing, vindicate his reputation as a professional journalist and determine the extent to which his writings of that period foreshadow the future poet of *Leaves of Grass*.

The files of the *Eagle* have furnished the material—much of it heretofore unnoticed—for Whitman's portrait: his editorials, paragraphs, news stories, commentary, and reviews. His concept of the duties of an editor, his relationship with his fellow editors, and his urban (and rural) environment have been reconstructed from this material. His reactions to the political and economic scene display his attitude toward manifest destiny, Europe, local and national government, the Democratic-Republican Party, banks, currency, tariff, wage-earners, and immigrants. His criticism of the social scene reveals his varied response to crime and its punishment, policemen and firemen, education, temperance, slavery, poverty, religion, health and doctors, the insane, the blind, women, and
even horses. A significant element, too, in the portrayal of the young editor is his remarks on literature, drama, music, ballet, and the fine arts. Most of the aspects of the "Roaring Forties" are examined by the Eagle where, through the catalysis of its criticism, they combine to form a consistent and believable likeness of Walter Whitman, Esq.

The portrait that emerges is one of a journalist who, though conventional, is entitled to respect as one who enjoyed his profession, took it seriously, and devoted it to an earnest purpose. Whitman liked his duties as editor, reporter, and reviewer, and he liked talking "on many subjects, to all the people of Brooklyn." He believed that the major responsibility of an editor was to school the "newspaper-ruled" people; and the persistent didacticism in the Eagle is evidence of his professional earnestness. Though he supported the conventional moralities, he was no mere conformist. On occasion, he advocated views unpopular not only with his readers but with his party and his employer as well. Somewhat a reformer and an advocate of radicalism in politics, Whitman himself was preserved from radicalism by his antipathy toward fanaticism, his skepticism of perfectionist theories, and his fundamental belief that the best society is that with the greatest freedom from restrictions imposed by either legislative bodies or interested groups. This last he considered an "immutable truth," and it gave him a touchstone by which to appraise the social, political, economic, and to a degree, the artistic phenomena of the 1840's, imposing a certain unity on the varied commentary in the Eagle. This "immutable truth" was later an important motif
in the *Leaves*. The writings in the *Eagle* also show that the psychological foundation for the mother-worship motif in the *Leaves* was already firmly established by 1846, that Whitman was being prepared to accept the polarity of good and evil in the *Leaves*, that his later theory of national literature was in its half-formed but generative "embryons," and that the things the young editor saw, heard, and read were being unconsciously stored in his memory as raw material for his later poetry.
INTRODUCTION

Until the present there has been no complete examination of the Walter Whitman who edited The Brooklyn Daily Eagle for two years in the decade preceding his self-apotheosis as "Walter Whitman, a kosmos." Selected material taken from the Eagle has been reprinted in two collections devoted to Whitman's early journalistic writings, and in a third concerned solely with those in the Eagle. These collections, along with a few scholarly articles which have cited some of Whitman's other comments in the Eagle, have been--rather than the files of the Eagle itself--the ordinary source for references, scholarly or otherwise, to the period in Whitman's life between March, 1846, and mid-January, 1848. The work of the scholars who compiled these selected collections has been invaluable in calling attention to a period in Whitman's life in which the seeds of Leaves of Grass were planted, if not already sprouting. Yet the tendency to depend largely upon these sources for inter-

1Emory Holloway, ed., The Uncollected Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman, 2 vols. (New York: Peter Smith, 1932); originally published in 1921. This collection hereafter will be referred to as UPP. Florence Bernstein Freedman, Walt Whitman Looks at the Schools (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950).

2Cleveland Rogers and John Black, eds., The Gathering of the Forces, 2 vols. (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920). This collection hereafter will be referred to as GF.

3"Though the actual writing of the poems in the 1855 Leaves of Grass certainly came later, Whitman probably started accumulating ideas for the book in the late 1840's before he had either the title or even
pretations of the Whitman of the Eagle has led to inadequately supported or erroneous conclusions. For example, Whitman's latest biographer says that he "had nothing to say about male labor except to condemn Negro slavery as unfair competition."¹ On the contrary, an examination of the Eagle shows that Whitman, in covering a laborers' strike at the Atlantic Dock and Basin in the spring of 1846, had a good deal to say about labor and about unions. The same biographer observes that the Eagle writings reveal a religious impulse in Whitman's reformist attitude, and he quotes as evidence passages from The Gathering of the Forces which identify Christianity with reform and which condemn luxurious churches as leading to spiritual complacency.⁵ Of perhaps greater importance, however, are some hitherto unnoticed remarks in the Eagle which suggest that Whitman had some predilection for the liberal doctrines of the Universalists and Unitarians, and which show his dislike of religious sectarian controversy, "hell and damnation" preaching, and what he called the "pros-

¹Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 80.
⁵Ibid., pp. 81-82.
titution of the religious sentiment." Similarly, references to Whitman's literary nationalism in this period have been restricted to his editorials on the subject as reprinted in the collections cited above; no one has analyzed his many book-reviews in an effort to determine the extent to which his desire for a native literature revealed itself in them. That has been done here.

The purpose, then, of this study is to present a complete portrait of the Whitman who edited The Brooklyn Daily Eagle during the two years in which the "Roaring Forties" reached their climax. These were the years of manifest destiny, when most Americans saw the design of Providence in the Oregon affair and the Mexican War—though some wished to use the incendiary Wilmot Proviso as an instrument to modify the plans of Providence. These were the years, too, when the Jacksonian principles of a low tariff and an independent treasury belatedly triumphed over a chorus of manufacturers and bankers who prophesied ruin. And they were the years that marked the first of the flood of Irish immigrants fleeing famine, when Brooklyn turned Whig and doubled in population. Reformers grappled vigorously with the problems of prisons, slavery, the insane, capital-punishment, education, liquor, the rights of women, and universal peace. Books and periodicals were plentifully published by Harpers and others, while the question of a national literature was hotly debated. Infectious and dyspeptic ailments were treated by orthodox and unorthodox physicians of warring schools, and doctrinal points were disputed by orthodox and unorthodox sectarians who also waged war with one another.
The Nativists damned the Catholic Irish, while the Whigs and the Demo-
crats wooed them. The theatres in New York and the lecture-rooms in
Brooklyn were sometimes well and sometimes poorly attended by citizens
seeking amusement or instruction or both. The magnetic telegraph was
revolutionizing news coverage at a propitious time when the people of
New York and Brooklyn were anxious for the latest report on "Old Hick-
ory's" actions in the southwest. Longfellow's "Excelsior" was a popular
concert number and gave its name to omnibuses and steamboats, while
drunkenness and petty crime flourished in Brooklyn. The Eagle's young
ing editor was engrossed in all the political and social change of the late
1840's--and he wrote about it, and he wrote sincerely.

A second purpose of this study is to vindicate Whitman of the
Eagle as a professional man. There has been a tendency--perhaps because
Whitman himself depreciated his early journalistic writings and because
there seems such a disparity between the young newspaperman and the
older poet—to speak of the Eagle Whitman as a half-hearted journalist,
not really devoted to his profession. An early and influential expres-
sion of this judgment was made in 1919 by Arthur M. Howe, then editor
of the Eagle, at the Brooklyn celebration of the Whitman Centenary.
Speaking of Whitman's editorials and commentary in the Eagle, Howe said,
"He conveys the impression of one who regarded his occupation in journal-
ism as something to which he was compelled by circumstances rather than
as a vocation for which he had any positive affection." The present

6 Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades (Boston and New
writer believes that this study shows the contrary to be true. Whitman had a number of things to say in the *Eagle* about the duties of a newspaper editor to his readers and he retorted to Marryat's complaints about the labors of newspaper editing by saying, "we *like* them"; he plainly showed a journalistic zest and expansiveness, for everything from manifest destiny to swill milk came within his range of interest. Though Whitman was capable of quibbling, especially on matters relating to local politics, his remarks in the *Eagle* ordinarily represented his honest reactions to the things said and done in his world of the late 1840's.

But it is not only in Whitman's attitude toward his work that his professional reputation as editor of the *Eagle* needs defending from prevailing assumptions about it. It has long been commonplace to speak of the newspaper Whitman "as a second-rate journalist whose products can scarcely be distinguished from those of others who wrote for the minor papers of the day." It cannot be denied that Whitman's articles in the *Eagle* are not "distinguished," a fact which appears to disappoint some who are devoted to the poet Whitman and to excessively please others who are contemptuous of his poetical reputation. It seems scarcely to matter, so far as *Leaves of Grass* is concerned, that Whitman was not exceptional as a newspaper writer, for it has never been suggested that

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his poetry is much indebted to the journalistic tradition. But one wonders if Whitman, for all his syntactical and grammatical blunders in the *Eagle*, has not been unfairly classified as an inferior journalist. He was not first-rate, indeed; such New York editors as Greeley, Bryant, and Godwin were certainly better journalists than their contemporary at the *Eagle*. His generally relaxed style was often rough and uneven. Occasionally it was affected. But at no time did Whitman write anything like that written by the editor of the *Norfolk Beacon* when he reported (as quoted in the *Eagle* for March 7, 1816) that several women and children had been trapped on the local beach and drowned, "the tide being so high as to effectually interdict their egress." On the whole, Whitman's style in the *Eagle* is readable and his matter adequate. Perhaps it would be juster to describe Whitman the editor as being fairly representative of the average journalist of his day. As Arthur

8 The reader of this study may form his own opinion of Whitman's journalistic ability as he proceeds. Quoted material has been left untouched, except in cases of obvious typographical error, where corrections were made. Whitman's conception of proper punctuation and sentence structure was often individualistic, but the use of *sic* has been avoided except in extreme cases. Conventional ellipses in quoted material are always those of the writer of this paper; periods without alternating spaces, usually seven or more, are a stylistic eccentricity of Whitman, denoting a change in thought or topic, or emphasis. But Whitman's stylistic idiosyncrasies are only incidentally noted in the pages that follow. The concern of this study is with what Whitman said in the *Eagle*, not with how he said it.

Whenever material quoted from the *Eagle* has been reprinted elsewhere (such as in GF or UPP), footnote credit is given that source. Hence items and editorials from the *Eagle* not so footnoted are for the first time, so far as the present writer can determine, referred to or quoted in this study.
Howe told his Brooklyn audience in 1919, speaking of Whitman's work in the Eagle, "If the quality was not above the average of his time, if it has added nothing to his reputation, it represents nothing for which an apology need be made."^9

A final purpose of this examination of the Eagle during Whitman's editorship is to determine if these journalistic writings foreshadow the future poet of Leaves of Grass. According to a well-known critic, the fact that Whitman's writings in both the Eagle and the Brooklyn Times (1857-59) are not "distinguished" (hence, apparently, they must be "desultory or impromptu") "proves the inadvisability of taking the Eagle editorials as evidence in any account of the development of Whitman's genius."^10 He admits that there exist "certain superficial relationships of theme and attitude between the editorials and the poetry," but these relationships are "superficial" because "of the almost total impossibility of predicting the poetry, in any exact literary sense, from the editorials." It is true enough that the prosody of the Leaves was not foreshadowed in the Eagle, but that is scarcely sufficient reason for dismissing the ideas formulated in that paper as irrelevant to the ideas later expressed in the poetry. The child was father of the man just as surely for Whitman as for any other person.

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^9Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, p. 362.

Another scholar, though he sees "little that is distinctive in manner or matter" in the *Eagle* pieces, points out that the experience of writing for the newspapers was of value to Whitman "in enlarging his vocabulary and in training him to write directly from life--the varied kind of life which reporters are likely to know. Furthermore, books for reviews and free passes to the theatres and musical events, especially the opera in New York, aided his self-education in the arts; and the necessity of commenting upon national as well as local affairs kept him in touch with the chief issues of his day . . ."

Surely one can say that without this experience it is doubtful that a mystic revelation would have been enough to translate Walter Whitman into "Walt Whitman, a kosmos."

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

1. History of the "Sit."

William B. Marsh, editor of The Brooklyn Eagle for the first five years of its existence, died from a congested liver on February 26, 1846, "brought on by unflagging attention to his duties as editor and reporter for the Brooklyn Eagle."¹ His successor was Walt Whitman, who assumed the editorial duties of the paper by the beginning of the following month² and retained them until the latter part of January, 1848. Brooklyn was

¹ The Brooklyn Eagle, March 2, 1846.
² The 1847 notebook of Whitman (see Introduction, note 3) has this entry: "About the latter part of February '46, commenced editing the Brooklyn Eagle—continued till last of January '48." See UPP, II, 88. The first volume of UPP (p. 123) quotes as Whitman's a review of Guizot's History of the English Revolution which appeared in the Eagle on March 5, 1846. This is the earliest date of the Eagle material in the two volumes. Holloway's More Light on Whitman, The American Mercury, I (February, 1924), 189, states that on March 3, in the Brooklyn Star, "Whitman published over his initials an appeal for aid to Marsh's destitute family. Within a week he was editor of the Eagle."

GF, II, 303, quotes as Whitman's a review of Keats' Poetical Works from the Eagle of March 5, 1846. Nothing with an earlier date is quoted in either of the two volumes of GF, and the editors state in their introduction that Whitman came to the Eagle early in March. It is possible that Whitman was with the Eagle at least by March 3, for on that date appeared a characteristic editorial directed against a Bill to Suppress Licentiousness recently introduced into the legislature at Albany. The Eagle for March 2 was entirely taken up by an account of Marsh's funeral and by testimonials of his exemplary character. As March 1 was Sunday, the paper was not published on that date.

Allen's The Solitary Singer, p. 73, says that "on March 3 Whitman published in the Star a signed appeal for financial aid for the Marsh family. The following week he succeeded William Marsh as editor of the
then a thriving city of 40,000 people (nearly 70,000 by the beginning of 1848), and it was a mark of journalistic achievement for a young man not quite twenty-seven to be chosen to edit "this chief of the Long Island journals." Whitman's writings in the *Eagle*, facile in language despite grammatical and syntactical blunders, indicate a healthy and vigorous pleasure in his daily routine. Though in later years he seldom referred to his tenure as editor of the *Eagle*, on at least one occasion he expressed a generally pleasant memory of the period.¹

Whitman was an experienced newspaperman and as such had sufficient capacities for his new position. In 1831, at twelve, he had become an apprentice printer on the *Long Island Patriot*. From that time on, except for a few brief stints as a country schoolmaster, he devoted himself to newspaper work, either as a compositor or as a writer. By 1840, Whitman had become actively interested in politics, and as early as 1841 he was speaking at Democratic-Republican rallies.⁵

Brooklyn Eagle." Allen does not indicate his source for this statement, but it is obviously based on Holloway's remark in "More Light on Whitman," quoted above. Since March 3, 1846, was Tuesday, Allen's disregard of Holloway's "within a week" has Messrs. Holloway, Rogers, and Black quoting as Whitman's, book-reviews (hitherto unknown to the pages of the *Eagle*) written by an anonymous interim editor who strangely shared Whitman's tastes in literature as well as his diction.


⁴See below. Other references to the *Eagle* days in Whitman's published prose merely state he was editor of the paper in such and such years.

From 1841 until he joined the **Eagle** in 1846, Whitman worked, sometimes as editor, on a number of New York newspapers, such as The Aurora and the **New York Mirror**, and freelanced for others; and immediately before joining the **Eagle**, he was with Alden Spooner's **Brooklyn Daily Evening Star**. He remarks in Specimen Days: "With these and a little outside work I was occupied off and on, until I went to edit the Brooklyn Eagle, where for two years I had one of the pleasantest sits of my life—a good owner, good pay, and easy work and hours."⁶

The **Brooklyn Eagle and Kings County Democrat** (becoming The **Brooklyn Daily Eagle and Kings County Democrat** on June 1, 1846) was published daily except Sunday. It was both a liberal and influential paper. Isaac Van Anden, its publisher, was a prominent Democratic-Republican, and it may be that Whitman partially owed his new position to his political concurrence with Mr. Van Anden. One function of the newspaper of the time was to serve as an organ of the party;⁷ and during the greater part of Whitman's editorship, the **Eagle** admirably fulfilled this function.

The pieces written by Whitman during this two-year period show him as a conformist and man-about-town; even when attacking conventions of the day, Whitman usually followed the line of popular reforms. He was active

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⁷Ralph Foster Weld, writing of the time when Whitman joined the **Eagle**, says, "The Eagle was backed by the regular Democratic organization of the city, a group of practical politicians." *Brooklyn Village, 1816-1834* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 250.
in Kings County politics, sponsored patriotic celebrations, and wrote a thoroughly conventional ode which was sung to the tune of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a Fourth of July ceremony. He attended clambakes, Sunday-school picnics, circuses, occasional church services, the theatre, the opera, ferry boat christenings, and art exhibits. Whitman records in Specimen Days that he and William Cullen Bryant, then editor of the New York Evening Post, several times took mid-afternoon rambles together in the countryside around Brooklyn. This friendly association with Bryant is testimony of Whitman's social conformity during his editorship of the Eagle.

Tradition has pictured Whitman as being the archetypal lounger during this period in Brooklyn, but there is evidence that tradition is contrary to fact. Cleveland Rogers, one of the editors of The Gathering of the Forces, believes that a true portrayal of Whitman, the Eagle editor, is that given of him in 1920 by William Henry Sutton, who was a printer's devil at the Eagle during Whitman's stay there.

According to Mr. Sutton, Whitman was a good man, a "nice, kind man." He wore a short beard, dressed conventionally and

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8 This ode appeared in the Eagle for July 2, 1846, with the title of "Ode--by Walter Whitman." It is reprinted in GF, I, 75-76, and in UPP, I, 22-23. It is more accurately transcribed in the latter work.

9 CW, IV, 203.

10 "In attempting to trace this legend to its origin the discovery was soon made that the few living persons connected with The Eagle who recalled Walt Whitman in the flesh never knew him as editor of the paper, but as the poet of later days." GF, I, xx.
carried himself with dignity... Most of the editorial work was done at the office, and Mr. Sutton is quite sure that Whitman always came down to work early and went at it energetically. He was always there either reading or writing while in his room in the office. He had comparatively few visitors, and they were "mostly politicians."... Whitman wrote his editorials during the morning and sent them to the composing room, after which he would take a short walk... After his walk Whitman would return to the office to read proof on the material for the day's paper. That ended his work for the day... 11

Mr. Sutton added that then Whitman, taking him along, would customarily go "to Gray's Swimming Bath at the foot of Fulton Street, where he would stay in the water exactly twenty minutes"; after his swim, Whitman ordinarily took the ferry to New York. Sutton often saw him later in the day riding along Broadway seated beside the omnibus drivers. Whitman, loafing and at his ease, was not "observing a spear of summer grass." Instead he was observing his favorite natural phenomenon, man, the essential component of the "en-masse." Regardless of what he observed when he lazily invited his soul, he loafed on his own time, not on the time of Mr. Van Anden and the Eagle.

Whitman left the Eagle shortly before January 21, 1848.12 Again

11Ibid., xxi-xxii. Mr. Sutton was ninety in 1920. Perhaps he answered this advertisement which appeared in the Eagle on April 20, 1846: "WANTED, AT THIS OFFICE—A boy from 11 to 17 years of age, to learn the printing business. Apply immediately."

12The Eagle, January 21, 1848, suggested that the New York Globe attend to its own affairs and let the Eagle's alone. The Eagle went on to say: "The publisher... has found it necessary to dispense with one of its editors, and although he did not see fit to consult with the Globe in regard to the matter, yet he claims that it has no right to misrepresent his motives, or in any way to meddle with his affairs." GF, I, xxxiv-xxxv.
tradition insists that excessive lounging on the part of the young editor led to his dismissal. Some part of this tradition doubtlessly is a result of Whitman's self-portrait in the *Leaves*, but the so-called factual basis of the legend derives from an item in the *Eagle* for July 19, 1849. This item is a reply to the *Brooklyn Advertiser*, which had taunted the *Eagle* for discharging Whitman because he refused to lend his editorial columns to Hunkerism, and because he kicked an important politician down the *Eagle*'s stairs in retaliation for a personal insult. The *Eagle*'s rebuttal to this accusation alleged that:

> Slow, indolent, heavy, discourteous and without steady principles, he was a clog upon our success, and, reluctant as we were to make changes, we still found it absolutely necessary to do so. Mr. W. cried persecution. . . . Mr. W. has no political principles, nor, for that matter, principles of any sort . . . Whoever knows him will laugh at the idea of his kicking any body, much less a prominent politician. He is too indolent to kick a musket.*13*

It is a simple matter to refute the *Eagle*'s assertion that Whitman possessed no political principles (and one suspects that "principles of any sort" is simply a projection of "political principles"). Under Whitman's editorship, the *Eagle* forcefully denounced the Nativist movement; in the face of strong Whig opposition and some Democratic opposition, in both Brooklyn and New York, the *Eagle* supported the Mexican War and the annexation of Mexican territory; and it consistently opposed the tariff. These, however, were orthodox Democratic-Republican principles. The best proof

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of Whitman's possession of political principles is his support of the Wilmot Proviso, which opposed a farther extension of slavery into any territories acquired by the United States as a result of the Mexican War. This proviso officially was anathema to Whitman's party; after his severance from the Eagle, the paper's policy became anti-Wilmot Proviso. Whitman himself, in Specimen Days, states that his adherence to his political principles lost him his job: "The troubles in the Democratic Party broke forth about those times (1848-'49) and I split off with the radicals, which led to rows with the boss and 'the Party,' and I lost my place."\(^{14}\) In September of 1848, Whitman became editor of the Brooklyn Freeman, a free-soil newspaper. He retained this position until September of the following year, when the paper's editorial policy changed. During Whitman's stay on the Freeman, his sincere support of free-soil principles was commented upon by several New York and Brooklyn papers, among them Greeley's New York Tribune.\(^{15}\) It was during this very period that the temporizing Eagle accused Whitman of a lack of political principles or "principles of any sort."\(^{16}\)

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\(^{14}\)CW, V, 35.

\(^{15}\)"It is edited and published by Walter Whitman, Esq., who manfully opposes Hunkerism in all its forms." Quoted from the Tribune by Holloway and Schwarz, I Sit and Look Out, p. 6.

\(^{16}\)Allen Nevins unfairly calls Whitman, as Eagle editor, "a somewhat inconsistent, hot-headed journalist" simply because he supported with "equal enthusiasm" the Mexican War and the Wilmot Proviso. "Newspapers of New York State," History of the State of New York, IX, 292.
Whitman was described by his old paper as "slow, indolent, heavy, discourteous." These adjectives appear to be hyperbolic versions of personal characteristics. Whitman was a larger than average man and deliberate in speech and action, but had he been "slow, indolent, heavy," would he have been acceptable, as he was, as an active worker in the Democratic machine of Kings County? The term "discourteous" seems especially unfitting. Here again such a trait would have made him a liability to a party organization; but the most conclusive refutation of this charge is the fact that all personal records of Whitman during his life attest to his steady and kindly courtesy. Doubtlessly he was indolent after hours, lounging along Broadway or a rural Long Island road, but Mr. Van Anden's Eagle was out.

The Eagle unequivocally impugned Whitman's journalistic ability in saying, "He was a clog upon our success." It seems unlikely that an incompetent editor would have been kept on for two years by so prominent a newspaper as the Eagle; especially as there were no hints, before the

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17 Even in his old age, as a rather unfriendly critic has admitted, Whitman, though stubborn and sometimes thoughtless in the fashion of old folk, was always courteous and kind. Mrs. Keller, Whitman's nurse for two months during his final illness, has this to say:

To Walt Whitman's credit be it said, he never spoke an unkind word to Mrs. Davis [his housekeeper from 1884 until his death in 1892]; never was arrogant or overbearing to her; never belittled her or put her down before others . . . but he would have his own way, and she with her yielding nature soon gave in . . .

split in the Democratic Party over the Wilmot Proviso, of any incompatibility between Whitman and Van Anden. A perusal of the Eagle itself during Whitman's editorship shows that he put out a respectable paper for the time, and his standing in his profession was good. Whitman became a clog, apparently, only when his principles interfered with the party line.

Whitman, in 1846 and 1847, was a good example of the progressive type of newspaper editor who seemingly came into being with the advent of Horace Greeley, who founded the New York Tribune in 1841. Alfred McClung says of the latter: "Greeley expressed himself frequently and fully on economic, political, and social problems with all the vehemence of a throbber's enthusiasm for the ideals and ideas he holds. He sought, as he stated in his announcement, 'to advance the interests of the People, and to promote their Moral, Social, and Political well-being.'" This statement, sans "the vehemence," would well apply to Editor Whitman. Many of his editorials in the Eagle were concerned with health, morals—political, social, and economic—and to humanitarianism. He devoted several columns of the Eagle, following the lead of Greeley's Tribune and Bryant's Post, to worthy literary productions. He was interested in the civic improvement of Brooklyn, especially in matters of sanitation, lighting, and parks. He reviewed books, plays, operas, concerts, lectures, and art exhibits. He wrote, in fact, on everything from thunderstorms to

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young ladies at the exhibit of Hiram Powers' "Greek Slave"; pleasure and instruction for his readers were to be found in all the manifestations of human activity and natural phenomena. True, he engaged, as did all his peers, in political bickering and trifling; but the majority of his political editorials were in support of his basic beliefs in democracy, America's manifest destiny, and anti-slavery. Rather than compromise one of these principles, Whitman chose to lose one of his "pleasantest sits." In this he was not the typical mid-nineteenth-century editor; he was the precursor of the Walt Whitman of *Leaves of Grass*.

2. Duties of the Editor.

In the early 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: "The inhabitants of the United States have, then, at present, properly speaking, no literature. The only authors whom I acknowledge as American are the journalists. They indeed are not great writers, but they speak the language of their country and make themselves heard." In the late 1840's, Whitman, in addition to agreeing with de Tocqueville on the lack of a native literature, also recognized the influential role of the journalist in forming American public opinion. "In this country," he stated in the *Eagle* on January 6, 1848, "our literature is mainly composed of periodical publications—from daily to monthly; and these give their hue to the minds of the people."

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Of these publications, the newspaper carried the most weight with the public, for "the people of the United States are a newspaper-ruled people."** Hence, editors of newspapers had a manifest duty, as a well-circulated paper could exercise considerable influence for good. "To wield that influence," said Whitman, "is a great responsibility. There are numerous noble reforms that have yet to be pressed upon the world. People are to be schooled, in opposition perhaps to their long established ways of thought."** Unfortunately, many of Whitman's colleagues took lightly this responsibility to their readers.

Whitman wrote in the Eagle for April 27, 1846, under the heading of "An Important Fact": "There are published in the United States alone as many periodicals and papers as are produced in the whole of Europe. It is no matter of surprise then that America should be centuries in advance of the Old World in point of intelligence and the general diffusion of knowledge." But Whitman was not such a chauvinist as to think American publications were superior simply because they were American. On January 6, 1848, he remarked that periodicals and newspapers in this country "often give a superficial character to the people, and make them light and ephemeral in mind, as it were. . . . All hands are too fond of making money directly: a passion that is ever at war with intellectual completeness; a passion sometimes at war with itself."

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21"Ourselves and the 'Eagle,'" UPP, I, 116-117.
So far as newspapers alone were concerned, America's intellectual appetite was given a far from satisfying fare by them. Whitman asserted in "American Editing and Editors":

It is a singular fact that while the people of the United States are a newspaper-ruled people, we have in reality few, we may almost say no, newspapers that approach even in the neighborhood of perfect specimens of their kind. We have little fine, hearty, truthful writing in our papers. We have, (it must be from want of public encouragement,) little high-toned gentlemanliness or elegance--little politeness even. Perhaps, however, the want of the refinements of writing in our daily prints is not so strange as the want of depth, force, power, and solidity. The American people are intellectual in a high degree--their brains are clear, and their penetration eagle-eyed. Why then, does not the press which asks their 'patronage' present something like the food we might reasonably suppose would be craved by such a mental appetite as comes from a healthy intellectual digestion? Why are our editors so flippant, so superficial, so vague and verbose? Why do they so rarely bring what they write to bear on the light of great principles and truths?

Whitman answered these questions by quoting "one whose name we cannot state" who placed the blame on low wages and low standards ("society has not required more"), which attracted men of low ability and character.

If we are to believe Whitman, he received "good pay" while editing the Eagle, and certainly the standards of the paper were relatively high, since William Marsh had, in five years, made it the most prominent of the Long Island journals. Ralph Weld, speaking of the period in which Whitman edited the Eagle, remarks: "Brooklyn journalism then, as during the village period, reflected the spirit of the community. Conservative in tone, as a rule it avoided sensationalism. Alden Spooner expressed its attitude, when he wrote 'Brooklyn has a character for morals, if New-York has not.'"22

22 *Brooklyn Village*, p. 250.
Whitman's own character must have been good, since no evidence that it was otherwise exists. Finally, his professional ability was sufficiently respectable to draw praise from even the editors of Whig papers. Here, then, in Whitman's case, existed none of the causes cited by his anonymous authority for the failure of American editors to give the proper journalistic food required by readers with "a healthy intellectual digestion."

On June 1, 1846, after having a month earlier moved to larger quarters at 30 Fulton Street, the Eagle came out improved in appearance as the result of new type. This issue of the paper contained what Holloway calls "Whitman's editorial creed"—the editorial "Ourselves and the 'Eagle,'" already alluded to. Whitman, in this editorial, referred first

23 During June, 1846, Whitman from time to time published in the Eagle brief excerpts from other papers complementing the Eagle on its improved appearance as a result of new type. Quite a number of them complemented the Eagle's editor as well as its new type. Perhaps it is to be expected that Democratic papers should have spoken well of the management of another Democratic paper: Bryant's Post spoke of the Eagle as "a spirited and well-managed Democratic paper" (June 6); the New York Morning News and the New York Globe offered "complimentary allusions" to the paper and its editor (June 6, 9); and so it went with other Democratic papers in and out of New York State. But Whig journals spoke well of Whitman's professional capacity, too: Greeley's Tribune said, "The paper is in every respect—except in politics...—exceedingly well got up. The Local Department is put together with great industry and cleverness" (June 2); the venerable Alden Spooner, dean of Brooklyn journalists, in his Evening Star, complimented the Eagle on its new type "and a brilliant lot of editorials and original articles to match" and expressed his gratification that Whitman "always had so much good in the midst of" his political heresies (June 4); and other Whig papers spoke in the same vein.

24 UPF, I, 115, note 1.
to his paper's political affiliation in restrained language free from any hint of a docile following of the party line. "The democratic party of Brooklyn should (and do) handsomely support a handsome daily paper. -- For our part, too, we mean no mere lip-thanks when we say that we are truly conscious of the warm kindness with which they have always treated this establishment." Then he addressed the general reader: "We really feel a desire to talk on many subjects, to all the people of Brooklyn; and it ain't their ninepences [the weekly rate for the Eagle] we want so much either. There is a curious kind of sympathy (haven't you ever thought of it before?) that arises in the mind of a newspaper conductor with the public he serves. . . . Daily communion creates a sort of brotherhood and sisterhood between the two parties." "Perhaps no office," Whitman declared, "requires a greater union of rare qualities than that of a true editor." And as a result, it was not strange that editors "are all derelict, in some particular." What were these rare editorial qualities? First, "in general information, an editor should be complete, particularly with that relating to his own country." Second,  

25Whitman made it clear in several remarks that his opinions were not passively received from the party. For example, on July 30, 1846, this brief item appeared in the Eagle: "Our rather impertinent friend and correspondent 'X.' is informed that the Brooklyn Eagle is committed to neither of the 'factions' [Hunkers and Barnburners] which raised such a row last winter at Albany. We have a prodigious fancy for keeping the E. aloof and clear from all clique and personal influence—and as to the latter part of 'X's' letter, we shall say what we think right, without the least alarm or 'hesitation.'"
an editor "should have a fluent style" but not elaborate, and his articles "should ever smack of being uttered on the spur of the moment, like political oratory." Third, an editor should contain his temper with the restraint of Job. Finally, an "editor needs, withal, a sharp eye to discriminate the good from the immense mass of unreal stuff floating on all sides of him." But though an editor have not all these desirable qualities, and though he have "the duties of five or six," still "much good can always be done, with such potent influence as a well circulated newspaper." Then followed the declaration of editorial responsibility already quoted: "To wield that influence, is a great responsibility. There are numerous noble reforms that have yet to be pressed upon the world. People are to be schooled, in opposition perhaps to their long established ways of thought."

"People are to be schooled"—this was the editor's duty. Just as Whitman later in *Leaves of Grass* equated the poet with the teacher ("he who would assume a place to teach or to be a poet here in the States"[^26]), so Whitman here in *1846* equated the newspaper editor with the teacher. Of the various elements discernable in Whitman's journalistic writings in the *Eagle*, the didactic element is one of the most pervading. The citizens of Brooklyn, as Americans, were clear brained and intellectually curious; and Whitman used his newspaper, while turning out political hack-work and routine news-reporting, to contribute to the advancement and education of his subscribers.

[^26]: "By Blue Ontario's Shore," stanza 12, line 1.
In addition to this abstract duty of the editor to school his readers, Whitman had as well, of course, the ordinary duties of the editor of a small daily in that period. He was both editor and reporter, as had been the late Mr. Marsh. Besides preparing editorials (which ranged in number from one or two daily to occasionally as many as three or four), Whitman clipped items from exchange papers, wrote book and periodical reviews, arranged a literary miscellany for the first page, compiled a column or so of local news, and frequently, instead of depending on reports from second hand, did his own leg-work on news stories in Brooklyn and across the East River in New York.  

In addition, Whitman also edited The Brooklyn Weekly Eagle, published on Wednesday afternoons, which contained selected material from the preceding week's daily Eagle.

The Eagle employed one special reporter during the first half of 1847—a Mr. Oliver Dyer, phonographic reporter and teacher. Beginning on December 8, 1846, Whitman ran a series of articles by Mr. Dyer on the nature of phonography, a species of phonetic shorthand. Early in 1847,

27 On June 19, 1846, in his "City Intelligence" column, Whitman quoted the New York Evening Post as saying that it got its item on the launching of the sloop of war Albany at the Brooklyn Navy Yard from an Albany paper. "What are the Brooklyn papers about?" asked the Post. Whitman indignant responded: "This Brooklyn paper, part of it, is 'about' the good city of Brooklyn, every day, actively engaged, at a very considerable outlay of time, work, and money, in getting every possible item of local news—of which we give a couple of columns each day." It appeared that the Albany version of the launching had been clipped from the Eagle and published as original.
the *Eagle* began on Mondays to print reports of sermons in Brooklyn churches. On May 10, 1847, the following item preceded such a report:

> The following full report, word for word, of a brilliant sermon by Dr. Cox yesterday, (9th) is made for us by the reporter whom we have engaged for such occasions—Mr. Dyer, the phonographist. It tells its own story; and we invite any of the vast assembly who crowded the Cranberry street building yesterday to hear the discourse; we invite them to tax their memories to the utmost—we invite the pastor himself—to discover the least inconsistency (unless some typographical error occur,) between this report and the sermon itself.28

Mr. Dyer left Brooklyn in the summer of 1847 and the *Eagle*’s reports of sermons dwindled to occasional sketchy comments by Whitman and accounts sent in by correspondents.

Correspondents to the *Eagle* provided a constant source of material consisting of poems, sketches, reform tracts, travel letters, reminiscences, political essays, and recipes. Whitman demanded certain things of these contributions, things familiar to college instructors of freshman composition. The following appeared in the *Eagle* of April 24, 1846:

> How To Write For Newspapers—1. Have something to write about. 2. Write plain; dot your i’s; cross your t’s; point sentences; begin with capitals. 3. Write short; to the point; stop when you have done. 4. Write only on one side of the leaf. 5. Read it over, abridge and correct it, until you get it into the shortest space possible. 6. Pay the postage.29

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28 Other newspapers employed phonographic reporters, too. When Louis Agassiz lectured in New York during October and November, 1847, his lectures were taken down by Dr. Houston, Secretary to the U. S. Senate and a phonographer, and were reported in full in the *Tribune*. James Playsted Wood, ed., *One Hundred Years Ago: American Writing of 1847* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1917), p. 200.

A brief item of July 29, 1846, indicated that many of Whitman's correspondents did not know how to write for a newspaper: "The communication of 'Fair Play' is unpublishable in our columns because it is written in very faint pencil mark. A great deal of the MSS. sent us are not attended to, from their illegibility, being written on both sides of the sheet, &c."

On December 2, 1846, this protest appeared in the Eagle: "If the gentleman who sends us the reports of interments, would write any thing else better than cow-tracks, the names of the diseases would doubtless be printed rightly. If not, not." When the contribution of a correspondent was printed, Whitman usually was careful to indicate his concurrence or disagreement with its sentiments if the piece dealt with politics or social conduct. He did not wish to have his personal opinions compromised by anything not his own which he printed. Whitman often printed extracts from books and periodicals; of these he once said in the Eagle (April 30, 1847): "Amid the extracted articles put in our Eagle, there is here and there a sentiment of which we cannot fully approve. Our own sentiments are always in the editorial articles proper."

As an editor, Whitman was jealous of "our own sentiments"; ample proof of this was his persistence in supporting the Wilmot Proviso against the line taken by the proprietor of the Eagle and the Democratic Party in Kings County. Whitman also was jealous of the freedom of the press. On September 16, 1847, Mr. Henry A. Lees, publisher and editor of the Brooklyn Advertiser, and a Whig and old adversary of Whitman, was struck by Mr. George H. Cooper, local lawyer, for an article he had published. Lees
challenged Cooper to a formal pugilistic encounter, with seconds, on the fourth floor of the Advertiser building. Cooper accepted and the fight took place; reports of the result were conflicting. On the next day, the following appeared in the Eagle:

When an editor, in the discharge of his duty to the public, gives in the columns of his paper a simple statement of facts, and that statement contains nothing which can in any manner be construed, or tortured into a construction to violate propriety, or wound the feelings of an individual—when an editor does simply this, and for this is assaulted in his own office, we conceive that the rights of the press, its dignity and freedom, have been outraged, and we cannot too strongly express our sympathy for our injured and assaulted contemporary, and our unqualified scorn for the perpetrator of the wrong. And we believe that the whole public would justify an editor thus attacked, if he should summarily inflict the most violent punishment in his reach upon the aggressor. In our belief, no retaliation could be too severe.

However, Whitman went on to condemn Lees for entertaining "no proper estimation of his dignity and of his position" by lowering himself to defending the liberty of the press in the prize ring. Having done this degrading thing, "he forfeits his claim not only to the sympathy, but also to the respect of all his contemporaries, and proves himself unworthy of the station he occupies." 30

No account exists of Whitman's having been assaulted as a result of anything he published in the Eagle, but one imagines that he would have felt little or no alarm at the prospect. As will be seen later, Whitman

30 Whitman seems inconsistent perhaps, after having said an attacked editor was justified in inflicting "the most violent" retaliation. However, he often attacked prize fighting in the Eagle; also, he and Lees never missed a chance to take journalistic pokes at one another.
on several occasions rather persistently attacked prominent citizens of Brooklyn in a fashion calculated to "wound the feelings of an individual." Assault was not an unusual conclusion to such matters in the hot-tempered forties, and what Whitman would have done had he been confronted with a situation similar to Lees' is a matter of the purest conjecture. All we have along that line is a probably apocryphal story of Whitman's kicking a politician down the stairs.

Though Whitman did not have his time taken up with exchanging blows with enraged readers, he was probably quite busily engaged in his regular duties until the proofs of the paper were read in the afternoon. That he enjoyed this steady grind of putting out a daily paper is evident from the general good spirits he displayed in the Eagle. Perhaps in midsummer, with the liveliness of the city dampened by the excessive heat, he was sometimes bored. On July 21, 1847, he wrote: "We learn that the rim of Long Island is swarming with the city denizens who have managed to effect their escape, while squads of absentees are perched high on the top of every mountain resort which looms up landward. 'Keep cool' seems to be the favorite motto, with all except omnibus horses and the class of beings who for the prescriptive right to use the syllable 'we' are doomed for an uncertain time to the prison house of a daily paper. Poor 'we' things, how

31 The following appeared in the Eagle on April 30, 1847: "EDITORS! VISITORS. --Pay as few visits as possible, to editors! Nine-tenths of the matters which people bring to an editor, could just as well be attended to by the publishing department. An editor in business hours, never wants to 'see company.'"
are they to be pitied." But though Whitman had to work as hard as ever while many of his readers lounged along the beaches of Long Island, he found an equal gratification in doing the work he took pleasure in. An excerpt from an article by Marryat was printed in the Eagle on March 16, 1847, under the title of "The Toils of a Newspaper." Marryat complained about the obligation of writing the leading article day after day and year after year regardless of one's health, mood, or situation. "To write for a paper," he said, "is very well, but to edit it is to condemn yourself to slavery." Whitman appended the following to the extract:

That the labors of an editor are hard enough, is an undoubted fact. But for our part, we like them. There are many pleasures and gratifications in the position of an editor. Moreover we think there has been quite too much of this cant about the dreadful things concomitant with the 'labors of a newspaper editor.' The worst of it is, not that the work is hard, but that, in this country, one man has to do so many things in the paper. Abroad, it is different: half a dozen editors are a small allowance for a well conducted daily journal. And one is apt to regret the having so much to do, here, because, in the multiplicity, each subject cannot be thoroughly done justice to. We would not give much however for a newspaper editor who is constantly grumbling at and disliking his profession. The same rule indeed, may hold good in other matters. What would you think of a sculptor, or a painter, or a physician, who should be ever piercing the wounded air with bewailments of his hard lot?

Whitman enjoyed his profession and took it seriously during his stay on the Eagle. For one thing, newspaper editing involved, for a man who tried to be a "true editor," an earnest purpose—that of educating the naturally intelligent Americans. For another, Whitman's work allowed, or rather demanded, that he go among and observe the myriad activities of his fellow beings. The following passage from Leaves of Grass is
descriptive of the young editor of the Brooklyn Eagle:

This is the city and I am one of the citizens,
Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets,
newspapers, schools,
The mayor and council, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories,
stocks, stores, real estate and personal estate.32

3. Whitman and His "Contemporaries."

During the period when Whitman was editing the Eagle, the Brooklyn public was also being served by two other daily newspapers: the Brooklyn Evening Star and the Brooklyn Daily Advertiser, both Whig. Whitman had been employed by Colonel Alden Spooner, proprietor and editor of the Star, on two occasions. He had worked as a compositor for Spooner's Long Island Star (as the paper was then known) from the fall of 1832 until May 1835; and he had written for the Star, as has been noted, for several months before coming to the Eagle. Henry A. Lees, a native of England, owned and edited the Advertiser, which he had established in 1814. Whitman followed the journalistic custom of his day in maintaining both a political and a professional feud with his two local rivals; however, his tone varied according to which of the two journals he was attacking.

Gay Wilson Allen remarks: "Whether he was piqued because he had lost an inexpensive reporter and special writer, or thought Whitman unequal to editing a daily, or--more likely--resented the political opposition the new Eagle editor would give him, Edwin Spooner published editorials

32 "Song of Myself," lines 1075-1077.
Indeed, it seems the last named motive for the Star's attacks on Whitman is the correct one, for verbal blows were not exchanged between the two papers until 1847; and the time element suggests that Mr. Allen's "would give" should read "was giving."

A number of Whitman's editorials in the Eagle took the Star to task for its reactionary stand on such matters as the national bank, the tariff, the Mexican War, President Polk's administration, and radical democracy.

The Star retaliated by commenting on Whitman's "weakness" as an editor, calling him a "pig ringer," describing him as a "country schoolmaster" and "hectoring scriviner," and imploring him to "soar above the low and foetid purlieus of profligate partyism." In return, Whitman was more strongly sarcastic about the Star's whiggish political principles (though he sometimes described the paper as a political mongrel), its diction,
and its apparent habit of filching copy from the Eagle; but never did he impugn, in contrast with his treatment of Henry Lees, either of the Spooners' personal character or integrity—though on one occasion he came near doing so. When he wrote his items critical of the Star, Whitman must have been consciously aware that its senior editor was "our old friend, Mr. Spooner, one of the best-hearted old men in the State of Long Island." Ordinarily references in the Eagle to the elder Spooner speak of him as "our venerable contemporary of the Star," and the Star itself is described as "our staid whig contemporary," or, confusingly and ungrammatically, as "our venerable contemporary of the Star." It was the whiggery in the Star, of course, that Whitman principally aimed at, even when criticizing it for lack of professional decorum in the matter of appropriating as original, material from the Eagle.

Whitman himself appears to have been relatively careful in the Eagle to credit the sources of those items in his columns not from his own hand. The Star does not seem to have aroused Whitman's ire on this point until the late summer and early fall of 1847—the time when its remarks on Whitman were sharpest. On August 27, Whitman said: "Since the Brooklyn Star is so nice in its sense of editorial decorum, will it once in a while give this print credit for the lengthy reports, prepared with care, which it often copies from us, and prints just as if they were original to it?" On August 30, Whitman comes his closest to dealing in

37"Professional Compliments," June 4, 1846.
personalities:

The Star, which is too mean to get local reports, takes ours, and instead of crediting our paper, attributes them to third parties. None but a sneak, as stingy as obtuse, would descend to such a petty subterfuge. All local reports come from some writers, of course—but no one except an innate vulgarian would go behind the paper, to refuse credit on such flimsy grounds.

The Star has made itself the laughing stock of Brooklyn, by its ridiculous and sleepy management as a newspaper, without enterprise, without even common talent, and without any fixed tone. It seems disposed to go a step lower, and spatter with its low impudence, those through whose labors it makes occasionally even a tolerable page of reading. The report which we last allude to, the Star knew well enough, was a long and statistical account of the Kings' county supervisors. It, we repeat, knew well enough what we meant; but its purpose was better answered by a falsehood, and so it readily invented one.

On September 14, Whitman noted that the Star had reprinted a brief abstract which the Tribune had made from the Eagle's account of the Brooklyn charter convention and had credited it to the Tribune. "Our contemporary," said Whitman, "ought to have more local spirit than to rely upon foreign papers for its accounts of local occurrences." Whitman's final protest against the Star's purloining practices came on November 3:

Our venerable contemporary of the Star in its yesterday's issue, took advantage of our paper being printed two hours in advance of the usual time, and cribbed from us an account of the murder in Leonard street, New York, which we took special pains to go over during the morning, and collect by our own personal trouble. The Star not only crib this from us, but uses our own words in rendering the account—and publishes it as if it were original. Since we have commenced this matter, we are determined to expose our venerable contemporary every time it does this very wicked newspaperial wrong. It has long cabbaged our local reports, and palmed them off as original; and now it seems determined to have our latest items of special news.

Perhaps after this cry for justice on the part of a busy editor, the Star did not repeat this "very wicked newspaperial wrong." At least there were
no further references of importance in the *Eagle* to the Spooners' paper; and soon Whitman was no longer connected with the *Eagle* and its quarrels.

Whitman's wrangle with Henry Lees' *Advertiser*, though its peak of intensity was reached in 1847, began earlier than that with Spooner's *Star*, and was continued on the same level of virulence by Whitman's successor on the *Eagle*, S. G. Arnold. Whitman's disputes with the *Advertiser* had their basis on political differences, but they quickly degenerated into mutual denigrations which were intense, personal, and often in remarkably bad taste. Strangely, Whitman seems never to have accused the *Advertiser* of stealing copy from the *Eagle*; instead, he accused it of being a carbon of such Whig papers in New York as the *New York Morning Express*. In the *Eagle* for May 22, 1846, Whitman spoke of the *Advertiser*

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38 An item in the *Eagle* for December 30, 1847, less than a month before Whitman's departure from the paper, indicates that he was not personally estranged from the Spooners: "The conductors of the principal Whig paper in Brooklyn, being desirous to give character and éclat to the new publishing office they have just taken unto themselves in the basement of the Long Island insurance company's building, on the corner of Fulton and Front streets, gave a pleasant little oyster and champagne /sic/ entertainment to a small party of very distinguished persons this morning—the 29th instant /sic/. We have not lost our horror of Whig politics—but there is no denying that the scamps have first rate judgment in wine."

39 Whitman's most pronounced breach of good taste anywhere in the *Eagle* was this brief item in the issue of February 9, 1847: "The Adv. should have signed the self-written letter V. O. M., for sure we are that any decent man who essays its reading will wish to vomit." Only a few months earlier (October 3, 1846), Whitman had congratulated himself "that our print, passing into so many family circles hereabout, affords from day to day a mass of matter that must make it peculiarly acceptable for the ladies, youth, &c."
as attributing to the *Express* an article condemning the Mexican War, and added:

Heaven forbid that we should charge the *Adv.*, with originating this thing . . . its cant and impertinence are mostly copied from one or two prints on the other side of the river. When they rave in the morning, the *Adv.* raves in the afternoon; and when the rising of the sun witnesses their attempts to be funny at the idea of American courage, the setting of that luminary beholds the Brooklyn *Adv.* close at their heels, snivelling and whining its whiffety bark, to the same tune . . . insulting to our people . . . when every true patriot stands up by his government, and has a hand and voice of sympathy for our soldiers in the south-west.

Whitman's standing complaints against the *Advertiser* were that it was a subservient party tool, was edited by a "cockney" Englishman devoid of patriotism for his adopted country, and was a corrupting influence on the American press. Perhaps party jealousy alone did not dictate this attitude toward the *Advertiser* and its editor, for on April 11, 1847, the *Eagle* quoted the *Star* as saying the following about its brother Whig in reference to party servility: "In this the *Daily Advertiser* has no rival on this side of the Atlantic. The thought is not altogether uncomfortable [sic] that there is not a drop of American blood in the veins of the editors and reporters who scribble the contents of that paper." An editorial in the *Eagle*

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That the Spooners disliked Lees and his paper as much as did Whitman seems indicated by this item which appeared in the *Eagle* on November 23, 1847: "The Brooklyn *Star* stated on Saturday that *a would-be distinguished editor in this city had been taken to the watch house, for kicking up a row, etc.* Whereupon the *Advertiser* responds in the following manner, to wit: 'We are willing to reply to or pass in silence as our humor takes us, the scurrility of the Star, through our columns,
for July 12, 1847, provides a compendium of Whitman's opinion of Lees and his paper.

To hear such a print as the Brooklyn Advertiser say, "we have none to call us to account for what we advance, and are responsible only to the public," is one of the best jokes of the age... Its body belongs to the most selfish and reckless of cliques; soul it has none to belong any where. The gutter-dirt that is washed into the dock by a shower, might as reasonably talk of its independence... And though it may be a very benevolent thing for the nest of English cockneys, who, as they boast so perpetually, "own the paper" they "edit," to come over here and enlighten the free people of Brooklyn with their effusions; we must say we can't realize that alleged fact. Quite on the contrary—for while always glad to receive the many good specimens from Old England, such samples as the Advertiser are alike unfair to their native country, and degrading to this. What vile elements these meaner sort of Englishmen, over the land, have introduced into our American press! Nearly all that is low and morbid, that corrupts and violates the rules of taste, as far as newspapers are concerned, have been infused among us by these migrating gentry from the stews of the English cities. And the worst of it is, that, in reality, they have little but hatred toward the country that affords them a living...

As for Lees himself, he was "an English cockney, of fifty-sixth mental calibre, deficient of an original idea in his head, or the capacity to write a sentence without the grossest blunders in grammar, and even in spelling!"

but when it comes out and lies wilfully, maliciously and cowardly, we shall meet it through another source.** So look out for another pugilistic encounter, in the fourth story of no. 35 Fulton street.***

The portion of this article quoted here does not appear in GF, but a concluding paragraph (in which Whitman speaks of having proved the Advertiser "an inventor of falsehoods, on many occasions") is printed in that work as though it were a complete editorial; see Vol. II, 19-20.
Lees must have retaliated for this unflattering picture of himself in the next day's Advertiser, for on November 5, Whitman defended himself against the Advertiser's charge of using bad grammar. He began first by sounding the old theme of the Whig paper's contempt for American institutions, its "obscene stories and allusions," and its "daily martyrdom of our language"; then he explained his philosophy of grammar.

What our style and "grammar" are, the readers of our columns can see for themselves. As to the style, we simply endeavor to be clearly understood: as to our "grammar," it is of course perfectly correct, or we shouldn't presume to write for an intelligent community. We say so plumply, because we consider the very least requisite of an editor is not to violate philological truth. We never sacrifice at the shrine of formal construction, however; and it is well known that a numbskull with a grammar book in his hand, but not the least idea of the general philosophy of the science in his head, can pick flaws in any idiomatic sentence, and parade his stupidity by calling incorrect what is frequently the best merit of the composition.\textsuperscript{2}

Lees' obvious answer for Whitman's rather monotonous epithet of "cockney" was to accuse the editor of the Eagle of being a Nativist—a term of particular approbrium in Brooklyn, where the rapidly increasing Irish (and German) population was courted for its votes by both parties. Whitman's answer to this charge was that "for the Advertiser to identify itself with any of the European nations, is unfair even to the wickeder phases of those nations' character"; as for being anti-foreigner, the editor of the Eagle "would banish" the word "foreigners" from the press of this country if he could.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{2}GF, II, 11.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 15-17.
The Advertiser was fond of such burlesque abuse as "The Blackfeet Indians shook the Eagle's realm when they drove the Flatheads from their home in the prairies, because the editor of that paper is a descendant of the latter tribe."^1^ Brilliant irony!" cried Whitman on this occasion. But on another occasion, the Advertiser unwittingly indulged in a bit of dramatic irony in its remarks on the following paragraph which appeared in the Eagle on January 12, 1817:

MONKEYISM IN BROOKLYN.—Among the sights that go to make a man's stomach qualmy, is that monkeyism of literature, involved in a few gentlemen, (very well in their places, but very silly when they reach higher) getting together, and 'adoring' and 'doting' on Byron, Scott, and 'sentiment'--making pretensions to criticism, with about as much ability that way as a smart little counter-jumper might have to rule the Treasury Department.

...At the anniversary of the Hamiltonian Literary Association last evening, (11th) after a long string of toasts of a character the very opposite of American, one of the guests—a citizen of New York—had the audacious vulgarity to think that it might not be out of time to remember (the low-bred fellow!) that there was such a republic as his own on the surface of the earth—and accordingly gave: "The United States of America—an independent country, not a suburb of London,--which was partially hissed! Is it too much to say that this was a specimen of the monkeyism of literature?^4^5

On January 14, 1817, Whitman briefly noted that the Advertiser had taken the article on "Monkeyism" as an insult to itself and had used in rebuttal

^1^Quoted in the Eagle, July 1, 1817.

^45^In a later editorial, "Independent American Literature," February 10, 1817 (GF, II, 237-241), Whitman explained that the hissing was done by a guest or guests of the Association, not by one of the members. He added: "In our former brief notice, certain words were used which we are now convinced did injustice to this really talented band of young men; they are, many of them gentlemen of much literary taste, and true perception."
"such massive arguments as are involved in repetitions of the overwhelming phrase, 'poetical editor of the Eagle,' and 'poet editor, looking down from his Parnassian heights.'" Whitman avowed that he found these arguments "quite unanswerable." It was well that Mr. Lees did not know of the notebook which Whitman perhaps began in 1847, or soon after, and which contained, among other very unconventional lines of verse, one reading, "I am the Poet."  

Whitman's verbal exchanges with his New York contemporaries were fewer and much milder in tone than those with his Brooklyn competitors, and were as a rule solely concerned with political differences. That Whitman thought well of the New York press on the whole is indicated by the following which appeared in the Eagle on January 6, 1848:

We possess infinitely more newspapers, of course, than the English: and in the way of getting late news the New York Tribune, Sun, and Herald, are fully equal in forethought and outlays to any journals in England. The London papers, though many of their "loaders" are choice specimens of force and pungent style, have oftentimes sad trash in their editorial columns. In the way of elegance of composition, none of them prints articles equal to those that proceed from Mr. Bryant's pen, in the Evening Post—and none that in dashing strength and freedom and clearness, are like Leggett's old editorials in the same paper.

The New York press—if our brethren there will excuse us for a few remarks into their domain—affords many peculiar features, both in literary and other points of view. We are

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46 UPP, II, 71. Despite the sharp exchanges between them, Lees spoke well of Whitman in the Advertiser when the latter was preparing to edit the Brooklyn Freeman in the spring of 1848; and in 1850, Whitman wrote a little for the Advertiser—anononymously. See Emory Holloway, Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative (New York and London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), pp. 77, 85.
no admirers of the Herald's flippant, sneering, exclusively selfish and sordid method in its editorial department; but still consider that print has done an immense advantage to the American press, in the way of offering it an example of newspaper enterprise and activity. Not until the advent of the Herald did the "Wall street press" get the wind taken out of its sails; for previous to that time, the cheap papers were purchased merely because they were cheap; afterward because they were better. . . .

Taken altogether, there is a vast amount of good reading, and writing, in the New York papers.--Only think of the haste of preparation, and the amount needed; and one will be ready to excuse the frequent want of condensation, and the looseness of style, noticeable in many editorial articles. Great is the estate of the press! and in it, great are the newspapers of New York!

But these great New York newspapers could be as guilty as the Brooklyn Star of petty filching from the Eagle. On June 19, 1846, Whitman remarked that Bryant's Evening Post "is in the frequent habit, we observe, of taking bodily our local news, and publishing it as original. So are nearly all the New York papers, with the exception of the Tribune and the Express. . . . Professional brethren, we presume, must notice in the Eagle that we render unto Caesar, &c." At times the New York press spoke slightingly of Brooklyn matters, and then Whitman would respond as he did on April 10, 1847: "One could better swallow even that 'brine' which lies between Brooklyn and New York than such a nauseous dose of insipid milk and unclean water which the Evening Mirror serves up, entitled 'Brooklyn affairs.' As to our possessing 'magnificent ideas,' why we hope we do, that's all." Sometimes the Eagle warned its subscribers against fraud in the press across the river. Not awed by the New York Sun's phenomenal daily circulation of 30,000, Whitman advised
his readers on May 20, 1846, that the Sun's extras were "humbugs . . . half the time full of the most ridiculous blunders and misstatements. We have been 'shaved' several times with them, and consider it our duty to put our readers on their guard."

From time to time, the New York papers were critical of certain of Whitman's stylistic idiosyncrasies; he ordinarily begged the question by being "cute." Often, when discussing the beauty or salubrity of Brooklyn, Whitman would speak of the "grateful Brooklyn air." On July 11, 1846, he reported: "The News wants to know what the Brooklyn air is grateful for." For not being confined, like its sister air, in the odious precincts of New York, to be sure! No dire penance, threatened by the angry Prospero to his 'tricksy spirit,' were half so terrible as that." Early in November of 1846, Whitman instituted a column of New York news with the somewhat ambiguous heading of "New York City: &c." On the sixth of that month he remarked that "The Tribune 'wants to know' if the '&c.' in the above head line stands for Brooklyn. Yes, it may, if we write head lines on the same principle that a lady writes a letter, and puts the best and sweetest part in the postscript." The '&c.' stayed in the heading and the Brooklyn air continued to be "grateful."

In "Song of Myself" Whitman wrote: "Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders." Perhaps he was thinking, when he wrote that line, of his Eagle days when he contended
with his contemporaries every day but Sunday and found it good. Doubtless the young editor sweated, but he gave no sign of being troubled by the fog.


Floyd Stovall has remarked that "What we feel most in Leaves of Grass . . . is the sense of life and the photographic impression of reality in scenes of the street, shop, and countryside."[^48] To a lesser yet still positive degree, Whitman's genuine interest in the spectacle about him is apparent in the columns of the Eagle. Editor Walter Whitman was a travelled man—in Brooklyn and its rural environs, in New York, and on the East River. After business hours, and often during them, he strolled the streets or rode the omnibusses, stages, ferries, and sometimes the Long Island Railroad. Some of his rambles were relatively aimless saunterings to see what he could see up some street or down another; others were purposefully directed toward an exhibition, a picnic, a ship launching, or a parade. In the Eagle Whitman told his subscribers of what he had seen on these excursions; and since the Eagle was a Brooklyn paper, the Brooklyn scene greatly predominated over the New York scene in those accounts.

As the editor of a local newspaper, Whitman was perforce a Brooklyn

booster. He spoke for the superiority of Brooklyn over "the Gomorrah," as he frequently dubbed New York, on the opposite side of the river. But New York surpassed Brooklyn in one thing, as Whitman admitted on September 30, 1846.

N. Y. Broadway is about the only thing that we will confess to 'beat our time,' in Brooklyn.—We have a healthier, pleasanter, more orderly, cleanly, 'nice' city than N. Y.; we have as elegant private dwellings—as commodious omnibusses . . . but we have no Broadway! The shops of Broadway are world famed. Stewart's new place is just now all the rush in the 'dry goods line.' And 314, Thos. Crane Banks', is just as famous in another and perhaps more beautiful line: the windows alone are a study. There are all kinds of dazzling and expensive knick-knacks—bracelets, whose worth is equivalent to a comfortable house and lot—necklaces that balance an editor's ten years' salary—cameos on which the genius of art has taken pride in substantiating gorgeous thoughts—finger rings of rare worth and brilliancy . . . We were shown, by a friend there, the other day, a wristlet of heavy gold the weight whereof on a lady's arm we should have called 'aggravatin'; it enclosed a costly gold watch, set in diamonds, and many other precious things besides . . . . A man can edify himself for hours by looking in the shop windows of Broadway—and learn no little of human nature in the operation.

Indeed, the spectacle of Broadway, its stream of humanity fed by the 400,000 New Yorkers, so stimulated the young editor of the Eagle that he saw in it the epitome of all great American thoroughfares and a

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Even strangers to America spoke of New York as "Gomorrah." Ole Munch Raeder, travelling in America in 1817-18 for the Norwegian government, wrote: "New York is the Gomorrah of the New World, and I am sure it may well be compared with Paris when it comes to opportunities for the destruction of both body and soul." Gunnar J. Malmin, trans. and ed., America in the Forties: The Letters of Ole Munch Raeder (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1929), p. 230.
symbol of the American spirit. The following, under the heading of
"Gayety of Americans," was the leading editorial in the Eagle for Sep­
tember 23, 1846:

The passed morning, (23rd) has been very beautiful. The sun
rose clear and cloudless—the air is fresh and just warm enough
to be without chilliness... We had occasion to pass through
Broadway, in N. Y.; and never have we seen that famed thorough­
fare present a brighter aspect. Walking there, if we had been
asked to mention the particular characteristic which would in all
probability impress a stranger visiting New York, we should reply
that it was a gay activity. This is surely the most striking
feature of the population. We have often wondered, of a bright
morning, how everybody could dress so well, and where on earth
they could find business enough to employ them, and make it neces­
sary for them to hurry along at that helter-skelter pace.

We are not sure but it is unjust to this country after all,
to attribute the want of 'fun' to it, which most European travel­
lers attribute. Go through the streets, and see for yourself,
almost anywhere, in pleasant weather, particularly at the begin­
ing of 'business hours.' For the early time of the day, there
is, too, an aspect of youth impressed upon N. York. Two thirds
of the persons you meet in the street are young men or boys
nearly grown—clerks, apprentices, office-boys, and so on. These
with their bright faces, and their exact attire, form by no means
the least agreeable part of the scene. Dull and torpid must that
man be who can walk any distance in the streets of the metropolis,
of a morning, and not become imbued with the cheerfulness so
evident everywhere around... the gayety we speak of is quite
different from the flippant gayety of the Parisian population.

... Ours, we think, is more the disposition to make business a
pleasure—to work, but to work with smiles and a bright heart.
Thiers is a repast, all flowers and fine dishes, but with little
for the appetite; ours forgets not the ornamental part of the
feast, but retains the solid, too.

Foreign travellers, Whitman continued, gave the Americans too much credit
for a feverish pursuit of wealth and too little for a capacity for enjoy­
ment. There was admittedly too great an "eagerness for wealth" among the
Americans; but there was at the same time a marked element of cheerful
liveliness in the national character.

What can afford a livelier spectacle, for instance, than the lower part of Fulton street, or of Atlantic st., Brooklyn—than Broadway, the Bowery, Grand street, Canal street, and nearly all of the large N. Y. thoroughfares, on a fine morning or afternoon? Of course, many of the persons who look so gay there have their own special troubles and cares... But, for the hour, they have forgotten them. Sunshine of the mind beams over their faces, and they find relief in the excitement of so much bustle and noise—the spectacle of so much fashion and beauty. And, indeed, all through the day, in almost all parts of New York, this activity never flags. Surely there can be no town on earth that has less of a sleepy look than that. It is always "wide awake," and the throbbings of its pulse beat forever... Life is short enough to make the most active hands, joined with the quickest brains, slow to do what ought to be done—and dark enough to render all that throws sunshine around us welcome indeed. We might... offer some suggestions of improvement; but to tell the truth, we are not among those who prefer to dwell on the deficiencies of a community, than on its merits; and we are quite satisfied with Brooklyn and New York character as it is—confident that though it might be better, there are hardly two cities elsewhere, take them all in all, in which it is as well.

If one may judge from the references in the Eagle to Broadway, Whitman was particularly impressed by that street's show of wealth and luxury. At times he may have felt that an admirer of Tom Paine, who at the same time was a mere journalist from a poor family, had no business taking pleasure in the sight of moneyed display, for he sometimes coupled his praise of the Broadway pageant with depreciation. In an editorial called "Matters Which Were Seen and Done in an Afternoon Ramble,"50 he remarked: "What a fascinating chaos is Broadway, of a pleasant sunny time! We know it is all, (or most of it,) 'fol-de-rol,' but still there is pleasure in walking up and down there awhile, and looking at the

50 UPP, I, 111-114.
beautiful ladies, the bustle, the show, the glitter, and even the gaudiness. But alas! what a prodigious amount of means and time might be much better and more profitably employed than as they are there!" On the whole, however, Whitman's delight in the splendor of Broadway was unqualified, and it is likely that its fascination drew him like a magnet whenever he set foot on Manhattan's shore. The Eagle for January 25, 1847, announced that New York had received the news that morning at ten, over the magnetic telegraph, of the arrival at Boston of the long-overdue British steamer, the Hibernia. The item continued:

So this beautiful morning—the sun shining so gaily and the air so pleasantly tolerable, for winter—we strolled over to the Gomorrah on the other side of the water, to hear what we could hear, as well as to 'see things.' How fine that river breeze, standing to feel it on the forward part of the Montauk! How active and inspiring the spectacle of so much passage and life, on the river and bay!—How innumerable the tides of humanity that swept along the streets adjacent to the shore! Broadway, too—for even thither wended our steps—was 'out' this morning, in all its splendour and joy, and glitter, and frivolity, and richness and pride! The rolling carriages—the groups of elegantly attired women—the showy shops—made up a scene, which is met with only in Broadway!

A poem which appeared for the first time in the third edition (1860) of Leaves of Grass contains this line: "Trottoirs throng'd, vehicles, Broadway, the women, the shops and shows."51 In 1847, Broadway had evoked the same associations for the young editor of The Brooklyn Daily Eagle.

New York had another spectacle which attracted Whitman as much as if not more than did Broadway—the theatre. In "Matters Which Were Seen and Done in an Afternoon Ramble," Whitman told that his stroll

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51 "Mannahatta," line 17.
ended at the Park Theatre, where he saw the Kean's in "a counterfeit pre-
sentment of 'The Troublesome Raigne of John, King of England.'" Numerous
accounts in the Eagle of plays, operas, and ballets seen in New York
attest to the frequency of his excursions to that city (Brooklyn had no
theatre) to see its stage productions. Whitman's reactions to those
entertainments will be discussed in a later chapter.

Notably absent from the columns of the Eagle were any comments on
P. T. Barnum's popular American Museum in New York. Why, it is difficult
to say. About two months after Whitman came to the Eagle, Barnum and his
greatest exhibit, General Tom Thumb, returned to America after a success-
ful European tour which included the presentation of the General to Queen
Victoria. The Eagle for May 25, 1856, printed the following:

BARNUM ON EUROPE:—We saw Mr. Barnum, of Tom Thumb notoriety,
manager of the Museum, &c., in New York, day before yesterday.
He told us about his tour through all the capitals of Europe,
and his intercourse with the kings, queens, and the big bugs.
We asked him if anything he saw made him love Yankeedom less.
His grey eyes flashed: "My God!" said he, "not a bit of it! Why,
sir, you can't imagine the difference.—There everything is
frozen—kings and things—formal, but absolutely frozen; here it
is life. Here it is freedom, and here are men." A whole book
might be written on that little speech of Barnum's.52

Despite Barnum's creditable republicanism, and despite the frequent adver-
tisements which the Eagle carried announcing General Tom Thumb's five per-
formances daily, Whitman never recorded for his readers any visits to the
American Museum. Perhaps he considered the place a total humbug, for he
labelled as one of Barnum's hoaxes a purported Chinese junk which visited

52 This interview was first reprinted by Theodore A. Zunder,
"Whitman Interviews Barnum," Modern Language Notes, XLVIII (January,
1933), 40.
New York in the summer of 1847. On July 11, the Eagle reported, under the heading of "That Tallest of Small Potato Humbugs, The 'Chinese Junk,'" that, according to "undoubtedly authentic information," the junk "was recently built near the city of Philadelphia, under the direction and superintendence of a man who belongs to that city of humbugs, New York, and has been notorious for humbugging the people by old negro women and mermaids for several years past, for a twofold purpose—first as a speculation and then as a hoax." Whitman described the crew as a mixture of whites and mulattoes, and the junk as "a humbug from stem to stern and from topmast to keelson." But for the New York populace, the junk was a genuine exotic. Whitman's article continued:

We happened in the neighborhood of 17th street and West street yesterday afternoon on business, and observing thereabout a prodigious throng of men, women, children, and vehicles of all kinds, colors and shapes, we were led to inquire what meant all this commotion? when we were informed by a man with a long beard and a very dirty shirt, that the 'Chinese junk' was in sight, with her 'latteen sails' all set, coming up . . . at the foot of 17th street.—We stood some thirty minutes at this point and counted eight hundred and thirteen deluded ones, as they passed down to the 'long wharf,' . . . and should judge the number on this wharf and pier alone about five thousand. . . .

We hope none of our Brooklyn Citizens will be gulled by this ridiculous imposture—for such it surely is.

By August 6, however, Whitman had apparently accepted at least the crew of the junk as authentic. On that date an article—"The Chinamen on Long Island"—appeared in the Eagle describing the reactions of "Hasing and Sum Teen, the two principal dignitaries of the Chinese junk," to the Long Island Railroad while guests of an excursion of the American Institute (a New York agricultural, commercial, and industrial society)
to Greenport, Long Island. The two orientals, Whitman reported, "for
the first time since their arrival, exhibited astonishment and delight.

... The speed of the train absolutely brought their queues to a com­
plete perpendicular with fright." On October 2, the readers of the Eagle
learned that twenty-six of the thirty-one members of the crew had returned
home to Canton at the expense of Captain Kellet, commander of the junk.
"Gone at Last," said the Eagle, when the junk left for Boston and further
exhibition on October 23.

A very different sort of vessel had attracted Whitman's attention
earlier in 1847. On January 30, of that year, the Eagle printed the fol­
lowing:

LAUNCH THIS MORNING OF THE WASHINGTON STEAMSHIP.—This bright and
breezy forenoon, at and about the foot of Seventh street, New York,
was gathered such a congregation of humanity of both sexes, as is
seldom seen on any occasion. The coming forth of these thousands
was induced by the announcement that the first American ocean
steamer would, at 9 o'clock, leave the wooden cradle wherein her
strength was matured, and be henceforth "rock'd in the cradle of
the deep." At the appointed time, the last wedges were knocked
away, and the giant ship commenced her movement almost impercep­
tibly at first, but gaining swiftness with progress; and when
half her length had left the ways, so fiercely rapid was the motion,
that the blocks over which her keel passed were set on fire by the
friction. The sight was the most beautiful and animating that
could be imagined! The manifestations of delight were perfectly
air (and ear) rending. Cannons were fired, drums beaten, and all
the people shouted; and the combination was of the most stunning
description. The stern of the noble vessel plunged deeply into
the yielding element, causing the foam and spray to dash over her
main deck, christening her in a beautiful manner; but as her whole
body moved swiftly into the water, she gained her equilibrium with
a bound, and was afloat!

The event commemorated in this piece is not as significant to the modern
reader as is a commonplace phrase used by the editor of the Eagle in des­
cribing the event. This phrase suggests that the initial line of one of Whitman's finest poems was possibly suggested to him by Emma Willard's poem "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," probably in its popular musical form.

In the fall of 1846, Whitman went several times to the American Institute Fair at Castle Garden off the Battery. On his first visit on October 6,\(^{53}\) he found the carpenters and exhibitors still busy preparing for the public, who had already arrived. "We advise our Brooklyn friends to hold on a while yet—a couple of days at least—before they visit the Fair for entertainment." But Whitman saw enough in the confusion to assert that the displays proved America's capacity to produce cheap yet excellent products which had no need of a protective tariff. On the 16th of October, he visited the fair again: "A 'large and respectable' quantity of ladies and gentlemen filled the great amphitheatre of Castle Garden this morning—we observed during a brief visit. We listened a moment to some one playing on the superb piano... edged our path amid bedsteads, shower-baths, and five hundred etceteras—and so came away."

Whitman attended the American Institute Fair again in the following fall. The Eagle for October 13, 1847, described its editor's reaction to "The Current Exhibition at Castle Garden." There was, Whitman said, more matter "for rational curiosity as well as entertainment, in one of these exhibitions, than in many very pretentious books, and many literary, theatrical, or musical performances." The articles on display illustrated a

\(^{53}\)GF, II, 59-61.
After threading one's way through the covered bridge to Castle garden . . . lined with all sorts of agricultural implements, carriages, washing machines, boats, etc., the first impression . . . at entering the great rotunda hall, will be the impression of magnificence and richness. There is nothing like it in New York—which is equal to saying there is nothing like it in America. The wares of glass, polished cabinet work, plated articles, and a thousand other things, make a glitter and a sparkle that very happily set off the rest. One could ramble for days among these beautiful, useful, and not costly fabrics, without tiring. At least one who thinks can do so. That new and powerful steam-engine, alone, is an almost sublime subject for observation.

Whitman then enumerated the exhibits of Brooklyn manufacturers, among which he especially liked "the simple elegance of the bell handles" made by George W. Jackson. And the cut-glass of the Brooklyn Flint Glass Company was "ahead of English glass—which is ahead of all the rest of the world—except us. (Or paraphrasing what Hackett said, last night, in the Kentuckiana, 'Brother Jonathan's father can lick any man on airth, and Brother Jonathan can lick his father.')"

Some of Brother Jonathan's children had been called together by the Mexican War. The Eagle for September 17, 1846, told of its editor's visit on the day before to Governor's Island to see Governor Silas Wright inspect the regiment of volunteers for California encamped there. The governor did not appear, so Whitman made his own inspection of the gipsy-like tent encampment. "We regret," he said, "that we cannot speak in very high terms of praise of the general appearance of the regiment, in regard to physique." But he supposed they were fitted for the job planned for them, and they seemed eager to be up and doing. He noted that "In nearly every tent was conspicuously displayed one of the bibles recently
Presented to the men; but they seemed, with their gilt bindings, to be mere matters of ornament; for whenever a Californian was reading, he seemed to be intently engaged in devouring the contents of a 'cheap publication,' which required no great stretch of imagination to determine might be an emanation of Eugene Sue or Paul de Kock." The editor of the Eagle, however, was "charitable enough to suppose that our visit was not made during the time appointed for devotional reading." He professed to envy the volunteers the "nutritious dish, pork and beans," that a number of women, probably wives, were preparing in "seething cauldrons, erected upon primitive furnaces, built of loose stones, near the water's edge." Colonel Stevenson, commander of the regiment, was present to supervise the first monthly pay day of the volunteers—seven dollars each. Whitman had learned, he said, that it was the colonel's "serious intention to embark with the regiment upon this wild goose chase" to San Francisco. On September 26, he watched the squadron of ships carrying the California volunteers down the bay and wished them "success in all their 'good intents'!"

One of the main New York waterfront streets was South Street where the rigging of the prows of the merchantmen overhung the seaward side of the pavement. "If anybody wants to see the activity of commercial life," said Whitman on March 14, 1846, "let him take a walk along South

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51 For the account of another visit to the volunteers' camp, wherein Whitman rhapsodizes upon the theme of new states along the Pacific coast, see GF, II, 121-126.
street, in New York, just at this time, and observe the shipping. Crowds of stevedores and laborers are constantly engaged in loading and unloading the vessels. Cartmen bring loads, and carry loads away, so thickly that the wharves are blocked up, and passengers are frequently impeded in crossing the street for ten or fifteen minutes." On occasional Sunday afternoons Whitman "sauntered" (a favorite word with him) along South Street looking at the shipping and talking with crewmen. On March 9, 1846, under the heading of "An Hour Among the Shipping," the Eagle reported: "We spent an hour or two yesterday afternoon, sauntering along South street, in New York, and boarding some of the lately arrived packet ships. The gales and tempestuous weather, at intervals, since the middle of January, have detained more vessels, and raised anticipations of more marine disasters, than ever before in the same space of time."

One of the battered vessels along South Street especially attracted his attention.

The Roscius was really a pitiful sight. Just before her last voyage, we had noticed and admired this beautiful and favorite packet—and the contrast presented by her present appearance, with her appearance then, is enough to excite feeling, even in the bosom of a cold hearted landsman. She puts one in mind of a dripping, half-drowned Chanticleer. Her spars, sails, and rigging are actually drooping—everything about her has a kind of bob-tailed look. Faithfully has she established her old reputation for tough timbers and a well knit frame! One of the crew told us she had been carried by contrary breezes over four hundred miles to the south; which, however an ill wind, "blew good" to them in one respect, for it thawed the frozen ropes and rigging, previously encrusted in ice . . . Our informant also gave us a graphic description of the damage done by the dashing water—whose effects indeed we could see in every part of the vessel.
A week later Whitman again took a "Stroll Along South Street." "Some idea," he remarked, "may be formed of the swarming state of the wharves when we mention that there are between sixteen and twenty Mobile and New Orleans packets to sail today! Other ports 'in proportion.'" Then he described his Sunday stroll.

We noticed as we sauntered along, that fully four-fifths of the vessels had more or less of their sails spread to dry. This gave the crowded shore somewhat the appearance of an immense fleet, under sail. Moreover, though it was the Sabbath, many of the crews were at work, and the noise of active labor came with a harsh discord on our ears—for we love the quiet and calm peacefulness of the time-honored day of rest. The late storms, however, have turned everything topsy-turvy—and, as sailing times as well as wind and tide, wait for no man, the stevedores and sailors had to infringe the usual custom of resting on the Sabbath and doing no sort of work.

The poor Roscius! She has her masts clipped, her spars cut away, everything indeed, mutilated in some sort, preparatory to fixing her up "as good as new," again. At present she presents a more forlorn, wo begone appearance. We promise, however, that she gets as smart as any of her sisters, in less than a fortnight!

About that part of South street, near the Battery, is the great rendezvous for the flour trade, the canal boats, grain, and so on. You will observe divers sloops and schooners, of a dirty green, with such information as this, chalked on an old slab of board and hung up conspicuously:

"Jersey Corn,  
Canal Oats, and  
Ship Stuff."

About the same neighborhood may be noticed some of the largest kind of freight barges—such as the Indiana, now lying at Old Slip. It would almost seem as though the capacious paunch of such a boat could bring down enough pork and flour to supply all New York! Yet, during the "session" of the canals, scores and scores of such barges may be sometimes seen there, all at once, within a few rods of one another—some coming in deeply laden, and others taking in return freight.

At 11 o'clock the John R. Skiddy, a Liverpool packet, hauled in near Fulton ferry, her decks covered with emigrants. We felt
glad, on their account too, that the day was so fine, and that their "first impressions," of the strange land they had chosen for their home, might thus be brightened with sunshine and clear mild air. They were a robust good looking set, mostly Hibernians; and, in spite of Nativism, we sent them a hearty welcome to our republic; and a wish that they might indeed find "better times acoming!"

The John R. Skiddy docked near the New York terminal of the Fulton Ferry, whereby, it may be assumed, many of her Irish passengers made their way to the large Irish colony in Brooklyn. The ferries, according to Whitman as a Brooklyn journalist, best served as a means of escape from an oppressive New York to a "delicious" Brooklyn. On July 9, 1846, the Eagle retorted to the New York Express' description of Brooklyn as a city of pigs and dirt: "We confess the pigs; but as to the dirt, we have hardly any at all except what comes from New York—brought on the heels of the thousands who so eagerly rush over our ferries, out of that stifling place, to enjoy our delicious goodness here. Poor, miserable New Yorkers! we pity you again!"

One inevitably associates ferries with Whitman because of his poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," and they were indeed a passion with him as he remarks in Specimen Days: "Living in Brooklyn or New York City from this time forward [1841], my life, then, and still more the following years, was curiously identified with Fulton Ferry, already becoming the greatest of its sort in the world for general importance, volume, variety, rapidity, and picturesqueness. . . . Indeed, I have always had a passion for ferries; to me they afford inimitable, streaming, never-failing, living poems." The Brooklyn ferries were often mentioned in

55 CW, IV, 20.
the Eagle; in fact, Whitman devoted an editorial to the "Philosophy of Ferries."56 "Our Brooklyn ferries," he stated, "teach some sage lessons in philosophy, gentle reader . . . whether you ever knew it or not." The ferry functioned like destiny: "Passionless and fixed, at the six-stroke the boats come in; and at the three-stroke, succeeded by a single tap, they depart again, with the steadiness of nature herself." The mad rush of people to catch a departing ferry or to dash off it before it was securely tied up was to Whitman illustrative of the American trait of hurry in all things. "If the trait is remembered down to posterity," Whitman told his readers, "and put in the annals, it will be bad for us."

Whitman, himself quite capable of syntactical blunders, poked fun at a sign erected at the Fulton Ferry slip until he finally was able to note in the Eagle for August 27, 1846: "We observed last evening another instance of the influence of a little ridicule. The sign on this side of the Fulton ferry, which has been so much admired for warning passengers 'not to leave the boat until made fast to the bridge,' has been altered so as to read 'until it is made fast,' &c." Whitman repeatedly supported the sentiments of this sign in the Eagle, for fatal accidents sometimes occurred to over-anxious patrons of the ferries. One of Whitman's secondings of the ferry company's pleas for safety is the following, which was printed in the Eagle on July 17, 1847:

Some of the New York papers continue their ridiculous tirades against the Union ferry company for keeping the chains up to prevent people from falling overboard. We think the company the most

56 UPP, I, 168-171; GF, II, 159-166.
abused body of men in this country. First they are anathematised for not having safeguards for passengers; but the moment they provide the chains they are abused for putting up traps which trip people overboard. It makes no difference whether a man jumps overboard in the middle of the river, or whether he plumps into the dock while leaping several rods after a boat, the company are represented to be wilful murderers and harborers of malicious designs against every passenger who goes on board of their boats. . . .

Whitman ironically advised his readers that the ferry company had decided to padlock each passenger to a "stout dog chain" attached to the side of the cabin; in the event any passenger broke his chain and fell overboard, "the pilot is to be directed to vacate his post, and the management of the boat delivered up to sixteen of the most vociferous of the passengers, who are always wiser on these occasions than any pilot can possibly be." It was hoped that eventually no crews would be necessary on the ferries.

When Whitman witnessed a ferry passenger going overboard, he often recorded the event in the Eagle and in a generally humorous tone, as on October 21, 1847: "UNFORTUNATE.---A colored Adonis attempted to leave the ferry boat Montauk night before last, before being 'made fast to the bridge,' missed his footing and liked to have gone to Davy Jones's locker. After swallowing a quart of the east river, be the same more or less, he crawled out in a highly saturated condition, entirely fire proof for the time being, and made rapid tracks for home---unknown, unhonored, but not unsung." On one occasion however (June 24, 1846), perhaps because the accident occurred on the New York side of the ferry, the Eagle's editor was indignant—but not at the carelessness of the unfortunate victim.

APATHY OF A CROWD, IN CASES OF INDIVIDUAL DISTRESS.---A poor strawberry woman, coming over to Brooklyn from New York, accidentally fell into the ferry dock, on the latter side, yesterday afternoon
about four o'clock. She was, however, extricated without any serious damage, farther than the fright, the cold bath, and a slight contusion of her hand. — The poor creature, being lifted safely on terra firma, thanked God, and sat herself down—thoroughly exhausted, of course—to dry in the sun. Then saw we a practical exemplification of a crowd's heartlessness. At least a hundred well-dressed people surrounded the dripping woman—people, doubtless, with five dollar bills in their pockets—and not a soul offered the least assistance! For a while, even not a word of kindness! A lot of mere 'stupid starers,' stood they; though at last one person, enquiring her residence, was leading her to a carriage, to be transferred home—when a young gentleman, (for so he is,) attached to the Ferry establishment, relieved him of the duty by taking charge of the woman herself, and promising to have her conveyed to her domicile in Cherry st.

Whitman at last came up with a solution for the problem of deterring passengers from wantonly leaping off and on the ferry boats. The Eagle for August 31, 1847, under the heading of "An Anecdote With a Moral," noted that on the preceding night at the New York Fulton Ferry slip, a hurried gentleman jumped ashore and landed in the water between the dock and the still-moving prow of the ferry. But "while many a spectator felt that deadly and nausea-like sickness which is caused by scenes of great physical horror," he managed to scramble up the dock in time. This, however, was not, Whitman continued, his "anecdote with a moral"; it was merely the prelude to the tale of the fourteen-year-old son of "an acquaintance of ours" who attended school in New York and commuted there by way of the South Ferry. It was the boy's practice to try to be the first on and the first off the ferry. His mother learned of this and remonstrated with him, but to no avail. At last she "prepared a pretty vivid drawing, with plenty of red blood about it—laying the scene thereof at the ferry landing, and making a crowd of people just stand aside enough to afford a view of a mangled human body, and a pale face bending over the same." This
picture was shown to the boy each morning as he left for school. "He is now thoroughly 'reformed,'" Whitman reported. And then he made the following suggestion. "We seriously recommend the Union ferry company to get a few paintings--(they can take the subject from life, at their own wharves, if they wait a little)--of mutilated human trunks, with the gore trickling from the same--all caused by the rash haste to save a few seconds at the boat landings; and to put these pictures up so that everybody on board will be likely to see them. They will be useful, perhaps, if not ornamental."

The Eagle conducted a lesser crusade against smoking on ferries. On April 17, 1846, Whitman had "A Word to the Fulton Ferry Company," which echoed the criticisms of Mrs. Trollope, Dickens, and other visitors to America: "Nineteen-twentieths of the persons who cross your ferry are annoyed, sickened, and disgusted, by the tobacco smokers and spitters who form the other twentieth. As to the spitters, there is perhaps no deliverance from them--but the smokers (who are the worst) should be stopped altogether. No person ought to be allowed on the boats, at all, smoking a cigar." Nevertheless, Whitman came to the defense of his favorite ferry when the New York Express alleged that on the Fulton Ferry "loafers were allowed to smoke in the ladies' cabin without remonstrance." "Every one," he asserted on May 6, 1846, "who knows anything at all about the ferry in question knows this to be false. Our contemporaries should be careful about publishing ill natured rumors against the best conducted ferry in the world." From time to time, the Eagle continued to print
indignant little squibs against smoking on ferries, with its special anathema reserved for men who, selfishly indulging themselves, smoked their cigars while standing at the open ends of the ladies' cabin.

Whitman championed the ladies in another matter connected with the ferries—that of fares. On May 11, 1846, he noted that a large number of young working women, of moderate circumstances, commuted daily to New York and back on the Fulton Ferry. Since many of them supported aged parents or younger brothers and sisters, the ten dollar yearly rate for ferriage was a burden for them. "We are refreshed every day by the sight of their pleasant faces blooming with health and intelligence," said Whitman, "and if we were the toll taker, we couldn't have the face to charge them any thing more than a look into their bright eyes, for the privilege of passage." He suggested that the annual rate for women be reduced to five dollars, and asked the Union Ferry Company, with wretched syntax, "Will you act as we suggest, forthwith, and gain the gratitude of those, one kind look from whose faces, there is hardly any thing we wouldn't do for?" From time to time, Whitman suggested that the Union Ferry Company reduce its rates for all passengers, especially urging that the two cent charge for foot passengers be lowered to one cent (which was finally done in 1850). However, he did not consider the ferry company extortionate. The following paragraph appeared in the Eagle for March 12, 1847: "Every time we pass over the Fulton ferry we cannot help being struck with the great change and improvement which have taken place since the present company assumed the charge. . . . With but
half the old rates of ferriage, passengers are now quietly propelled across the East River, while seated in apartments combining all the substantial comforts in the most splendidly appointed parlor. And for these advantages we are all indebted to the desire on the part of the present ferry company to subserve the interests of the public instead of their own purses."

In the fall of 1816, the Union Ferry Company acquired a new boat, the Montauk, for the Fulton Ferry. The editor of the Eagle was invited to attend a christening excursion of the new vessel on October 1, and the Eagle duly reported it the following day. The Montauk, with Granger's Brooklyn Band which "greatly astonished the porpoises who rolled about in great delight at the fine music," had sailed down the bay to the Narrows and back again to Brooklyn. The "gay party" of two hundred ladies and gentlemen "whirled away the time in conversation, or amused themselves in looking at the pretty gothic cottages on Long and Staten Island"; and finally all joined in an oyster feast. Whitman especially complimented the Montauk on her "stately mein and easy gait."

In the following year, the Fulton Ferry added still another boat, the Wyandank, whose maiden trip across the East River added to the color of the scene outside the editorial windows of the Eagle at 30 Fulton Street on the morning of April 19, 1817.

There is a great rush this morning among passengers to make their trip across the river in the Wyandank. On their approach to the ferry, the moment they catch a glimpse of her new tints, streamers and flags, presto! away they go, pell mell, heels over head, running down all the smaller specimens of humanity
on the road, over applestands, carts and carmen, until they bring up safely by a perilous leap on the deck of the new boat. Some funny scenes have occurred, and Fulton street, opposite our office bears no distant resemblance to the arena of a perpetual foot race.

The readers of the *Eagle* were often reminded of the nearness of the Fulton Ferry landing to the newspaper's office. If Whitman commented on a foggy morning, he was almost certain to mention the constant ringing of the bells on the ferry landing to guide the boats in. Persons running past No. 30 in the morning to catch a boat often found themselves ridiculed that afternoon in the *Eagle*. And occasionally the passengers moving to and from the ferry landing inspired bits of whimsey, as on December 3, 1847: "UMBRELLAS.—From our 'loop hole of retreat,' we see nothing, this morning, but a vast mass of moving umbrellas. It looks funny, enough, sometimes, to see the umbrellas rushing down to the ferry, and up too, without a squint at those concealed under them."

Not only the ferries but also the river steamers running from New York to Albany furnished some copy for the *Eagle*. Such copy, however, was ordinarily taken from exchange papers, for Whitman does not appear to have taken the trip up the Hudson during his association with the *Eagle*. He did, nevertheless, attend the housewarming of a new Hudson River steamer, the account of which he turned into a humorous comment on the bibulous habits of his Brooklyn peers. The *Eagle* noted on April 10, 1847, that

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57. H. A. Lees of the *Advertiser* may have acquired by 1847 those "dissipated habits" which led to his "neglect and mismanagement" of his paper in the early 1850's. See Henry R. Stiles, *A History of the City of Brooklyn* (Brooklyn: Published by Subscription, 1867, 1869, 1870) 3 vols.; III, 936.
"In the handsome saloon of the Roger Williams, at the foot of Warren st. N. Y. was collected yesterday afternoon, (9th) a merry gathering enough." Among those invited to the celebration by Captain De Qroot was "a party from Brooklyn, including our humble selves," Whitman continued:

All was life and jollity. We thought we observed in a distant part of the room, a pretty considerable quantity of bottles, and champaign glasses—and heard a strange pop! pop! pop! continued without any intermission all the while we were there. Indeed, when we came to remember the looks of a portion of the party, and get their testimony this morning, we shouldn't wonder if there were wine, some—and the tallest nicest sort. We understand that two representatives of the press of Brooklyn—not democratic—had to be left in charge of Capt. De G. . . .

If Whitman had partaken of Capt. De Groot's wine, he did not admit it.

Ocean-going vessels also came in for their share of notice in the Eagle, though the citizens of Brooklyn were no longer excited by their sight. On October 25, 1847, the Eagle remarked that the French steamer, Missouri, had passed down the East River that day at noon on her outward voyage. "These large steamers attract little more attention now than our ferry boats," Whitman commented. "Four or five years since the town was all agog and the shores lined with anxious spectators whenever one arrived or departed. Steam navigation has made monstrous stride within the time mentioned above." Whitman himself was an interested observer of the shipping which could be seen from the Brooklyn docks or from the ferries as they crossed the East River. Ordinarily his comments in the Eagle on these ships were simply brief descriptions such as this which appeared on November 10, 1846: "The new ship, the New World, has been enlivening the river off against our shores this morning, 10th, with the
sonorous 'heave-eol' of a gang of sailors, &c., hoisting her anchor.

She is a huge sea-monster—and not deficient in grace and beauty, withal."

Though as a rule Whitman found something which pleased him in each ship he saw in the harbor, on one occasion (May 29, 1846) a British steamer aroused his complete disapproval.

The great interminable black length of this gigantic monster [the Great Britain] came crawling up the bay just before eleven o'clock this morning, in her usual sulky style . . . Her decks were covered with people; and we noticed that her number of masts was minus one—having now but five, instead of six, as formerly. What a ponderous looking creature she is! As to grace and beauty there is not a particle of either, in her build or movements. Vastness, heaviness, unwieldiness are the peculiar attributes of this monster vessel. As she drew her dark stretch of hull along our Brooklyn shore this morning, we thought of sea-serpents, hippopotami, and such like interesting specimens of marine life. The smoke from her mighty pipes blackens her rigging and every thing about her—makes her very flags look singed—and gives her a weather-beaten dingy look all over.

Talking of the Great Britain's flags, we observe a somewhat singular custom her commander had this morning,—and had on her previous passage, too,—of quartering a little bit of American stripes on the same piece of bunting which has the English ensign over them, and flying the whole in one flag at the peak. We do not know anything of naval etiquette in such affairs, but we consider the right to do this, a right more honored in the breach than in the observance. It smacks a trifle of cool impudence—and we see no reason why the captain of this craft, big as it is, should amuse himself at our expense. It is somewhat the more singular when we observe that a large beautiful Union Jack was flying at the stern of the steamer. There were plenty of masts also to run up the Star Spangled banner—which has been borne over prouder worthier decks than this smoking looking concern, we wot!

Whitman might have mentioned in this article, though he did not, that the impudent English captain would soon discover that Americans could build great ocean steamers too, for the Eagle had remarked on March 10, 1846:

"AHEAD OF THE WORLD!—Quite a public interest is felt in the construction
of the new ocean steamers lately contracted for by the government. It is the ambition of the builders that they shall be as much ahead of all previous steamers in the world, as American ingenuity is ahead of that of other nations." On January 30, 1817, as has been noted, Whitman witnessed the launching of the first of these vessels, the Washington, America's first trans-Atlantic steamer.

It is possible that Whitman gazed censoriously at the Great Britain from the dock of the Fulton Ferry at the foot of Fulton Street, Brooklyn's principal business thoroughfare. The foot of Fulton Street was a focal point of the city, since its ferry was the largest and most patronised of all the local ferries; and for the editor of the Eagle its interest was enhanced by the fact that his office windows looked out upon it. Whitman commented on this location on June 4, 1846, in an article called "Fulton Street, Brooklyn." There were a number of new four-story brick buildings on the right as one came up from the ferry. "One of the first that strikes you, coming up from the boat," he said, "is the 'Eagle Building,' the domicile of this veracious print, and all that it inherit. Does it not strike you as being very well? Is it not cool large, and airy?" Earlier, on May 6, Whitman had written a long editorial on "The Foot of Fulton Street" which began with childhood reminiscences of that locality, switched to its aspect at the present, and ended several miles away as a result of stages being introduced into it.
Of all the busy scenes to be met with in this busy country—scenes which place it beyond the power of a foreigner to deny that we are the "tarnallest" nation in the world, for energy and activity—we have yet observed none that go beyond the foot of Fulton street, Brooklyn. We well remember this spot, a few years ago—how much narrower it was than now, and how the Old Long Island stage houses ranged sleepily on each side, with the look of portly country farmers, well to do in the world, but not caring much for appearances. We remember Coe Downing's huge sign stretching over the sidewalk, (there was no law against "obstructions," then,) inscribed with the names of all the places on Long Island—half of them decent Christian terms from the Bible, and the other half heathenish words, such as Quogue, Hoquag, Speonk, and so on. By the by, what has become of that old sign? Capt. Basil Hall copied it verbatim and literatim in his book of American travels; and if we had on this island a museum sacred to the relics of our own territory and people, that would be worthy a place by no means the last conspicuous in the show.

We remember old Mr. Langdon, as he used to sit in his gouty chair, (we don't mean that the chair had the gout,) and what a marvellous piece of mechanism it seemed to us, wherewith he moved the said chair by turning a little twisted handle. We remember how the marketmen used to come jogging along (by no means on the locomotive principle of the present time,) in their canvass covered wagons painted with lamp-black, the smell of which made us sick. There was Smith & Wood's old tavern, too, with its snug bar in the corner, and the queer cast-iron stove set in the wall, so as to throw its heat in two rooms at the same time—and the high wooden press of the public room, in which the farmers hung their stout homespun overcoats, their whips, &c., all without fear of theft, for the world was more honest in those days. Oh, that race of jogging country-stage men has pretty much passed away! We see one of them at rare intervals, in a wagon of the old sort, but somehow he has not the old sturdy comfortable look. He has no one to keep him in countenance: the Long Island Railroad has quelled the glory of his calling.

In an autobiographical note now in the Trent Collection at Duke University, Whitman recalls the weekly trip his maternal grandfather, Major Van Velsor, made with a stage and market wagon from his farm at West Hills "to the Brooklyn ferry, where he used to put up at Smith & Wood's old tavern . . . near Fulton ferry. . . . I well remember how sick the smell of the lampblack and oil with which the canvass covering of the stage was painted, would make me." Clarence Gohdes and Rollo O. Silver, eds., Faint Clews & Indirections: Manuscripts of Walt Whitman and His Family (Durham: Duke University Press, 1949), p. 45.
Whitman remembered, too, when the ferries were powered by horses and he was "lifted up to the ocular demonstration thereof, by a pair of parental arms." The Old Ferry House had only recently been supplanted by a new one and several of the persons employed there still looked just as they did in 1830.

But the foot of Fulton street, now, presents a very different scene. In the morning, there is one incessant stream of people --clerks, merchants, and persons employed in New York on business --tending toward the ferry. This rush commences soon after six o'clock, and continues till nine--being at its climax about a quarter after seven. It is highly edifying to see the phrenzy exhibited by certain portions of the younger gentlemen, a few rods from the landing, when the bell strikes three, the premonitory of the single stroke which sends the boat off. They rush forward as if for dear life, and wo to the fat woman or unwieldy person of any kind, who stands in their way! how astonishing it is that they do not remember them of another boat, to start right off, in less than five minutes!

"Several handsome lines of omnibusses" ran from the foot of Fulton Street to the outskirts of Brooklyn, as did a number of stage lines to nearby villages, despite the Long Island Railroad.

There are divers old fashioned folk, ancient ladies and those under their charge, who cannot get out of their minds a dim connection between the steam-engine and Sathanus--who eschew modern innovations and wish to be taken in Christian style, by the aid of horses' legs, to the very door of their destination. These keep up a patronage of the stages; and indeed, of a pleasant undusty day, when the rate of peregrination is not too slow, we ourselves never find it amiss to traverse this beautiful Island in the same manner--prefer it, even, to the whizz and whisking of a locomotive.

--But we must stop, although there are several other points connected with our subject. These we may return to again, on another occasion.

The morning of May 27 of the same year found Whitman unprepared for his lead editorial in the Eagle, so he looked out his window at the foot of Fulton Street in the rain and wrote what he aptly called "Some
Afternoon Gossip.

The war excitement which swallows up everything else, makes dull times, notwithstanding, during the intervals.—It is like the appearance of a great actor, half the week: all the 'off nights' are heavy, and the players mouth it to empty benches. When we have nothing to tell from the southwest, we hardly know what to make our 'leader' of... 

— The violent storm of last night has subsided into a perpetual dripping chilly rain,—this morning, dark and dreary enough to give half our good Brooklyn folks the cerulean satans. ... Talking of rains, the scenes presented at the lower part of Fulton Street, on the coming up of a sudden heavy shower, it is curious to see. To say nothing of the ordinary hurry-skurry of pedestrians, the alarm of fat men, aged matrons, and gossamer dressed virgins, the street is then a truly 'interesting spectacle.' It is changed into what the English or Germans on their own soil would call a very respectable river. The tide rushes and bulges along imperiously, too: it bears trophies on its swelling but somewhat dirty breast, viz., stray boards, fruit from surprised apple-stands, dead cats, and so on. A mountain torrent is a poor comparison to the way in which the water sweeps down here after a very sudden heavy shower...

Now if the morning had been clear, said Whitman, instead of dark and rainy, then the foot of Fulton Street would have presented a scene of confusion almost equal to the "equestrian pandemonium" seen there on race day.

A race day on Long Island—and a great race day withal! No other spot, perhaps, can give just exactly such a spectacle, as Fulton street, then—particularly at the foot of it. Crowding over the ferry from the very earliest day-dawn, comes vehicles of every supposable description, and some that are not supposable... Then may you see the 'boys' in all their glory. Then the exstatic lessee of a 'three-minuter,' cometh and goeth rejoicing on his way—the envy of all more luckless wights. Then flaunts vice: then prepares temptation its damnable gambling wiles: then reckon the sons of darkness how many simple ones they may delude into their grasp.

59 Compare with the last lines of Swift's "A Description of a City Shower."
The rain drops still pattered against Whitman's office window as he gossipped to his readers; they reminded him of cold water and the temperance movement, but he fancied that even temperance reformers failed to appreciate the full merits of pure water. "In heaven," says he whose grave is now verdant in Greenwood, poor McDonald Clarke, once to us, 'In heaven, we shall find plenty of flowers, of little children, fine air, and pure water.' Pure water, fresh or salt, was a blessing here on earth to the editor of the Eagle, who reminded his readers of the delights of bathing. Then he closed his rambling essay on a note of sentimental pathos.

---The rain having 'suspended' a while, we observe from our point of observation, four ragged boys and one gentleman whose forefathers ate plantain in Africa—the said boys and gentleman profoundly wrapt in some deep inquiry, with down-cast eyes and slow-dragging steps, promenading in the very middle of the street. Poor creatures! they are in hopes the flood has swept down some little trifle, which they may find in the gutter, now that the waters have rolled away.

The foot of Fulton Street was at times the setting for more tragic sights than that of five indigents searching for trifles in the gutters. Items such as the following, dated June 11, 1846, were frequent in the Eagle: "RECOVERED.--The body of the boy John Wallen, who was drowned near Fulton ferry on Friday last, 5th inst., was yesterday discovered by Pat'k Lynch, a lighterman, floating about a quarter of a mile from the wharf at Clarke, who died in 1812, was described by his contemporaries as "the mad poet" of Broadway. Whitman wrote a tribute to the dead poet which appeared in the Aurora, March 8, 1842. This memorial is reprinted in Joseph Jay Rubin and Charles H. Brown, eds., Walt Whitman of the New York Aurora: Editor at Twenty-Two (State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1950), pp. 105-108. Also see GF, II, 110-113.
the foot of Dock street . . ." Not remarkably, most of the persons
drowned along the Brooklyn shore were boys. On June 5, 1846, the Eagle
had printed an article titled "Accidental Sudden Deaths" in which
Whitman dwelt mostly on drownings, particularly of young boys. "The
most touching part of Hamlet, (the most touching play ever written,) is," said Whitman, "the sequence that comes after the drowning of Ophelia,
and the description of that hapless accident. What a world of agony and
heart-sickness is there in the two little words, 'Drowned! drowned!'"
He remarked that now was the beginning of that season when deaths by
drowning were usual occurrences: "Boys roam down to the docks to bathe
. . . they venture . . . out to a distance in the river, or emulate
their companions in diving . . . Many a death occurs in consequence of
this boyish rivalry. The proper place for boys to swim is the bath."
Whitman imagined a mother whose spirited young boy is late in returning
home; "A knock is heard at the door." The knock, of course, is the
foreboding omen of the news that follows immediately—her son is drowned.
And the mother's grief was pictured with the sentimentality which pleased
the readers of that period.

By a peculiar coincidence (as the Eagle reported the next day)
Whitman witnessed on the very evening of the day that "Accidental
Sudden Deaths" appeared in his paper, the emotions of a father and
mother whose son had been drowned—of the parents, indeed, of John
Wallen, whose body was to be found five days later by Patrick Lynch,
lighterman.
'A BOY DROWNED!' was the answer given to our inquiry about a large crowd rapidly gathering at the dock, just south of Fulton ferry, at five o'clock yesterday afternoon. We moved with the current to the spot. There they were, peering over the great beam that borders the wharf—some few with a little excitement imaged on their faces, but most of the crowd in that singular state of apathy which masses of men will sometimes exhibit, when collected together on such business.

Whitman was surprised to learn that nothing had been done to recover the body at once. The boy's cap lay on the dock—he had been fishing with some other children, who ran away when he fell in the water—and it was not certain who he was. There was considerable alarm in the neighborhood among those parents who had small sons, but it was soon discovered that the drowned boy was "an Irish lad of nine or ten, named Wallen."

Presently his father, a stalwart young Irishman, came along. It was pitiable to see his tears and wailing when he took the little cap! That was fatal proof enough. Great drops gathered on his forehead—and he wept and wrung his hands, and acted like an insane man. But his grief was nothing compared with the mother's; for presently she came down too. Poor thing! our pen could do little justice to the scene, as far as she is concerned; and besides, a mother's sorrow is something almost too sacred for idle description. We noticed when we returned to the spot half an hour afterwards, that the man had become comparatively calm again; but the mother had been carried home under the exhaustive agony of sorrow that would not be comforted.

"It was melancholy (many might have beheld only the ludicrous points in the picture, but we could not do so,)", said Whitman, "to see the number of women who gathered so quickly there—each apprehensive of some danger to her little boy." As he had gone toward the crowd on the dock, he had seen a "withered, aged dame" hobbling as fast as she could toward the wharf, "her wrinkled face moist with agitation." The next instance, she was in the midst of the crowd. "Immortal beauty of woman's affection!" exclaimed Whitman, "how it outlasts the green and very autumn of life!
how it ennobles the commonest characters, and makes graceful things which would otherwise be rude." Some boat hooks were gotten, "when it was too late," but the body had not been recovered when Whitman left the scene at six. "It was not entirely unsingular," he mused, "that at the very time that article "Accidental Sudden Death" was being distributed among our readers, the grief we depicted as filling a parent's mind at the sudden accidental death of a beloved child, we were called upon to see in one of the most affecting phases of development." In conclusion, Whitman condemned the failure of spectators to rescue drowned persons as quickly as possible and the application of improper methods of resuscitation as the causes for many fatal Brooklyn drownings. Among other things, he suggested that "A moderately persevered in attempt to inflate the lungs with a bellows inserted mildly in the mouth frequently produces a good effect."

One of the most eventful sights which the foot of Fulton street witnessed during Whitman's editorship of the Eagle was the arrival of President Polk at the Fulton Ferry on June 26, 1847, for an hour's visit in Brooklyn--a visit duly reported in the Eagle for that day under the heading of "The President in Brooklyn." Before nine o'clock a large crowd had gathered in Fulton Street, including "the City Guard, spirited little companies of firemen in uniform, with a corps of mounted dragoons, all with bands of music." The citizens of Brooklyn had a long wait, for the President did not arrive from New York until some hours later. Under a sub-head reading "One O'Clock. Arrivals of the President..."
at Brooklyn," Whitman wrote:

The president has arrived at the Fulton ferry.—His passage over the river was announced by the thunder of cannon; and his appearance on shore, after landing from the boat, was hailed by the most vociferous cheers from the assembled multitude.—The president's passage through the dense mass of persons was impeded by the great concourse—hundreds of citizens crowding to the carriage where he was, to grasp his hand, or speak to him. He stood erect, and bowed to the people as he passed. The story in some of the whig prints that he looks jaded and bowed down with care, is all bosh... His eye, particularly, is full of fire and vigor—and we liked well his massive intellectual face. It is traced with his responsibility, of course—but, to our mind, has every evidence of both bodily and mental health. To the ladies—who were in every window—he bowed with marked courtesy.

Mr. Polk, Whitman reported, rode several blocks up Fulton to a point opposite the carriage of the Whig mayor of Brooklyn, where both gentlemen made brief speeches. Whitman was unable to hear the mayor's address, "partly from the low voice in which the mayor spoke." Polk "happily" alluded to Washington and the Battle of Long Island. "The elocution of Mr. Polk is hearty and clear," stated Whitman. At two o'clock, the President returned to the ferry and steamed back to New York. "Our Brooklyn military and the firemen," Whitman boasted, "looked fine and marched superbly."

The trees had gone from the lower end of the busy street up which Polk had ridden, but at its upper end, and over most of Brooklyn, they were flourishing; and Whitman was the self-appointed champion of their preservation. On June 4, 1846, in an article titled "Fulton Street, Brooklyn," the editor of the Eagle gave his readers an inventory of the business places which lined that street. He noted that an old residence
on upper Fulton was being removed to make way for several stores and
the new home of the Brooklyn Savings Bank, and he expressed the hope
that the proprietors of the bank "will preserve those beautiful trees
from the least harm. We shall be very, very sorry indeed to notice that
the buildings is allowed to encroach upon them, trunk or limb.
The beauty of Brooklyn is in its trees." Slightly more than a month
later, on July 11, Whitman recorded the death of the trees on the site
of the new bank.

BROOKLYN TREES.—The beautiful large trees that stood so long
on Dr. Hunt's old place, corner of Concord and Fulton streets,
were cut down the other day, to gain a few inches more room, to
build brick and lime walls on. Now, though we hold to as little
intermeddling as possible, by the press, with 'private rights,'
we pity and denounce the taste of the Brooklyn Savings' Bank
directors, which achieved this work of death. Why didn't they
let the trees stand—and build their fine edifice a few feet
farther in?

We remember those beautiful trees from our childhood up.
One of them was indeed a beauty—the great horse-chestnut, with
its magnificent bulge of verdure:

"Not a prince,
In all the proud old world, beyond the deep,
E'er bore his crown as lofty as it
Bore the green caronal, wherewith
God's hand had graced it!"

But a few years ago there was also a splendid row of towering
elms on the opposite side of Fulton street, from James B. Clarke's
old place, up to Clinton street. One or two yet stand in front
of the Rev. Mr. Jacobus's church; but all the rest have been
slaughtered.

It is perhaps expecting too much of those who new-come or new-
buy in Brooklyn, that they should look upon such things with the
regard of love and sorrow. They never played under them in child-
hood. They don't remember them, identified with many a boyish
spree, and merry game... But new-comers and speculators might
at least have their eyes open to the highest profits: for, even by
that sovereign rule, it is better to preserve the good looks of Brooklyn. . . . We have for a long time observed this practice of cutting down fine trees, to gain sometimes only twenty inches of room! In the name of both the past and the future, we protest against it.

Whitman advocated positive countermeasures against this arboreal slaughter: time and time again his newspaper urged the planting of trees in those sections of the city in which expanding construction was particularly destructive of trees. But despite all the building and chopping, Brooklyn remained a city of trees.

HOW BROOKLYN WILL LOOK, SOON.—Already, this beautiful morning, (3d,) the horse-chestnuts have burst out their bright green leaves— the peach trees and the early cherries are in bloom— the lilacs have donned their umbrage— and the moist fresh grass is thick enough, wherever the earth will allow it to grow in any fertility! Yes, spring is at her maturity, and will soon yield to the more warm-breathed summer. Then Brooklyn will be in its pride and glory. Then in all the blocks between Fulton street and the heights, will lie a dreamy shady quiet, under the trees that line the walks there, and through the ample yards. Then Brooklyn will have its green robes about its shoulders, and its skirts will be not a little draggled with the wet when it walks out in the morning.61

The various seasons of the year were so amply commented upon in the Eagle that it would not be difficult to prepare from its pages a general weather almanac ranging from March 1846 to January 1848. Of the seasons, spring and autumn were Whitman’s favorites. Winter days pleased him when they were mild enough for such saunterings as those he took along South Street in New York in January 1847; but wintry days ordinarily led him to write brief paragraphs about heavy clothing, blue noses, and tearful eyes.

61May 3, 1847.
His references to the sound of sleigh bells in the streets and to omnibuses temporarily on runners were lacking in any sort of enthusiasm. Winter had its nuisances; and on March 7, 1846, Whitman wrote: "The practice of boys sledding down the declivities on the sidewalks is a general and abominable nuisance. The easiest way to abate it is to sprinkle ashes where there is ice, and we advise all not to be very economical thereof." Winter in Brooklyn was not the time of year for those who enjoyed their pedestrianism. And one recalls that winter scenes are rare in *Leaves of Grass.*

Autumn, on the contrary, invoked such paeans as this which appeared in the *Eagle* for October 9, 1846:

> OUR CHARMING WEATHER continues yet! Both the days and the nights are beautiful exceedingly—the days with their brilliant freshness and elasticity, and the nights with their clear shining full moon, and the moistness in the air. It is hard to drudge at one's work these sweet autumn times—much harder, of course, than when the sharp frosty air we are going to have surrounds every thing that is not housed.—We therefore take the liberty of advising the gentle reader . . . to steal away a day or two—or a few hours at least—now while the Heavens invite him, (or her) and commune with what he will see outside of cities. We advise the ennuyee, the dyspeptic, the sour man, the grumbler, the dawdling lady too, to go forth in the neighborhood of trees and where nothing intercepts the broad view of the sky up above; go to the outer wards of Brooklyn, to farther East Brooklyn, to Greenwood, to Flatbush—to Hoboken, or Staten Island—and inflate the lungs with the purest of air, once in your life at least!

And he concluded his article with lines celebrative of autumn mornings from "that sweet one of American poets, Longfellow."62

62See OF, II, 219-220, for another brief piece from the *Eagle* lauding autumn as a time for strolling in the country.
Spring as well as autumn invoked paens. On March 9, 1816, two
days after having denounced the practice of boys sledging on the side-
walks as an "abominable nuisance," the Eagle showed a better humor with
the world.

APPROACH OF SPRING.--Yesterday was a sweet day; and though
the "going" was bad enough, nearly every body who could get
out, walked into the open air to enjoy its warmth and freshness.
The arrival of a fleet of long due vessels—the coming in of
many anxiously waited for mails from every point of the compass
—and the lifting up of the ice-finger that has been chilling
us so much of late—combined with the spring-like beauty of the
day—contributed to infuse among the community an unusual exhil-
oration and cheerfulness. Welcome, loveliest of seasons—young
Spring! Your birds will soon be "singing blithe and gay," for
even now the signs all around, (except the dirty snow—but that
is fast melting away) prove that you are indeed "coming, coming!"

And spring came in 1816, and again in 1817, with the editor of the Eagle
reminding his readers from time to time of the beauty of Brooklyn and
Long Island in that season. 63

But with July came the oppressive heat of the city (though Whitman
often spoke of Brooklyn as a veritable summer resort as compared with New
York and its heat) and Whitman recorded in the Eagle the departure of his
fellow Brooklynites for cooler regions. On August 5, 1816, he noted that
"Yesterday the City Guard evacuated the place; and this morning that
numerous body, the Daughters of Temperance departed for up the river, and
the first detachment of the numerous Fire Island party 'put out' for their
cool destination . . . " As one who could not leave the city, Whitman
found solace in the occasional cool mornings, as on July 13, 1816: "THIS

63See UPP, I, 113-114.
the air is grateful again! What a relief to the sweltering city!

... The frolicsome wind comes coolly over the Heights this morning...

... fresh and jovial as a wholesome child. How blessed is the wind! -- the
sweet, fragrant, invigorating wind -- that 'most spiritual thing of all the
wide earth knows!' More often Whitman's summer comments on the weather
had the tenor of the following from the Eagle of August 14, 1846:

THE HOT DAYS are upon us again. The air is dry and feverish,
and the glaring sun comes down so spitefully at one! It is not
so much the warmth, perhaps, but the glare, which makes this
August atmosphere almost unsupportable... How lurid the sun
was, when he went down last night! We watched him from the
Fulton ferry as he hung like a great red ball over the roofs of
Gomorrah on the other side of the river -- not as
"With lingering kiss, the drowsy Lord of Light,
Like Antony, when to th' Egyptian Queen
He bade farewell, hangs on the cheek of Night
Within her chamber of the deep!"

-- but like one of the play demons, on the Chatham stage, (in pieces
which, to please one pit, represents another, whereof the denizens
of the first may perhaps know one day somewhat nearer,) with eyes
of fiery crimson glass.

But at least the advent of warm weather brought some variety to the scene
outside the windows of the Eagle, as Whitman noted on June 4, 1846. "The
present weather has brought the woollen and flannel trade to an abrupt
termination," he said. "There is a regular forest of white pants passing
along opposite to our office."

Other areas of Brooklyn than Fulton Street were perambulated by
the editor of the Eagle -- regardless of the season -- and written up in its
columns. Usually Whitman's observations centered on the evidences which
he noted of Brooklyn's rapid growth -- an obvious matter for comment, since
Brooklyn almost doubled in size during the two years he was with the Eagle.
On September 11, 1847, in a paragraph headed "Residence in Brooklyn," he remarked that "Blocks of splendid dwellings have sprung up in every direction, as by magic; and large private residences, almost palaces; and commodious houses for the 'bone and sinew' portion of the community, are met with in all parts of the city, even to the very outskirts." New York business men were finding it pleasant to live in Brooklyn and commute to their work. In addition, manufacturing plants were increasing and other streets were becoming potential challengers of Fulton Street's position as the principal business street of Brooklyn. One of these was Atlantic Street, located in the rapidly growing area of the city called South Brooklyn. On September 28, 1846, Whitman remarked that "Passing through there [Atlantic Street] on Saturday evening, we were surprised as well as gratified to witness the great amount of business done in that section of Brooklyn. From the brilliant and busy appearance of the stores and shops, we could almost imagine ourselves in Fulton Street, or N. Y. Broadway." On March 25, 1847, the Eagle asserted of South Brooklyn: "Perhaps, indeed, the republic does not present a greater evidence of the go-ahead spirit of the American people than that same section of our city—joined with what may be seen in East Brooklyn."

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Whitman remarked on this point: "The ferries . . . are now one of the advantages. Nothing is more refreshing in a hot . . . Whitman the pure delicious air that one gets in crossing. The warm and dusty wayfarers of the great Babel . . . often recross several times to prolong the luxury. We have been tempted ourselves repeatedly in this way."
Whitman was especially interested in a project under construction in South Brooklyn—the Atlantic Dock and Basin—and frequently and correctly prophesied its future commercial greatness. On July 24, 1847, he devoted an article on South Brooklyn almost entirely to a description of piers, warehouses, grain elevators, steam engines, and railroads which had been completed at the dock to that date. Exactly a month later, a paragraph in the *Eagle* showed that the Atlantic Dock was still a stimulating sight to Whitman.

**THE GREAT WORK AT SOUTH BROOKLYN.**—We have of late years seen in the newspapers and magazines a great many poems on "the sublimity of labor," and such like topics; but the most potent argument possible in that line is furnished by the Atlantic dock, still in process toward completion, at South Brooklyn. We spent some hours there yesterday afternoon—and under the polite guidance of Col. Richards, as well as by our own investigation, we saw enough to make us wish to go many times again—which, indeed, will be necessary before a man can get the whole of one of the most stupendous and uniform commercial conveniences of modern times, fairly in the scope of understanding. . . .

He concluded the paragraph by marvelling at the "incomprehensible process" by which the grain was conveyed by "steam enginery" from vessels to the warehouses at the dock.

On the opposite side of Brooklyn, in North Brooklyn, Whitman from time to time visited another shore-line installation—the Navy Yard. Here on the morning of June 27, 1846 (as he reported in that afternoon's *Eagle*) he witnessed the launching of the U. S. Sloop Albany. The sloop slid into the water, he said, "like a duck from a pond shore, into said pond." Apparently this was an exact enough description, for the ship was prevented by the mud at the end of the ways from going past the end of the dock. On
October 8, Whitman told his readers that "The Albany has been thoroughly painted within the last week, and presents a truly beautiful appearance; and if any of our readers who are interested in naval architecture, desire a treat, we advise them to seize an early moment to view her."

At intervals in the Eagle, Whitman took his subscribers along with him on a stroll along a particular street, minutely describing its sights. Some streets, like Joralemon and Willoughby, were wide, shaded, and lined with "tasty" residences, schools, and churches. But others presented a more varied and interesting spectacle because they reflected the city's remarkable expansion; such a street was Myrtle Avenue, which Whitman described in a long editorial on August 16, 1847. Myrtle Avenue stretched for three miles east from Fulton, and Whitman began his promenade at its eastern end and guided his readers to its conjunction with the latter street. At its eastern extremity, Myrtle Avenue had "the appearance of a country road," and along it were quite a number of "milk manufactories" which repelled Editor Whitman because of the wagons outside them loaded with the swill from the breweries and distilleries that formed the staple diet of many dairy cattle in the environs of Brooklyn. In the general vicinity of these dairies, and "still coming westward," were large tracts of land "all properly laid out on the city map, and the proper grade fixed, but still unoccupied by houses." The land was laid out in lots of 25 by 100 feet, selling from $100 (or even lower) to $400; and Whitman suggested that the Brooklyn mechanic, who paid from $100 to $150 a year rent, would do well to buy one or two lots, build a small cottage, and so live healthier and cheaper.
A mile from its eastern end, Myrtle Avenue changed from a country road to a street "regulated, paved, lighted and pumped," on which, it may be assumed, were located modest new homes and "thrifty shade trees"; these at least were the features of the side streets which began at this point to intersect Myrtle and down which the editor of the Eagle abruptly turned with his readers. Eventually Whitman returned to the avenue where it crossed Fort Greene, the contemplated site of Washington Park. He was instantly reminded of his fight to make the park a reality, and asserted that "no one with common judgment can fail to see that stretching far and wide the streets here are, in a few years, to be filled with a dense mass of busy human beings. Shall there not be one single spot to relieve the desolating aspect of all houses and pavements?"

Moving still farther westward on Myrtle, the editor of the Eagle came upon one of the effects of the potato famine in Ireland upon many of the northeastern American cities.

Descending Fort Greene one comes amid a colony of squatters, whose chubby children, and the good-natured brightness of the eyes of many an Irishwoman, tell plainly enough that you are wending your way among the shanties of the Emeralders. They are permitted by the owners here, until the ground shall be wanted, to live rent free, as far as the land is concerned. To the right, descending, you catch a view of the burying ground, Potter's field, which is seldom this summer, without some activity going on inside its low paling; for sickness and death are rife, lately, among the poor immigrants. . . . To the left rise the brown turrets of the county prison, with its long range in the rear, where the prisoners' cells are. . . .

Leaving the county prison behind, Whitman approached the western end of Myrtle, where "all is the clattering din of traffic, turmoil, passage, and business." The street floors of the buildings on each side of
The street were occupied by "groceries, clothing and tailoring stores—dry goods, hat, boot and shoe, and book stores—places for selling tinware, wood-ware, fruit and vegetables, lace, hosiery, cabinet furniture, confectionary, watches and jewelry . . . bakeries, butchershops." However, "one description of edifice is wanting in this three-mile st.; and that—strange to say in this 'city of churches'—is a house of public worship. . . . There are a great many public houses on Myrtle avenue—but not one church."

A year before this peregrination down Myrtle Avenue, on August 19, 1846, Whitman had told his readers of a stroll he had taken the day before in East Brooklyn along some of the streets which intersected that avenue. He had "found surveyors marking out locations for houses . . . recent purchasers with their eyes gloatin in anticipation." It made him envious, he assured his subscribers; and on his return down Myrtle he saw, at the new homes already occupied, more matter for envy.

What an agreeable picture of domestic life is it to see a pretty wife upon the piazza, anxiously peering at intervals down the avenue in expectancy of the evening return of her husband, while the children, accompanied by the spaniel, are gambolling about in front, ready to run and hasten the near approach of their father; while as you pass, your eye unconsciously peers in at the basement window and takes a rapid inventory of neatly arranged furniture, and a well spread board, rejoicing in all the glories of pure white china and spotless table linen. These are the incidents which make life rationally agreeable; and these we witnessed in abundance on our return.

Whether this passage expressed a sincere longing on the part of Whitman or merely served as an agreeable and conventional vehicle for journalistic rhetoric is a matter for speculation. But he probably was sincere when
in the conclusion of his article he said, "Commend us . . . to the fast growing rural portions of Brooklyn."

Whitman's saunters in rural Brooklyn, as recorded in the Eagle, were almost all summer expeditions, and were, after their fashion, substitutes for the few weeks in the country or on the seashore enjoyed in that season by those less bound to the daily exercise of a business or profession than was the editor of a daily newspaper. It was not Whitman's custom, however, to stroll to the end of such a street as Myrtle Avenue and back again; on the contrary, he combined two pleasures, as he explained on August 26, 1846.66

The East Brooklyn line of stages is among the 'good things' of the age and day. After our editorial morning toils are over --weary and fagged out with them--we have no greater pleasure than to get in one of these handsome easy carriages (imagine it is our private establishment, and the other passengers our guests) --and drive out to some of the beautiful avenues beyond Fort Greene, (are we to have that Park?) and there alight, and walk about--stretching over the hills, and down the distant lanes--till after sunset; and then walk home with a tremendous appetite for supper, and limbs that invite sleep.

The East Brooklyn line of stages, operated by Messrs. Husted and Kendall, occasionally dropped Whitman off in the afternoon at one of the gates of Greenwood Cemetery, a suburban showplace near Gowanus Bay, about four miles

65 On July 13, 1847, the Eagle carried an article headed "Pleasant Two Hours' Jaunt--East Brooklyn Stages," in which Whitman remarked concerning rural strolls, "An occasional indulgence in this cheap but most rational pleasure, will be more profitable to you than a jaunt to the springs or a feverish trip to some fashionable country place." GF, II, 149-151.

66 And again on July 13, 1847, in "Pleasant Two Hours' Jaunt . . ."
southeast of Fulton Ferry. The *Eagle* for June 13, 1846, in an essay entitled "An Afternoon at Greenwood," described, in terms of conventional sentimentality, its editor's perambulations among the graves at that rustic spot. A year later, on June 14, 1847, the *Eagle* again recorded an excursion to Greenwood, but this time its editor was not alone.

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Whitman commended Messrs. Husted and Kendall's generosity, "for seldom have those little people cause to know that the outer world yet remembers them so kindly!"

Jamaica, a few miles east of Brooklyn, was a favorite spot with picnicking Brooklynites, and the *Eagle*’s editor gave accounts of two Sunday

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67 *OF*, II, 105-113.
school picnics which he accompanied to that spot. "A Day With the Children," June 25, 1846, told of the excursion of the Sunday School of the Unitarian Church of the Saviour on the previous day. "An interesting group of some four hundred persons," including Whitman and a great many children, embarked on the Long Island Railroad. "On, on we sped," said Whitman, "for a half hour or so, after a fashion that Mazeppa's far-famed Ukraine charger might have advantageously imitated; and at length were set down in the vicinity of the pleasant, sleepy, old Dutch village of Jamaica." The party "gaily marched to the inspiring strains of the 'grand march from Norma,'" supplied by an accompanying band, to a grove.

It would be idle to tell how each of the four hundred engaged in their different modes of spending the day. . . . under the shade of trees whose graceful foliage, rustling in the gentle wind, discoursed a strange and agreeable music to the thoughtful; or follow the wandering footsteps of several groups who preferred to roam over the adjoining copse, on botanizing and geologizing excursions. . . . or describe the buoyant hilarity of the innocent young hearts who devoted themselves to the various swings with which the grove was plentifully bestowed; or attempt to paint the charms of those bright-eyed damsels whose een wrought so vivid an effect upon sundry young gallants; or how some saltatory exhibitions were got up, to the accompaniment of the 'pipe and tabor,' despite the vehement injunctions of sundry prudent and staid matrons . . .

The grand event of the day was the feasting upon fowl, ham, beef, lobster, pie, pudding, and cake. This was followed by speeches by two reverend gentlemen, "the drift of which was somewhat enigmatical, as bearing allusions for the most part, to some previous circumstances whereof we for one did not happen to be in the secret." After "more lounging, strolling, dancing, and swinging," the group returned home, arriving in Brooklyn at six in the evening.
A month later, on July 23, Whitman went again to Jamaica on a Sunday school picnic, that of the Episcopal Calvary Church; again some four hundred adults and children feasted in the same grove of trees and engaged in "rural sports." Writing an account of the picnic for the next day's Eagle, Whitman expressed his approval of that popular institution which had "a most valuable, moral and healthful tendency," furnished "children, teachers, parents and friends the opportunity to become better acquainted with each other," and strengthened "the attachments of the children to their school and teacher."

Not all the picnic excursions attended by Whitman were of the Sunday school variety. On July 14, 1847, some sixty adult Brooklynites, ladies and gentlemen, including Whitman, rode Messrs. Husted and Kendall's stages to Coney Island for a clambake. While waiting for the clams to roast, the party swam in the ocean. "The beautiful, pure, sparkling, seawater!" exclaimed Whitman the next day, "one yearns to you (at least we do), with an affection as grasping as your own waves." After the clams were eaten, "the champaigne, (good stuff it was!) began to circulate," and divers healths were drunk. The eight-mile return trip to Brooklyn in the evening was pleasant because of the cool air and the odor of the new mown hay. Whitman concluded his account of the excursion by thanking "the contractors of the new city hall! to whose generous spirit we were indebted for yesterday's pleasure."

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68GF, II, 151-155.
The stages of Husted and Kendall and the cars of the Long Island Railroad were not the only methods for going to a picnic or clambake—one could go by steamboat as well. The Eagle for August 1, 1846, reported that "To Glen Cove wended we our joyful way yesterday, (31st) in the good steamer Excelsior—with a comfortable party of nearly three hundred ladies and men." Whitman found the trip stimulating, for he asked,

DID you ever, sweet reader, lean over the bows of a steamboat, under swift headway, and mark the keen-cut speed with which she divides the waters—and the up-springing diverging jet she makes at the same time? . . . The fragrant saltness of the sea-wind comes at you in a rough caress; and exhilarating consciousness of swift motion adds to the 'fun'; and that impulse, which no human mind is without, to be taken out of the present, is constantly gratified. After this token, (and something more, perhaps,) there is a beautiful pleasure in swift sailing, on a large sheet of water. Then love we to get bow-ward, where there is nothing of the boat and the people to be seen—where, abstracted from the artificial method of the rest, one realizes only Nature's noblest developments, the sky, the immeasurable vault of air, and the sweep of the waters.

The party landed at Glen Cove, on the north side of Long Island, where they ate roasted clams and ham and bread under the trees with evident pleasure.

In the following summer, however, on August 11, the Eagle censured the growing fashion of steamboat picnics.

THE FASHION OF GOING ON "PIC-NICS," PER STEAMBOAT.—As our eyes yesterday morning were thrown out of our sanctorium window upon the little strip of river, (whose moving panorama is so refreshing, by the bye,) we beheld the Kosciusko steamboat, panting and blowing up to a dock nigh the Fulton ferry. Her decks were absolutely crammed with human beings—women, children, and men—who clustered over every part, like bees swarming. We understood that the boat was taking the people to West Point, on a "pleasure excursion!" and stopped at Brooklyn to get a few more of the same sort! In the sweltering moist air that we were enjoying yesterday, it must have been very nice indeed on board there.
In sober truth, the new fashion of picnicking, by way of steamboats, has come to the pass of o'erleaping itself and falling on the other side—the side which is opposite to pleasure... 

The trouble with such excursions, Whitman informed his readers, was that the boats were often uncomfortably crowded with a thousand persons rather than the rational number of three or four hundred.

Immediately on the south outskirts of Brooklyn was the Camp Ground at Flatbush where the Brooklyn militia encamped for a short time each summer for "professional practice." At such times the Camp Ground was a popular and easily reached goal for Sunday excursions. The Eagle for June 18, 1846, recounted "A Drive Out of Brooklyn" which included a visit to the militia at Flatbush. When Whitman and his party arrived at the Camp Ground with its thirty or forty tents, they found "an inspiring and gay spectacle" composed of "the band playing—ladies walking about, with militaires and civilians in attendance—the glitter of uniforms, the marching of sentries, and all that." From this cheerful scene, Whitman's party proceeded to the Kings County Lunatic Asylum—"What a sad spectacle, indeed!" Here they saw a woman whose distrust of men was so deep-seated that she refused to shake their hands. Another poor female, "mincing and ambling," was smitten with one of the gentlemen in the party. "The cause of her derangement, we were informed, was, unrequited love, years ago," explained Whitman. "Poor withered thing! That closely cropt grey hair, those lips and cheeks, sunk in the indentations of a toothless mouth—those peering eyes—what a burlesque on passion!" Whitman and his party saw more distressing cases of mental illness in the iron-barred violent
ward of the asylum; but if the sight of these "poor sick looking wretches" was depressing, the conclusion of the day's drive was calculated to elevate the spirits, for the party drove from the asylum to Coney Island through the refreshing scent of clover fields.

How grand, too, the rolling scope of the ocean, whose waves dash into the sand-hills there! We drove some distance on that hard, clean, level sand, snuffing up the air with such delight as a man feels, who rarely gets away from the purlieus of the crowded city—The phantom shapes of vessels, with full-bellied sails, saw we in the distance, moving along like children of the mist. There, too, were the white plumes of many a mighty ripple—ere it threw its long hollow scoot high up the shore. Nor was the scene wanting in solemnity. How can human eyes gaze on the truest emblem of Eternity, without an awe and a thrill?

It may have been around this time that Whitman sensed "that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the sea-shore should be an invisible influence, a pervading gauge and tally for me, in my composition." Whitman went farther afield on Long Island than the beaches and little villages in the immediate vicinity of Brooklyn. The Long Island Railroad sponsored a "flying pic-nic" from Brooklyn to Greenport, eighty miles away on the east end of the island, and back, for one dollar; and on the following day, June 27, 1846, the Eagle printed its editor's impression of the trip. Whitman was pleased with it all: the handsomeness of the village of Greenport, from which a dozen whaleships operated; the Peconic House, "a jewel of a hotel"; and the car attached to the train in which "the obliging waiters served the passengers just as the latter might

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69CW, IV, 167.
70UPP, I, 118-121.
have been served in an ordinary public or ice-cream room." Whitman took
the same jaunt the next year. The Eagle for September 3, 1817, briefly
reported the expedition, marveling mostly at the fact that one could
leave Brooklyn after breakfast, spend five hours at Greenport, and arrive
back in Brooklyn at nine in the evening.

A few days later, Whitman made a third trip into east Long Island, this
time extending it into a proper vacation of perhaps two weeks. He
spent several days at Riverhead, the county seat of Suffolk County, and
shorter periods at other villages thereabouts. The subscribers of the
Eagle were informed of its editor's progress by three letters published
as "East Long Island Correspondence." The first two letters were simply
descriptive of the villages along the railroad. In the final letter,
Whitman told his readers of the few Indians who remained on the eastern
end of the island and of their past history. At one time, he cited a
local tradition as saying, "'the natives were as many as the spears of
grass,'" especially in Suffolk County, where the royal tribe, the Wyandanch,
rulled from Montauk Peninsula. But in the 1840's the population
of Suffolk County was small, and the Long Island "spears of grass," now
European, were thickest in Brooklyn, where the Wyandank (a variant spelling
Whitman objected to) and the Montauk carried Whitman's coevals from Brooklyn

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71 UPP, I, 174, note 1, cites this as Whitman's second and final
trip to eastern Long Island while editor of the Eagle; apparently Holloway
overlooked Whitman's one-day excursion to Greenport on September 3.
72 UPP, I, 174-181.
to Manhattan and back again. And urban Brooklyn was Whitman's real milieu.

Though it had no theatre and its citizens were largely dependent on New York for other types of entertainment, there were ways of amusing oneself in Brooklyn other than by sauntering its streets. For example, there was the occasional circus. Whitman attended the performance of Rockwell & Stone's Circus on the evening of May 21, 1846, and reported it in the next day's *Eagle*. The large crowd had been enthusiastic especially over the "bull fight," a spectacle in which the bull was impersonated by a horse "of great sagacity" but who forgot his role and attacked "his assailants with his heels." In the fall of 1847, Sands, Lent & Co.'s American Circus came to town and thrilled the Brooklyn public with the equestrian feats of its company. On November 4, the *Eagle* reported: "The last performance of Sands & Lent's circus took place last evening, and the tent was crowded to repletion. . . . The very great success with which this exhibition has met with here would seem to imply that any meritorious exhibition of a permanent character would be well sustained in Brooklyn. Is it not about time for this city to be independent of New York, in some measure, in the way of resources for amusement?"

Akin to the circus, and exciting in its way, was the wild animal exhibition which visited Brooklyn each year. The *Eagle* noted, on November 12, 1846, a "Great Event" which that morning had excited big and little alike in the city—"the grand *entree* into the city of that menagerie, which has been so anxiously expected for a week past." The menagerie made its
grand entrance with "a long column of ultra-marine blue box carriages," containing the wild animals, preceded by "an imposing 'triumphal car,' in all the glory and glitter of gold leaf, decorated with an infinity of gilded lions, drawn by eight stout black chargers, and containing a band of music, which made the brick walls and crowded thoroughfares melodious with a spirit stirring air from 'La Fille du Régiment.'"

Whitman swore to his readers that he was "bound to see the 'bear dance' --we are." The menagerie was in the city again in the following spring. When it closed its Brooklyn appearance and moved on down the island, Whitman remarked, on April 30, 1847, "We commend it to the attention of our Long Island friends, as a very rational and instructive source of amusement."

Another, but quite different "rational and instructive source of amusement" was the various lecture courses which marked the winter season in Brooklyn. The Eagle for March 5, 1846, noted:

There are no less than three courses of lectures now in progress in this city, viz: The Institute Course; Dr. Baird's lecture on Europe at the Church of the Pilgrims in Henry street; and Professor Fowler's on Phrenology [73] at Hall's Buildings. From the numerous attendance which each receives, an impartial observer would imagine that there is an almost unquenchable thirst for knowledge on the part of our citizens. . . .

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73 Three reviews of these phrenological lectures appeared in the Eagle during this month (March 5, 7, and 11) ridiculing the claims made for the science of phrenology by Orson S. Fowler, the future agent for the first two editions of Leaves of Grass. Florence Freedman, in her Whitman Looks at the Schools, pp. 57-58, quoting two lines out of context from the last review of the lectures (mistakenly dating it the 10th), wrongly uses them as evidence that Whitman at that time approved of the claims made for phrenology. The entire review is highly ironic, as are the two lines quoted by Mrs. Freedman.
The lecture course was an established American institution, and its popularity was as great in Brooklyn as elsewhere. As a historian has stated, speaking of Brooklyn at this period, "All the serious minded and many of frivolous flocked to the lecture halls."\footnote{Ralph Foster Weld, \textit{Brooklyn Is America} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 71.} The Brooklyn Institute lectures, which enjoyed the greatest prestige, presented topics which ranged from astronomy to consumption; and Whitman carefully noted the beginning of the Institute's winter series each year. The \textit{Eagle} reported on October 13, 1846:

\begin{quote}
FIRST LECTURE OF THE SEASON.--The introductory lecture before the Brooklyn Institute was delivered last evening by George S. Hilliard, Esq., a legal gentleman of Boston. There was a large audience present, and seldom have we seen an assemblage so captivated by a literary performance, as they were by the production of Mr. H. The principle aim of it was a truthful survey of the literary taste prevailing in the country, and the moral position of the United States in a governmental point of view. The lecture was a perfect chaplet of gems in brilliancy of its thoughts and its strikingly beautiful and expressive diction. We could have listened all night to its continuation. . . . Notice was given that Mr. Gliddon the lecturer on Egypt would commence his series on Thursday evening next.
\end{quote}

The Institute series for the winter of 1847 was begun by Louis Agassiz, recently emigrated from Switzerland, who found a subsistence in lecturing before becoming professor of natural history at Harvard in 1848. The \textit{Eagle} noted on November 26, 1847, that "The customary winter entertainments of the Brooklyn Institute were commenced last evening with a lecture by Prof. Agassiz upon the subject of the transportation of boulders generally and the Swiss glaciers particularly." Professor Agassiz gave his topic
"a greater degree of relevancy" by alluding to the boulders on Long Island as examples of glacial transportation of the same. Whitman reported the lecture in some detail, judged it "an interesting lecture to the audience generally," and concluded by remarking that "The enunciation of the professor is sometimes a little difficult to understand, though he speaks fluently and seems to have mastered most of the difficulties of our barbarous mother tongue."

The Institute sponsored attractions other than lectures. The Eagle for November 6, 1847, spoke of the institution in this fashion: "Being decidedly the most interesting feature of Brooklyn life, it has so insinuated itself into the affections of a large class of our citizens that its absence would create a blank much to be deplored." The article continued on to specify some of the things that made the Institute so interesting a feature of Brooklyn life: the lectures, naturally, but also the annual exhibition of paintings and the several musical concerts. The article might have mentioned, but did not, the annual exhibition of flowers, fruits, and vegetables at the Institute, which Whitman reported on at some length in the Eagle for September 29, 1847. The first thing he had noticed that morning, on entering the exhibit, was "a cast of the goddess Flora, decorated with blossoms, and elevated in a large bower." Among the flowers that pleased him was "the toad-flower, whose speckled leaves put one irresistibly in mind of the reptile that in poesy's age

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75 Whitman's comments upon art exhibitions and concerts will be given in a later chapter.
bore 'a precious jewel in its head.'" Some of the plants were exotics with which he was not acquainted, "but it needed no instruction to take in the grace and superb delicacy of the sight in general—the rich bloom of the flowers, the mellow ripeness of the fine fruits, and the glossy lustre of the dark green lemon and orange trees! Beautiful indeed were they all—those children of earth and sunshine; and an eloquent plea in behalf of blending the practical and the ornamental in life!"

Also of interest to Whitman and some of his fellow citizens was the Natural History Society of the Brooklyn Institute, which met weekly for scientific demonstrations and discussions. Accounts of these weekly meetings appeared fairly regularly in the Eagle, and Whitman seems to have attended some of them with varying degrees of appreciation. One meeting which he found relatively dull was reported in the Eagle for November 18, 1846.

There was less than ordinary interest in the proceedings last evening of the Natural History Department of the Brooklyn Institute. The most interesting part occurred before the sitting, when a member instituted some experiments with the gun cotton which then began to make some noise in Brooklyn. The experiments did not strike us, however, as being very satisfactory. . . . When discharged from a pistol, its expulsion of the ball was very weak. The burning upon a piece of paper was more satisfactory.

A more interesting meeting of the society was reported in the Eagle for April 10, 1847.

A numerous attendance of members took place last evening at the meeting of the department of natural history. The specimens were various and of striking character, and as they lay upon the table presented contrasts of the most notable description, and truly wonderful to behold. Disgusting reptiles of various kinds were to be seen in juxtaposition with the beautiful representatives
of the floral kingdom. Lizards paid court to flowering azalías\footnote{sic}, snakes peered into the recesses of the passi flora, and young crocodiles seemed entranced with the rich tints of the arbutilon. Toads looked as if they were preparing to swallow large specimens of copper ore; and large stuffed owls gazed on these strange sights with marvellous gravity and curious composure, and no doubt pondering on the purpose for which certain paving stones with remarkable holes in them, and flagging stones with antique bird feet prints upon them, were brought there. Alligators looked with longing eyes upon several beautifully arranged nests of butterflies and other entomological specimens; and a large grey eagle had his eye on—a glass one, by the way—and was calculating his probable success, should he pounce upon, a delicious looking duck in the next case. The business of the evening was equally interesting, and consisted in discussing, principally, the recently published opinion of Prof. Lyell upon the fossil human bones found last year at a great depth in Alabama. His opinion was that the bones were not anti-deluvian, and that the depth of their position was attributable to some accident. During the debate which ensued upon reading the article, most of the members coincided with the views of the distinguished geologist.

To Whitman, such meetings of the Natural History Society as he attended were steps in self-education. In "A Few Words to the Young Men of Brooklyn," which appeared in the Eagle for December 17, 1846,\footnote{UPP, I, 148-149; GF, I, 133-135; Whitman Looks at the Schools, pp. 151-152.} he said, "To those who are just entering upon manhood, the paths of science present pleasures of the most alluring kind."

Patriotic celebrations also furnished the people of Brooklyn with entertainment. The Fourth of July had not been celebrated officially in Brooklyn for several years prior to 1846, apparently as a result of having been overshadowed by New York's festivities. On June 5, 1846, the Eagle remarked that "It is probable that our Common Council this year will pluck
up spirit enough to vote a small appropriation for celebrating 'Independence day,' in a becoming manner, apart from the celebration of it in the metropolis over the river. Good!" Some complained that a public celebration of the day encouraged dissipation; but, Whitman pointed out, "There will be just as much dissipation, either way. . . . The celebration may well be a manly and decent one, too--though the little boys will fire their crackers, and some ill-advised people will go on a bit of a spree." The Fourth was celebrated in Brooklyn on Fort Greene, but only after the businessmen of Brooklyn, abetted by pleas in the Eagle, had collected a private fund to supplement that voted by the Common Council. The Fourth in 1846 was an uncomfortably wet day, reported the Eagle for July 6, but the City Guard, the Columbian Riflemen, Fusiliers, Union Blues, the Hibernian Benevolent Society, the city officials, and several bands assembled at the junction of Sands and Fulton Streets and marched to Fort Greene. There the Rev. Mr. Thayer gave the opening prayer which contained what Whitman thought "a neat little thought"--"'the tears which heaven was shedding, are--let us think--the tears of joy, for so sublime an occasion.'" The principal address was very good, though the speaker's oratorical powers were "indifferent," and "the singing of the odes, music by the band, salutes, &c., all went off according to announcement."77 Then the procession reformed and marched back to Fulton Street and Sands, where Alderman Burbank "invited the soldiers to a handsome collation at

77An ode written by Whitman were among those sung. See note 8.
the Brooklyn Garden." In summing up the day, Whitman was pleased with it all.

When we take into consideration the miserable weather, we reiterate our assertion that the day was kept well. Our New York contemporaries speak of an unusual number of intoxicated men in the streets. In Brooklyn we saw hardly any at all. — The mass of our citizens evidently "kept it up" with determined glee. Crowds were in the streets—and the rattling squibs, firing of guns, ringing of bells, and drumming of drums, made "glory enough for one day," of themselves. The crowd on Fort Greene . . . stood the rain bravely. . . . We know, then, we have many not fair-weather patriots in Brooklyn.

There was one contretemps, however; it was not until three days later that the weather permitted the municipal fireworks to be fired off on top of Fort Greene.

The Fourth of July of the following year fell on Sunday and, as a result, was celebrated on the day following. The Common Council once again appropriated insufficient funds for the affair, and again a group of citizens organized to ensure the success of the day. The Eagle for June 9, 1847, reported that this group had "appointed the following committee of three, to perfect the arrangements necessary for raising subscriptions, and for other means requisite to celebrate the day: Gen. H. B. Duryea, Gen. James E. Underhill, and Walter Whitman." The celebration on July 5, went off well enough except for the failure of the Common Council to cooperate. The Eagle for July 6, had this to say:

Taken altogether, the celebration of independence day in Brooklyn went off pretty well. The salutes and bell-ringing at sunrise—repeated at noon, and again in the close of the day ---made the principal part of the official recognition of the great era. The procession at 6 o'clock, though small, was one of the neatest we ever saw. It marched over the route designated, and in due time, arrived at the place where the military were to
to be reviewed by the common council. But no common council was on hand, and the procession was dismissed. . . . That part of the procession occupied not by the city dignitaries, was a marvel all along the route. . . .

Whitman took the municipal government to task for its "wretched conduct" which had caused "the greatest dissatisfaction to the citizens." But despite the Common Council, "In the evening, thousands and thousands of people assembled on old Fort Greene to see the fireworks, which went off well, and every way to the pleasure and gratification of the multitude."

"By the by, what atrocious music the hired bands always give on these public occasions!" Whitman had remarked when writing of the Fourth of July celebration in 1846. "Such a diabolical rub-a-dub as they kept on Saturday, (not a single tune on the whole route!) was enough to set any body's teeth on edge!" But when it came to midnight serenading (a fairly common amusement in Brooklyn, judging from how often it was commented upon in the Eagle), these bands forewent the "rub-a-dub" and played tunes enough for everyone. The Eagle made the following comment on July 11, 1846:

MUSIC AT MIDNIGHT.—A treat intended exclusively for some young ladies in Willow street last night was enjoyed by half a thousand sleepless denizens of the neighborhood. A magnificent brass band (could it have been Lothian's?) commenced their delicious music at half past one o'clock, and made the vicinity melodious for about an hour—causing all the young ladies' hearts to flutter, within hearing distance, and eliciting sundry screams from babies who were disposed to sleep but couldn't make it out for the music; besides waking up several deep-mouthed mastiffs who gave loud token of their vigilance. All these conglomeration sounds made the walkin ring in a style wondrous to hear. The band, however, had the best of it and kept up their music, until a watchman (wonderful to tell!) gave them a gentle but unwelcome hint by striking his club on the pavement, whereat they evacuated the neighborhood.
Apparently Whitman did not resent such musical intrusion into his rest. The Eagle for November 5, 1847, remarking on the unseasonably warm weather, mentioned that its editor had been awakened the previous night at two in the morning "from a profound slumber by the delicious strains of 'Love Not,'" played by Granger's Brass Band. Whitman vowed, "If there be anything more agreeable than another it is to hear music in the stillness and repose of the night while you are half awake and struggling for dear life to understand what particular portion of the spheres has suddenly thrown you under obligations by sending their strains down to your front windows."

The band serenaded the city until morning, moving from one street to another. During much of the time they were audible to Whitman, but in the next day's Eagle he thanked them instead of damning them.

Brooklyn had its daytime serenaders too, largely as a result of the flood of immigrants pouring into Brooklyn and its neighbor across the river. On July 23, 1846, a brief item in the Eagle informed its readers that its editor had been "highly edified by a band of strapping German vocalists, and one with a violin, who performed various airs, and sang songs under our editorial window this morning." Perhaps the Germans were back again the following day, for the Eagle of that date had more to say on the subject.

PUBLIC SERENADES.—There has been a great influx of musical talent into the country of late, judging by the numerous bands of serenaders who make our thoroughfares "vocal," and instrumental too.—A tolerably good German band, consisting of five persons, among whom is a female who plays the German flute, have recently commenced public business in our streets and discourse tolerably eloquent music. These peripatetic musicians
manage to pick up (for a rarity) less "kicks than coppers," and are in a fair way to make money. The profession of street minstrelsy is getting somewhat overburdened, however.

A year later "the profession of street minstrelsy" was even more overburdened. The Eagle noted on July 31, 1847: "This fine morning has started out about a score of the professors of the music-grinding profession. Our city is vocal and instrumental from one end to the other. Query--which is the hardest for these able-bodied vagrants--lugging about a heavy organ in the boiling sun or digging respectably in the earth?" Whitman did not answer his question, but he knew, for he had written about them, that there were hundreds of Irishmen and Germans laboring "respectably" at the Navy Yard, at the Atlantic Dock, and elsewhere in the city. They, too, along with the native Americans, were part of the Brooklyn scene in the late 1840's--the scene which the editor of The Brooklyn Daily Eagle caught in his columns not only in the descriptions of his ambles about the city but also in his comments upon newsworthy happenings and upon issues, ranging from political to medical, that interested the Americans of his time.
CHAPTER II

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SCENE

1. Nationalism and the West.

In the Eagle for June 4, 1846, Whitman noted that John L. O'Sullivan, founder and until recently the editor of The United States Magazine and Democratic Review (and founder and still co-editor of the Democratic New York Morning News), was "about to withdraw from that active participation in political affairs which he has been distinguished for during the past five or six years" because of ill health. Whitman eulogized the Democratic Review, as conducted by O'Sullivan, for presenting "the plain unvarnished recognition of the first principles of democracy." He did not mention, however, that O'Sullivan had originated, the year before, a term which apotheosized American nationalism in the 1840's. Whitman seems never to have used the term in the Eagle, but he expressed its essence time and again in his editorials. In the Democratic Review in the summer of 1845, O'Sullivan had written an editorial supporting the annexation of Texas, and in it he had stated that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."¹ O'Sullivan, in the expression "manifest destiny," had given the majority of the Americans of the 1840's a shibboleth. A recent study in American history says: "'Manifest Destiny'--the term used

to describe the American expansionist spirit of the 1840's--was characterized by a bumptious enthusiasm and naive nationalism; its proponents claimed that the United States had the world's best government, that its people were better off than those of any other nation, and that its imperialistic designs were sanctioned by both divine and natural law."

Even the Brook Farm Phalanx saw the workings of Providence in the Mexican War, for in 1846, its weekly newspaper, the Harbinger, said of the war: "In many and most aspects in which this plundering aggression is to be viewed it is monstrously iniquitous, but after all it seems to be completing a more universal design of Providence, of extending the power and intelligence of advanced civilized nations over the whole face of the earth . . ." But not only Americans were seduced by the concept of manifest destiny; an intelligent foreigner, and one fully aware of American deficiencies, regarded the Mexican War as a step in the unfolding of America's destiny. Ole Munch Raeder, who in 1847 and 1848 was investigating the American jury system for the Norwegian government, wrote the following to a Norwegian newspaper: "Anyone who is able to look beyond the immediate future must surely hope, in the interest of peace and humanity, that this Union may continue to extend its dominion over the continent so that even the stagnating population of Mexico may be aroused to new life under the

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influence of the Anglo-American race. Must we not see the hand of Providence in the present war, even if it did have a rather unjust beginning?\(^h\)

If the Mexican War had had an "unjust beginning," Whitman came close to admitting it on only one occasion and immediately declared it unimportant in comparison with the fulfilment of his country's destiny.

In the *Eagle* for January 7, 1848, he commented on the "Disagreement Among the Legislative Doctors":

It is useless to deny that there is a very potent anti-war feeling in the house of representatives—a feeling just short of a majority there, and kept in check only by the overwhelming voice of the mass of the people (the "common people," if you please,) which does not refine upon abstractions, and cannot see the use of making our republic the world's laughing stock, as we should be by withdrawing our troops at once and unconditionally from Mexico.

How useless is it, too, that sage grave men, and not a few editors, spend much breath and brains in arguing what way the war began, and who had most of wrong or most of right at the commencement! These points are worth but little now, to the nation. (In history, of course, they will be different.) What has been done, is past; and whatever the causes were, they will have just as much weight in our future "destinies" as though those causes had been totally reversed.

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This was written by a man who for the first time in his life, as a result of this very conquest of Mexico, had seriously embraced a cause—the Wilmot Proviso, which demanded that slavery be prohibited in the territories to be annexed from Mexico. Unlike many advocates of the proviso, he was unwilling to halt American expansion simply to block the spread of slavery.

When Whitman assumed the editorial chair of the *Eagle* in early 1846, the American people were profoundly interested in the westward extension of the United States, a matter to which the new Democratic administra-

\(^h\)Malin, *America in the Forties*, p. 90.
tion in Washington was pledged. A brief item in the *Eagle* for March 16, 1846, amusingly illustrates the public concern: "The Hickman, Ky, *Standard*, says, 'A lady residing within fifty miles of this place has recently given birth to four sons within an hour. They have been named Polk, Dallas, Texas and Oregon, and all are in a thriving condition.'" The *Eagle*'s editor, on the same date, mused: "TWENTY SEVEN STARS counted we on the blue background of the American flag, flying from the staff at the Battery yesterday. How many more will be added, before many of us, now throbbing and breathing, will be laid away in our graves?" Whitman believed he knew where some of the future stars would have their source. On March 12, he had written in the *Eagle*: "A LARGE and active party in Mexico are now striving to change that republic (!) into a constitutional monarchy. They had far better 'annex' themselves to the United States, as their northern provinces wish to do, and probably will do."

From its beginning, Whitman ardently supported the Mexican War. On the afternoon of May 7, 1846, the subscribers to the *Eagle* opened the paper and saw on page three, inserted amid the advertisements, under the heading of "POSTSCRIPT" in the largest type available, and of "HALF PAST TWO O'CLOCK," the following: "ACTUAL WAR ON THE TEXAS FRONTIER. MATAMOROS BLOCKADED!" The item briefly stated that four American soldiers had been killed while on a fatigue party by fifty Mexicans. What to Whitman was "actual" war, strangely enough was not actual war to President Polk, who was anxious to ease the consciences of some of his cabinet members by citing a definite act of aggression by the Mexicans before asking Congress
to declare war. On the evening of May 9, word reached the White House from General Taylor of such an action: General Arista had crossed the Rio Grande and one of his cavalry patrols had killed some American dragoons and captured others. Polk, with the approval of his cabinet, sent a war message to Congress on May 11 (May 10 was Sunday), and two days later Congress declared that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico.

Whitman, too, approved of Polk's war message. He asserted, in the Eagle for May 11, that "The news of yesterday has added the last argument wanted to prove the necessity of an immediate Declaration of War by our government toward its southern neighbor." The Mexicans, he said, had refused to settle the Texas question peaceably; further, they had wantonly massacred Americans during the Texas Revolution. "Who," asked Whitman, "has read the sickening story of those brutal wholesale murders ... without panting for the day when the prayer of that blood should be listened to--when the vengeance of a retributive God should be meted out to those who so ruthlessly and needlessly slaughter His image?"

The editor of the Eagle scorned the lukewarmness of the New York democratic press toward the commencement of hostilities and the "contemptible anti-patriotic criticisms" of Greeley's Tribune; these journals did not voice the "wishes of the people." But The Brooklyn Daily Eagle did: "Let our arms now be carried with a spirit which shall teach the world that, while we are not forward for a quarrel, America knows how to crush, as well as how to expand!"

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Whitman's war spirit did not go unquestioned by his readers. The *Eagle* for May 20, 1846, contained the following item:

**CRYING 'PEACE!'**—A correspondent inquires how we reconcile our peace principles, as formerly expressed through this journal, with our present position on the Mexican War. We are not for peace, under all circumstances—and have never been so. We think no man with true life in his soul can whine the 'peace doctrine' now; and though we would not 'imitate the action of the tiger,' we yet think that, being attacked, this nation should prosecute a vigorous and stern war with the enemy—carrying our arms, if need be, into the very capital of Mexico.

Indeed, the war was an opportunity for young men. Whitman noted in the *Eagle* for May 25, that Governor Silas Wright of New York had been notified by Washington that New York's maximum quota of troops for the war was seven regiments. "There are," remarked Whitman, "thousands of our young men—not a few in Brooklyn—who will like no better 'fun' than an excursion to the south, on this business. To all who have no 'incumbrances,' indeed, the chance is a first rate one." Apparently Whitman had "encumbrances"; perhaps one was a psychological disposition to be a spectator rather than a participator.

But even as a spectator of the hostilities on the southwestern frontier, Whitman served his government, and party, by consistently supporting the war in his journal in opposition to the other two Brooklyn newspapers and a number of the New York papers. Whitman was indignant at the failure of the English editor of the *Brooklyn Advertiser* to support his adopted country in its struggle against Mexico, but he was much more shocked at the anti-war opinions of native Americans such as Greeley and Spooner.⁶ That Greeley and Spooner distrusted the motives of

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the United States was not important, as Whitman related in "A Fable" in
the Eagle for June 3, 1846.

There was once a very nice old woman, who had an immense
number of children. She was very nice, I say; that is, she
treated every body well, even strangers, whom she always
welcomed, and gave them food, clothing, and so on. Immense
numbers of strangers therefore come [sic] to this old woman,
and she never refused to let them settle on the land she
possessed—which, if unoccupied, she even gave them. I am
sure this was very kind, indeed: how surprising is it, there­
fore, that the distant places from which those strangers came
were continually abusing the old woman.

But that is not what I was going to tell about.---Our old
woman was a little this side of angelic perfection; as indeed
most old women are. But she had a great big heart, and though
sometimes caught in the commission of foibles, she was pretty
generally right. On one occasion, when she had been insulted,
and her property stolen by a neighbor, she directed some of her
servants to place themselves on the boundary of her lands, and
resist all aggression. A series of contests occurred, in which
the dame's servants were victorious. But, wonderful to relate!
several of the old woman's own born children lifted up their
voices in denunciation and ridicule of her! Was not this very
unnatural? Even if she had been entirely in the wrong, was it
the office of a son to denounce and accuse his own mother? I
trow not.

The sacred loyalty of a child to a dear parent is not like
the loyalty to Kings. It is sometimes a virtue to forego the
latter, and slay a King who becomes a tyrant. But ingratitude
to one's mother!  O, no, no! Who ever did it, and was not sorry
afterward?

The unnatural sons of the old woman in the fable were, of course, generally
members of the Whig party. Whitman made this clear to his readers in an
editorial entitled "Points of Wish and Belief in the Two Parties Illus­
trated by the Leaders of the Democratic and American Reviews for February.
---The Mexican War," which appeared in the Eagle on February 10, 1847.

The leading article of each of the rival magazines for that month was on
the war with Mexico, and each professed to speak for the majority of the
American people. The Democratic Review candidly informed the world, said Whitman, "that the impulse of democratic freedom which has built up thirty states on this continent . . . must go on spreading and conquering, and diffusing human happiness—or rather preventing governments from inflicting human misery." The acquisition of vast territory from Mexico, which would erase tyranny from that territory and open it to settlement by freedom-loving Americans, was a "cause of joy" to the Democratic Review and the party it represented. But the Whig American Review, in its leading article, seemed as though it "dreaded the spread of democratic institutions, and was all but willing to contract the American power, instead of enlarging it." It had no faith in the manifest destiny of the United States. "Said we not well," Whitman asked his readers, "that the characteristics of democracy and whiggery were exemplified in the twain disquisitions?"

As for the foreign lands who spoke badly of the old woman who had welcomed so many of their people, Whitman was never at a loss to find points of comparison unfavorable to the former. And when the British press accused the United States of gross imperialism in its war with Mexico, he aptly compared that conquest with British actions in India and China. In an article in the Eagle for September 18, 1817, Whitman noted the generally malicious tone taken toward the United States by the British press in regard to the Mexican War, but he especially deplored the intrigues of the British government with the undemocratic elements in Mexico. Whitman felt that such actions were not consonant with the
gratitude which the British government should feel toward America for taking its naked and hungry off its hands. Furthermore, Britain should keep out of our affairs in reciprocation for our keeping out of hers.

"When," asked Whitman, "have we intrigued to stop her conquests in India, although our souls have been harrowed by the accounts day by day and year by year, of the atrocities perpetrated in that region by her ruthless soldiery?" And there was China: "Our prayers were all that we opposed to this most iniquitous war . . ." At the present the British were intriguing in Mexico for the establishment of a monarchy, taking advantage of the Mexicans "while they are in a state of semibarbarism." The British professed to fear the entire annexation of Mexico to the United States--"a thing she does not believe, and has no reason to dread if it were so, as the only evil that could flow from it, would be to establish a peaceable liberal government, where the most horrible despotism now exists, and to induce a horde of mountain robbers to become quiet and orderly citizens and peaceable cultivators of the earth." Once acquainted with the benefits of a free government, the Mexicans would never willingly submit to a monarchy--and that, said Whitman, was "the rub" so far as the British were concerned.

In the early months of the war, Whitman had enthusiastically entertained the notion of the annexation of the greater part of Mexico. In an editorial in the Eagle of June 6, 1846, he had asserted, in support of

7GF, I, 242-244.
such a possibility: "The scope of our government, (like the most sublime principles of Nature), is such that it can readily fit itself, and extend itself, to almost any extent, and to interests and circumstances the most widely different." But as the war neared its close, Whitman had less confidence in the protean scope of the American form of government, though no less faith in American destiny. On November 22, 1847, he wrote in the *Eagle* on the "Annexation of Mexico," saying that "The idea of 'annexing' the whole of Mexico to the United States, however, is not a sensible idea, and we do not think any body seriously entertains it." The sparsely populated northern provinces of Mexico (which were certain to be annexed) were well suited for settlement by American republicans; but the other portions of Mexico were more thickly populated—"The inhabitants could not assimilate to ours; and the institutions could not work with ours." Perhaps after many years, after assimilation of democratic ideals through intercourse with the United States, those provinces might voluntarily seek annexation. Meanwhile the Whigs should stop getting excited, for "it is as fixed as fate that a very large territory will be added ... to these free and independent United States." Though Whitman firmly supported the proposed Wilmot Proviso (composed not by a Whig but by a suddenly insurgent Democratic representative from Pennsylvania), he was not inclined to see in its defeat, as were some of its more radical

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8 The *Eagle* on November 2, 1847, asserted: "We beg to assure the Advertiser that our opinions on the subject of 'acquisition of territory,' &c., and in reference to its perfect freedom from slavery, has not changed one iota—and will not change."
advocates, the seeds of a disrupted union—his faith in the American destiny was too strong.

That there will be some want of smoothness, some contention perhaps, in the organization of the new states, is every way probable at the beginning. But (and we say it with reverence,) our faith in the final triumph of Christianity is not more clear and full than our faith in the harmonious progress and increase of the United States of North America—and their added brethren, as the latter join us from time to time. To us, nothing more proves the short-sightedness of a man than his speculating on the rupture of this union as a thing to be taken into account. Nor is it with any blind faith that we feel our perfect confidence in the perpetuity of the union. We feel the same confidence in it that we might feel in the strength of any thing not only established in power but beloved by all those within its influence, and who are altogether benefitted by it—that has surmounted greater obstacles than any that can befall it again, and whose failures would plainly overwhelm the seceders within their own weakness, taking their very life-blood from them!

In the following year on September 9, in the first issue of the Brooklyn Freeman, Whitman was to say that "we shall oppose, under all circumstances, the addition to the Union, in future, of a single inch of slave land, whether in the form of state or territory—those are our first objects." But as long as he was editor of the Eagle, he so plainly saw the hand of Providence in the acquisition of Mexican lands that he was willing to run the risk of the establishment of slavery in that new territory.

The Oregon Question came to a head along with the Mexican War and provided expansionists with another topic suited to expressions of manifest destiny. Since 1818, the United States and Great Britain had jointly occupied Oregon without reaching any agreement on the ultimate division of

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9The first issue of the Freeman is the only extant copy of that newspaper. A facsimile of this first issue is included in Ellen Francis Frey's Catalogue of the Whitman Collection in the Duke University Library (Durham: Duke University Library, 1945).
the territory. One of Polk's election commitments was to acquire Oregon, and in his inaugural address on March 4, 1846, he stated that the title to the whole of Oregon clearly belonged to the United States. Whig alarmists immediately prophesied war, though cooler heads foresaw an equable compromise as more likely, especially since Americans would inevitably populate the southern portion of Oregon. Whitman's was one of the cooler heads. On March 9, 1846, he discussed the matter in a lengthy editorial. He saw no reason for war; it was not important that we get all of Oregon.

When one thinks of the future greatness of this republic--how our territory is stretching in almost every direction (in way of settlement and increased prosperity we mean,)--how even distant provinces of other countries are eagerly seeking to come under the wings of our eagle--how the name of "American" must, in a few years, pale the old brightness and majesty of "Roman"--he will see that the mere ownership of a few million acres more or less of Northern Oregon, does not involve our power or honor hereafter, in any degree worth serious estimation! . . . The United States in twenty-five years, or less, must be the most potent nation on earth! No human means can retard this great consummation . . . Shall we . . . delay our journey--or rather go backward again--to wrangle or fight for any thing short of our lives, independence, or dearest rights?

Should the United States fight or compromise on the Oregon question was a moot point in the Senate during March and early April, and Whitman followed the speeches of the senators with interest. On March 16, Senator John C. Calhoun made an eloquent speech in favor of peace and compromise, a speech which so delighted Whitman that he referred to it and quoted from it for days afterward. On March 21, he made a remark on Calhoun's speech which later caused one of his readers to ask how he reconciled his former peace principles with his belligerency toward Mexico.
Further reflection has only convinced us more firmly of the sense and patriotism of Mr. Calhoun's late Oregon speech. No; let us not go to war. We have indeed a higher mission. The world has tried that agent of redressing wrongs and grievances long enough, and the result—do we not see it all around us? Why are these bitter prejudices between nations? Why do men of the same flesh and blood hate one another? Why are the lines in geography permitted to be moral divisions as well as physical?

It may be utopian—it may be a chimera—but it is at least a beautiful chimera, this of universal brotherhood and peace! And the world were better did it believe it practicable. . . . God speed its progress!

But meanwhile many of the Whigs were denying that the United States had a valid claim to any of Oregon, and Whitman could not stomach this lack, as it seemed to him, of proper patriotism. On March 16, the Eagle, under the heading of "Pretty Patriots!" had the following to say:

We consider ourselves not of those affectionate bigots who exult with zeal, every custom, claim and attribute of the native land above all other lands on the face of the earth. We love our country with a deep enthusiasm—and yet we own our country's faults. it runs into errors and excesses many a time and oft. Also—we see divers evil customs that a long and dreary time of trial and perseverance alone can purge us from.

But we have never yet learned, like many of our whig neighbors, to take up the cudgels in behalf of a foreign nation, when the dispute lies between that nation and our own. The whig organs in New York, Washington, and Albany . . . and the prominent whigs, are striving day after day to advance the interests of Britain—to show how superior is the British Oregon claim to ours. . . . and, indeed, never lose an occasion to put bars in the path of their own government when difficulties arise between it and a distant ruler—particularly if that ruler is in England, a spot which a large part of the whig faction have a special reverence for.

Had hostilities resulted from the Oregon dispute, it seems a safe conjecture that the editor of the Eagle would have taken up his pen in support of his native land as strongly as he did in the case of the Mexican War.
Fortunately, war was not necessary. In April 1846, after securing the support of the Senate, Polk notified Britain that the United States would permit the joint occupation of Oregon to expire after one year. The British offered to divide Oregon along the forty-ninth latitude; this offer was accepted by Polk and the Senate, and the treaty incorporating that settlement was signed on June 15, 1846. The Eagle for June 19, remarked that the flag had been run up on the staff on the Eagle Building in celebration of the ratification of the Oregon treaty.  

"We hope our 'Fifty-four-Forty' friends will not grumble at this," said Whitman. "We, too, would have marched up to that line if we could have gone there. But what is decreed, is decreed." And it was decreed, though Whitman did not know it, that the southwest and California, rather than Oregon, were spectacularly to illustrate the operation of manifest destiny in the 1840's.

2. Nationalism and the Old World.

The Americans of the 1840's were sensitive to what they regarded as a blind prejudice against American institutions and mores on the part of most Europeans, especially the British. Whitman's generation esteemed de Tocqueville's Democracy in America but deplored such accounts of their visits to the United States as those given by two English travellers in particular. Frances Trollope's Domestic Manners of the Americans had

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10GF, I, 270-271.

11Malmin, America in the Forties, p. 86.
appeared in the early 1830's; however, the Americans of the 1840's still remembered that Mrs. Trollope had condemned things American from spitting to politics in an effort to illustrate the superiority of the rule of the few over the rule of the many. Charles Dickens' patronizing *American Notes* and uncomplimentary *Martin Chuzzlewit* had appeared in the early 1840's and were still unpleasantly familiar to Americans. It was so seldom that British visitors were sympathetic to American political institutions that when Whitman reviewed Sarah Mytton Maury's *American Statesmen* he scarcely touched on its defects: "There is a genuine American feeling here, and generally throughout the work, in the midst of much evidently over-wrought." But Mrs. Maury was a rare exception, and Whitman was but adding his small voice to the general chorus of the American press when he wrote an editorial entitled "Minor Moralities" for the *Eagle* of September 25, 1846.

Foreigners, travelling among us, have frequently thought proper to attack the American people for their lack of what may be called the minor moralities of life. Thus we see some horrified at the practice of spitting--some indignant at the scarcity of towels--others denouncing rapid mastication--and so on. In this way we have "all our faults observed, set in a note book," and spread before the European reader as a conclusive argument against democratic institutions. And Boz writes about the pigs in Broadway, and Mrs. Trollope writes about the pigs of Cincinnati. . . . We "acknowledge the corn." But . . . let us imagine any civilized kingdom of Europe changed to a republic--the people made equal--the masses elevated to the same grade with the nobility, and the nobility depressed to the

12Mrs. Maury's book was reviewed in the *Eagle* for February 22, 1847, and was dedicated to James Buchanan, then Secretary of State. On October 8, 1846, Whitman had reviewed another favorable book by a foreigner: Frederich Raumer's *America and the Americans*. "Heaven bless him for it!" exclaimed Whitman. See UPP, I, 134-135, and GF, II, 262-263.
masses. Let us suppose France, for instance. Who would not be shocked at the stupidity, the indecency, the total absence of all polish, which would then prevail? In the distant provinces of France... the masses do not read or write; they are but little removed from the more sagacious brutes. And not dissimilar would be the result of the same rule applied to England, Germany, or Spain. And shall a person come among us, and from the solid masses, the aggregate body of the American people, take out here and there a few violators of trivial etiquette, as a sample of America? The faults of the people here are exceptions to the general rule. In Europe, refinement is the exception... There is in us none of the bombastic vanity which loves to depreciate every thing not American, and parade with great praise all our peculiarities...

Whitman had never been to Europe, but he was as confident of the general degeneracy of the European masses as he was of the unjustness of the portrait drawn of the American masses by European visitors.

This American trait seemed distinctive to Ole Munch Raeder, as he explained in a letter to the Christiana Den Norske Rigstidende in 1847.13

That which has annoyed me most in my association with the Americans is their prejudice against Europe, which they regard as hopelessly lost in slavery and wretchedness. Three-fourths of the people in the East and ninety-nine hundredths of the people in the West are fully convinced that the other side of the Atlantic is nothing but a heap of medieval states, which, indeed, show some slight indication of a reform here and there, but have not made much political progress and have not enough vitality to rise from the abyss of misery and corruption into which they have fallen as the result of centuries of ignorance and despotism; their doom is inevitable. If one tries to dispute any portion of this creed of theirs, they simply point to the foreigners... They simply cannot see... that a monarchical form of government can be combined with any liberty...

Most of Europe was "but a heap of medieval feudal states" to Whitman, and he was alert to pick from the foreign news brought by the transatlantic

13 Malmin, America in the Forties, pp. 83-84.
ill steamers those happenings which revealed the corruption of Old World institutions: the deceit of Louis Philippe, sordid royal weddings in Spain, the dismemberment of the free city of Cracow by the Holy Alliance. Writing of this last event, Whitman exclaimed: "Listen, men of the New World! but for one hour to the tale of oppression... to the hellish wrongs of the coroneted few on the continent of Europe toward the masses --which those masses tamely bear... " Continental Europe was more iniquitous than insular England for a number of reasons. Whitman often spoke in the Eagle of the existence of a sentimental attachment between the United States and England similar to that between a son and his mother (though this attachment was more ideal than real). Too, despite the anti-democratic doctrine of many great British writers, the English, unlike the continental Europeans, had "that sturdy spirit of progress and independence, which is the greatest treasure a people can possess." But the British had not kept pace with the political and social progress made in America, and Whitman commented caustically upon their oppression of the Irish, and their imperialism in China and India. Numerically, more critical comments were made in the Eagle on the British than on all the continental nations combined. This was partially the result of both

14 GF, I, 29-50.
16 GF, I, 166-174.
the times which brought England and the United States into diplomatic collision and the habit of the British to write books and articles which depreciated American aspirations and institutions in a language only too available to the sensitive inhabitants of the United States.

"In books are the staunchest exposer of wrong and the readiest inducements to right," Whitman remarked in the Eagle on November 26, 1847, in an article entitled "The World of Books." One might expect, as a result, that Whitman, the devoted republican, used his frequent book-reviews to expose, when possible, the evils of monarchical rule and the unwholesomeness of anti-democratic foreign literature. The contrary was the actual case. For example, Whitman reviewed 100 works of fiction (excluding juveniles) in the Eagle without an allusion to unwholesome foreign influences, though the great majority of the books reviewed were written by Europeans. In only one review of fiction did Whitman illustrate, by contrast with Old World ills and evils, the virtues of a republican government. On May 31, 1847, he reviewed Eugene Sue's Martin the Foundling.

Perhaps no work has yet been written, of what are called novels, which more fully exhibits the potency of the romancer, to do good, in a certain way than this! It cuts into the very heart—the sore, gangrened, suffering, guilty heart—of that

17Whitman's classic statement in the Eagle on anti-democratic European literature is his "Anti-Democratic Bearing of Scott's Novels," which appeared on April 26, 1847. See GF, II, 264-266, and UPP, I, 163-164.

immense social evil which has accumulated for long and artificial ages over the states of Europe; exposes the monstrous effect of undue distribution of wealth, by unnatural means, which prevails in the monarchies there--and with the most daring boldness pours facts... Little credence have we in that cant of modesty, (in this very thing proving its own falseness,) which is shocked at the truths themselves... Would they rather the guilt and pain should go on growing farther and stronger under the surface?... We like this book well and hope it will be read widely. It is a democratic book.

For further remarks critical of European society, one must go to Whitman's reviews of historical and biographical works.

Whitman noticed twenty-two historical works, fourteen dealing with Old World history and the remainder with American. But Whitman did not make full use of his opportunity to castigate European corruption. For example, his review of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* was mostly occupied with the need for an international copyright; and one regrets that he did not comment on Carlyle's condemnation of both the rebels and the rebelled-against. In only two of these particular reviews were there any references to monarchical evils. Whitman reviewed Henry Hallam's *Constitutional History of England* on March 27, 1847, and found it to be a book with good principles and wholesome examples. He especially liked its accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for "Then it was that the buds swelled which have since burst into the bloom of a better freedom for man and mind--the precursor, haply, of a still higher and wider freedom in the future"; and, in the latter century, "the doings of those spawn of tyranny and bigotry the Stewarts..." provided a

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19GF, II, 292-293.
moral illustration of "philosophy teaching by example." Perhaps the longest of the reviews in the *Eagle* of a single publication was that of Lamartine's *History of the Girondists*, which was reviewed on August 10, 1847. At one point in the review, Whitman quoted a passage from the work which expressed some commiseration for Louis XVI and his queen, suggesting that they were not vicious, merely too susceptible to bad advice. Whitman's reaction to the passage was that

In view of the fate that befell the unhappy couple one is willing that the foregoing terms, favorable as they are, should be used toward them. But the great faults of Louis and Marie Antoinette were, it must still be remembered, that they lifted themselves in their blasphemous and insane pride, so high above humanity as to have no sympathy for the horrors and sorrows that were spread over France, and which entered into the every day life of so many millions of people whose flesh and blood were just as divine as the king's or queen's...

The overthrow of that despotism, added Whitman, was "a glorious work, for which whole hecatombs of royal carcasses were a cheap price indeed!" Later in the review, a passage was quoted from the history describing the corrupt conditions in France immediately prior to the Revolution. To Whitman this description should confirm the readers of the *Eagle* in their love for democratic institutions.

Such are the workings of an unfree government—such but a few of the manifold mischievous results of an unholy power, of monopolies, of hereditary riches and privileges. They bear a mighty lesson, those results do! And as what comes to pass on the human physical structure, after long years of unwholesome influences, is the best teachings of health, so the consequences of constraint are the best argument for liberty.

The "consequences of constraint" were not just to be seen in the past history of the European nations; if at all, those consequences were greater
than ever. One book in particular, of the fourteen biographical and autobiographical works noticed in the Eagle, aroused Whitman to remark on the contemporary despotism in Europe. That book was Hazlitt's Napoleon. He said little of the book itself, which he liked, and much of the necessity of reconsidering, free of Tory bigotry, the French Revolution. Whitman then spoke of the excesses of the French Revolution, and, as in his review of Lamartine's History of the Girondists, excused them as sufficiently provoked by aristocratic abuses. He dreaded violence, "bloodshed, and a maddened people."

But we would rather at this moment over every kingdom on the continent of Europe, that the people should rise and enact the same prodigious destruction as those of the French Revolution, could they thus root out the kingcraft and priestcraft which are annually dwindling down humanity there to a lower and lower average—an appalling prospect ahead, for any one who thinks ahead. Moreover, when it is observed how deeply the fangs of that kingcraft are fixed—and how through-and-through the virus of that priestcraft is infused—it will make one come nigh to think that only some great retching of the social and political structure can achieve the blessed consummation.

The spring of the year following that in which Whitman reviewed Hazlitt's Napoleon was one of revolutions over Europe. Ole Munch Raeder, writing

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20 One other book of this class which permitted Whitman to contrast free institutions with despotic institutions was the radical-liberal John Forster's The Statesmen of the Commonwealth of England, reviewed on July 27, 1846, and again on September 5. The comparison of the austere Puritans with the complacent Cavaliers confirmed for Whitman that virtue is the compliment of free government, vice that of royal rule.

21 OF, II, 284-287; the work was briefly noticed again on April 2, 1847 (UPP, I, 133).
from Boston in May 1848, told how everyone flocked to the newspaper offices for the latest news on the revolutions whenever a steamship arrived in the harbor or news came that one had arrived in New York.22

Whitman was in New Orleans, working for the Daily Crescent, and none of his articles in that paper commented on the upheavals in Europe.23 But Ole Haeder was probably speaking for Whitman as well as for many other Americans when he wrote his Norwegian compatriots, in the spring of 1848, that "The most surprising of all, to the Yankee mind, is that all of the European nations have not got rid of their kings."


Whitman had a triumvirate of national heroes to whom he often alluded with reverence in the Eagle: Washington, Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson. In an editorial on March 15, 1847, commemorating Jackson's birthday, he placed him at the head of these heroes. Washington was a man of "honor and august virtue"; Jefferson "was in democracy and politics somewhat as that Corsican 'child of destiny' amid the thrones of Europe"; but Jackson was a "truly sublime being" who breasted "with a great will, such waves of aroused interest, of seeming public opinion, as try mortal courage to their utmost endurance!" However, it was Jefferson, with his

22Malmin, America in the Forties, p. 169.

23See UPP, I, 181-229.

24Malmin, op. cit., p. 171.
maxim that the best government is that which governs least, who most influenced Whitman's idea of the role of government in a democracy.

In Whitman's opinion, the welfare state was an incongruity in view of American potentialities, and it was his hope that democracy would prevent such a state coming into being. He had the following to say on this matter in an editorial in the *Eagle* for July 26, 1847:25

> In plain truth, "the people expect too much of the government." . . . Men must be "masters into _sic_ themselves," and not look to presidents and legislative bodies for aid. In this wide and naturally rich country, the best government indeed is "that which governs least."

One point . . . ought to be put before the eyes of the people every day; and that is, that although government can do little positive good to the people, it may do an immense deal of harm. . . . Democracy would prevent all this harm. . . . It would have no one's rights infringed upon and that, after all, is pretty much the sum and substance of the prerogatives of government. . . . While mere politicians, in their narrow minds, are sweating and fuming with their complicated statutes, this one single rule, rationally construed and applied, is enough to form the starting point of all that is necessary in government; to make no more laws than those useful for preventing a man or a body of men from infringing on the rights of other men.

Though Whitman often wrote in the *Eagle* on the proper function of a democratic government, the idea expressed in the editorial just quoted is fundamental to all his statements on the subject.26 When the opportunity occurred, he applied his Jeffersonian principles to current legislative matters. A seduction bill was introduced into the state legislature at

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25 *UPP*, I, 166-168.

26 This fundamental idea was expressed as early as 1842, when Whitman was editing the *Aurora*. See Rubin and Brown, *Whitman of the Aurora*, p. 90.
Albany, and Whitman at once decried the attempt to "legislate men into virtue." He protested again when the New York legislature submitted to local option vote a No License law (no distilled liquor to be sold by the drink or in quantities less than five gallons). When the New Jersey legislature passed a bill making it illegal to race a horse for money or before an assembly of twenty or more people, Whitman reported it in the Eagle without comment but under the heading of "Questionable Policy." At times Whitman found it possible to cite Jacksonian principles as well. In the summer of 1847, a number of the western states sent delegates to a convention at Chicago to discuss ways of getting federal appropriations for harbor and waterway improvements. On July 8, 1847, Whitman reported in the Eagle that the convention had begun, and wondered "why don't the rich and populous states of the west themselves go to work, and effect the necessary result?" He added, "For our own part we confess to a liking for General Jackson's principles on the subject," thinking no doubt of Jackson's Maysville Veto. On July 15, Whitman wrote on "The Anti-Democratic Doctrines of the Chicago Convention."

It seems to us ... that the great error of that convention, and of all objects like its, is this: it assumes that the general government is the protector of, and improver for, the people. Strictly, and in a democratic view, this is by no means the case. Monarchies may be viewed in that light, but not such governments

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27See GF, I, 59-64; also Rubin and Brown, op. cit., pp. 99-100.
28GF, I, 65-73.
as ours. Keeping within its true scope, (which it has already travelled too far out of,) what we call our government has right­fully and really the most meager code of duties, and the simplest array of prerogatives, of any on earth. It is the mere agent, not the principal. . . .

One of the last pieces which Whitman wrote before leaving the Eagle was concerned with the American mania, as he saw it, for passing laws. Under the heading of "More Legislative Doctoring," Whitman remarked in the Eagle for January 1, 1848, that the state legislature had convened that date at Albany and would remain in session for about one hundred days. "It is not, as yet, known," Whitman told his Brooklyn subscribers, "upon what subjects the legislative doctors will try their hands. That they must give physic, however, seems to be a settled necessity, in their minds. Whether well or ill, we have to take it—and pay for it too. . . . Will the day ever arrive when people will see the folly of this excessive legislation?" Whitman was still anticipating that day when he published the second edition of Leaves of Grass eight years later. One of the attributes of the ideal "great city" in "Song of the Broad-Axe" was that it was a place "Where the men and women think lightly of the laws."29

It was inevitable that a young man who admired Thomas Paine,30 the originator of Jefferson's principle that the best government is that which governs least, would be a Democratic-Republican rather than a Whig. And though Whitman was probably in many ways a party hack during most of his

29Line 119.

30CW, IV, 168-171.
stay on the *Eagle*, his editorials show beneath their conventional jour­
nalistic rhetoric a genuine liberal idealism more identified with the
Democrats of the time than with the Whigs. Shortly after becoming editor
of the *Eagle*, Whitman wrote an editorial in which he pointed out the
opposing principles, as he saw them, of the two parties.\(^{31}\) He expressed
surprise that the Whigs in some years were victorious over the Democrats
at the polls. Both parties, he admitted, contained the same sort of
human beings: demagogues, "ignorant, ill-bred, passionate men," and men
with good qualities.

But if the inquirer after truth will reflect a moment . . .
he will see in this as in all civilized countries, two great
currents running counter to one another. . . . In each modern
nation there is a class who wish to deal liberally with humanity,
to treat it in confidence, and give it a chance of expanding,
through the measured freedom of its own nature and impulses.
Also, there is a class, who look upon men as things to be
governed—as having evil ways which cannot be checked better
than by law; a class who point to the past, and hate innovation,
and think that the nineteenth century may learn from the ninth,
and a generation of light can be taught by a generation of
darkness. . . .

There was, of course, the problem of conservatives amid the Democrats and
liberals amid the Whigs, which Whitman explained by saying, "It sometimes
happens that an individual whom nature intends for one class gets entangled
in the other." As an illustration of this point, he cited Greeley: "Who
that has an intimate knowledge of the editor of the *N. Y. Tribune*, ever
supposed that he was intended to sacrifice himself in behalf of high duties
and paper money? The whole other principles and course of the man are at

\(^{31}\) "Some Plain Paragraphs, For Plain People," March 21, 1846.
war with him, as he befogs himself in the darkness upon those two sub-
jects."

Not many months passed, however, before Whitman found his party
following a course which eventually he could not abide. In August 1846,
Polk asked Congress to appropriate two million dollars to be used in
purchasing lands taken from Mexico. David Wilmot, a Democratic represent-
ative from Pennsylvania, introduced a resolution into the House which
attached to the proposed appropriation a proviso that slavery be outlawed
in the territories acquired from Mexico—a resolution passed by the House,
after much argument, but refused by the Senate. However, "Every Northern
legislature [including that of New York] but one, whether Whig or Demo-
crat, passed resolutions approving it, and acclaiming Wilmot as a great
statesman." 32 Apparently the proviso appealed to Whitman's idealism,
though he did not, at any time, oppose the successful prosecution of the
Mexican War because of its failure to pass Congress. Coincident with his
editorial visions of an expanded United States as a result of the war, he
called on his party for support of the proviso.

If there are any States to be formed out of territory lately
annexed, or to be annexed, by any means to the United States,

32 Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of
the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1942), I, 598.
Morison and Commager suggest that Wilmot proposed and the Northern Demo-
crats supported the proviso as a "mischievous" slap at the Southern Demo-
crats for not supporting the Fifty-four-Forty line in Oregon after the
Northern Democrats had backed the annexation of Texas in the face of
threats of war.
let the Democratic members of Congress, (and Whigs too, if they like,) plant themselves quietly, without bluster, but fixedly and without compromise, on the requirement that Slavery be prohibited in them forever. We wish we could have a universal straightforward setting down of feet on this thing, in the Democratic Party. We must. But Polk refused to take Wilmot's proviso seriously; to him it was a sectional intrigue and he damned it officially. As a result, factions developed in the Democratic Party, and it was necessary for Whitman to choose sides. He chose that faction of the party which had received the epithet of "Barnburner" and which was opposed by a faction that had received the invidious label of "Old Hunker." But Whitman, though he obviously knew better, refused to admit such distinctions in the party as "Barnburner" and "Old Hunker." State elections were held in New York State on odd years, and in the Eagle for September 16, 1847, Whitman announced the coming election of Democratic delegates to district conventions, who in turn would choose delegates for the state convention, who in their turn would select the candidates for state offices. He admitted that divisions existed in the party within the state, but we confess to our ignorance of who are "Barnburners" or who are "Old Hunkers," as applied to democrats; and we are glad

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33 Cf, I, 194; also see 195-228.

34 The terms "Old Hunker" (from the Dutch word Hunkerer, a selfish person) and "Barnburner" (from the mythical Dutch farmer who burned down his barn to get rid of the rats) had been in use in New York State since 1815. The latter were the radicals of the Democratic Party and devout followers of Van Buren. Since Van Buren had opposed the annexation of Texas, they were considered the anti-slavery faction of the party—with only a certain degree of accuracy. See Denis Tilden Lynch, "Party Struggles, 1828-1850," History of the State of New York, VI, 74-76.
to acknowledge that we are intensely ignorant of the causes whence arose those euphonious appellations. We recognize no clique or faction; our duty is to work for the good of Democratic principles, which cannot divide themselves into quarreling bands; which are harmonious for the welfare of all; and to the advancement and universal spread of which, we ever have been and ever will be devoted. . . .

Whitman was being rhetorically naive when he professed no knowledge of the terms applied to the principal factions of the Democratic Party in New York. He was equally so when, on October 30, he struggled to keep faction out of Kings County.

If disputes and angry bickerings have pervaded other counties in the state, they have, thank heaven! not yet pervaded ours. . . . We do not recognize the distinctions of "old hunker" or "barn-burner." We know only the name of democratic republican—a time-honored appellation, which comes to us from the era of Jefferson, and has been handed down through Madison, Jackson, and Van Buren. . . .

And on election day Whitman still stubbornly refused to publicly admit that his party and his political ideals—now reduced to the proportions of David Wilmot's proviso—did not agree. He wrote in the Eagle on November 2, 1847, the following plea:

Friends of the Wilmot proviso! we earnestly hope that you, of all men, will not abstain from voting the regular ticket, presented at the head of your paper. Is not Mr. Hungerford \candidate for Congress\ a fast friend of the principle of the proviso, as recorded by his votes in congress last winter? We are surprised that any of the advocates of that principle can, (if they do,) refuse support to a ticket made up principally of men who are, by their past action, committed in behalf of the intent and scope of that proviso.

The regular Democratic ticket lost throughout the state, including in Brooklyn. The fact was not surprising, since the Barnburners had withdrawn from the state convention only to meet in Herkimer to draw up a
free-soil resolution without naming a state ticket. On November 5, Whitman remarked in the *Eagle* that "We do not think, to speak candidly, that either the Syracuse convention, or those among us who are called conservatives, have satisfied the people." But at least the Whigs, who had met in Syracuse and adopted a free-soil plank, had won the election.

Less than a year later, Whitman was an active member of the new and short-lived Free-Soil Party. But he gave up the Democratic Party reluctantly. On the day after the 1847 elections, November 3, in an editorial entitled "Some Reflections on the Past, and For the Future," Whitman blamed the Democratic defeat on lack of radicalism and expressed the hope that more liberal doctrines would be advocated by the party.

As a fact without reasonable question, we would mention that our party has not been of late, sufficiently bold, open, and radical, in its avowals of sentiment. . . . The adoption of the new constitution, with its startling changes, almost amounting to pure democracy, shows that the people of New York will honor almost any draughts upon their radical ideas, and on those once derided, but now widely worshipped doctrines which the great Jefferson and the glorious Leggett promulgated. . . . The heartier then, our party's avowal of high radical doctrines—and the farther it goes for freedom—the more sternly it rebukes and puts aside conservatism . . . the more likely to succeed. But all conservative influence is pestilential to our party. It may succeed for a day or a year—but fate itself is not more fixed and immutable than that the more liberal doctrines will gradually become paramount. . . . And it is to this progressive spirit that we look for the ultimate attainment of the perfectest possible form of government—that will be where there is the least possible government, when the barbarism of restrictions on trade shall have passed away—when . . . the plague spot of slavery, with all its taint to free-men's principles and prosperity, shall be allowed to spread no further; and when the good old democratic party—the party of the sainted Jefferson and Jackson—the party, which, with whatever errors of men, has been the perpetrator of all that is really good and noble and true in our institutions . . . shall
be existing and flourishing over the grave of this fleeting whigism, and all its passing brood. ... Conservatism, in all its aspects, must leave the field—and the democracy must unite on its boldest and noblest and most radical doctrines.

But conservatism did not leave the field in the regular Democratic Party, and Whitman found himself without a job and without a party in mid-January of 1848. In the following September, after his jaunt to New Orleans, he was able, as the editor of the Free-Soil Brooklyn Freeman and a member from the Seventh Ward of the Free Soil General Committee for Brooklyn, to speak of President Polk, whom he had loyalty supported in the Eagle, as "What Sort of Man Has New-York Made President?" Such was the heading of a paragraph in the first issue of the Brooklyn Freeman; and the paragraph explained why Whitman, who had voted for Polk in 1844, had turned against the Democratic president of the United States: "The Chief Magistrate of this nation intimates that he would veto any law establishing freedom instead of slavery, nearer to the equator than a certain line. The state of New-York, by the most incessant and self-sacrificing efforts of the Democratic party—the Van Burenites most of all—gave the votes which made this man President. God forgive us!" And Jefferson was no longer the precursor of the incumbent president. The leading editorial of this first issue of the Freeman was "Jefferson on the Non-Extension and Abolition of Slavery." In the article Whitman disregarded the manifold problems with which Jefferson had been concerned and conveniently labelled him as, "in

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35See the facsimile of the first issue of the Freeman in Frey's Catalogue of the Whitman Collection in the Duke University Library.
the literal sense of the word, an abolitionist."^{36} But much earlier in the Eagle, Whitman had invoked the founding fathers in support of the Wilmot Proviso. On April 22, 1847, he had asked the citizens of Brooklyn "whether the mighty power of this Republic . . . shall be used to root deeper and spread wider an institution which Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and all the old fathers of our freedom, anxiously, and avowedly from the bottom of their hearts, sought the extinction of, and considered inconsistent with the other institutions of the land."^{37} Whitman earnestly endeavored to carry the lares and penates of the Democratic Party with him when he left the Eagle and the party; but it was not until the 1860's that he found a new and effective symbol in President Lincoln.


The mayor and the Common Council (as the board of aldermen were called) of Brooklyn were elected to office annually. When Whitman came to work for the Eagle, the incumbent mayor, Thomas O. Talmadge, and perhaps half of the Common Council were Democratic-Republicans. Whitman at once went to work on the impending city election, which was to take place in April. In "Some Hints to the Mayoralty Convention" in the Eagle for March 14, 1846, he pleaded for moderation in the exercise of political favoritism. "We who are immersed in the vortex of politics are

^{36} Ibid.

^{37}GF, I, 201.
too apt to imagine that our own little circle is 'the world','" he explained. "But in reality the great strength and numerical potency of the ballot-box ... comes from the quiet business man, the mechanics and the farmers of the land. ... It is far better to satisfy the calm common sense of these men than to please the brawlers of a party." Whether the political or the lay group of Democrats was the more satisfied Whitman did not say when in the Eagle for March 20, he reported that Talmadge (whose name he consistently misspelled, leaving out the "d") had been renominated for mayor: "Mr. Talmage, is one of those efficient, business, unimpeachable men, who just fits the office of the mayoralty--fits it, in our opinion better than any man who could have been selected,--taking all things into consideration."\footnote{Talmage had been a wholesale grocer in New York until 1837, and was to become president of the Broadway Rail Road Company of Brooklyn in 1858. What business he was engaged in from 1840, when he moved to Brooklyn, to 1858, is not clear. But he was an active politician. See Stiles, History of Brooklyn, II, 276-277.}

As for the Democratic nominees for the Common Council, they were "all worthy and estimable men--known to their friends, and the city at large, as possessed of sterling integrity and intelligence."

Talmadge had two opponents for the mayoralty: the Nativist candidate and the Whig candidate. Whitman discussed "The Opposition Candidates for the Mayorality \textit{sic} " in the leading editorial of the Eagle for March 25. He had thought the Nativists' party dead; as for their candidate: "His name is Pinckney--an obscure lawyer, an abolitionist, and a whig of the rankest rabidest kind." The Whig candidate for Mayor was Francis B.
Stryker, a journeyman carpenter, and erstwhile tax collector and sheriff. Stryker, according to Whitman, had no qualifications for the office he sought and was the sort of man to be ruled by an unscrupulous clique. "His good character," admitted Whitman, "is a thing of course; we could not expect any less. But a mayor must have something more than this."

From Whitman's later remarks in the Eagle, it appears that the Brooklyn Whigs had picked Stryker for his appeal to the city's large population of workingmen. Whitman's efforts to belittle this aspect of the Whig campaign is illustrative of the increasing importance of the common man's vote. The following editorial, under the head of "Funny Struggle," appeared in the Eagle for March 28:

It is every way amusing to see what efforts the principal whig organ in this city makes to push its candidate for the Mayoralty into the position of "a plain man of the people." Mr. Stryker forsooth is "not a great financier," and "not able to make a rhetorical speech," and so on. But Mr. Stryker has "lived with the masses, and attracts them to himself, as the magnet attracts steel." . . .

As to the spasms of the whigs hereabout, in the way of identifying themselves and their men with the real people--

39 "While thus working as journeyman in his brother's employ, at twelve shillings per day, he was much surprised in the spring of 1846, at receiving the whig nomination for mayor." Stiles, History of Brooklyn, II, 277. Stryker was thirty-five years old at this time, ten years younger than Talmadge.

40 The Eagle often gave Stryker credit for such charitable acts as nursing a destitute immigrant family, ill with ship's fever, when no one else in Brooklyn would come near them; taking homeless waifs off the streets; and, on one occasion, taking home a respectable young lady who had gotten off the Fulton Ferry considerably the worse for a toddy she had taken in New York to keep out the cold.
it is little but cool brazen impudence! Nine out of ten of that perfumed, finical, dainty faction will not touch a sturdy working-man's hand, large and dark with honest labor, at all, on any terms. . . . Stryker is a mere instrument in the hands of certain selfish whigs in Brooklyn. . . . And in order to gain his election they have prepared more than one "cunningly devised fable" . . . and lastly this laughable proposition that we are the aristocrats and they the friends of the masses! . . .

But despite Whitman's repeated appeals in the Eagle for the citizens of Brooklyn to support the genuine people's ticket, Stryker, the journeyman carpenter, was elected mayor by a substantial majority and the Whigs secured half of the eighteen seats on the Common Council. Whitman was humorously philosophical about the possible results of Stryker's election: "We hardly think he can do much harm; and for expecting good, we are quite comparable to the blessed ones whom a 'colored brudder,' described as not looking for any, and, therefore 'w'a'nt gwine to be disappointed.'" But Whitman was going to be, if not disappointed, at least irritated.

The Eagle had censored the conduct of the Common Council prior to the April elections in an editorial entitled "Municipal Short-Coming" in the issue for March 27, 1846. Whitman first made it clear that Mayor Talmadge was not to be blamed for any of the shortcomings of the board of aldermen, since his powers were limited by the city charter. But the Common Council itself—

Who that has regularly attended the debates in the legislative branch of our Brooklyn government will deny that the useful and sensible bear but the tithe of a proportion to the flippant, the verbose, and the personal? The real business of the corporation is transacted in a few minutes; the folly and vulgarity of the corporation take up many weary and tiresome hours. . . . The coarse sneer, the retort, the imputation of falsehood, and all the long train of dock-loafer vulgarity ought to condemn every one who indulges in them, to a hopeless obscurity for ever. . . .
And who was to blame for this ill-placed vulgarity? The "Whig black-guards in the Common Council," as Whitman explained in an article of that title in the Eagle for April 7, who lacked "all good manners, good sense, and common decency." A new Whig leader, however, elected to the Council in April 1846, was to become the blackguard par excellence for the Eagle's editor, and Mayor Stryker was to be labelled the new alderman's catspaw.

State elections took place in early November of 1846. It appears that a Mr. Van Brant was granted a license on or about October 30, to operate an omnibus from Fulton Ferry to East Brooklyn. Soon after the election it was rumored that he had voted for the Democratic ticket, and about eight days after the election his license was revoked.\(^1\) Whitman sprang to arms. The Eagle for November 28, contained a "New Text Book For Mayor Stryker" in which the mayor was likened to a jealous monarch because of the revocation of Van Brant's license, and his so-called "prime minister," a Mr. Fowler newly elected to the Common Council,\(^2\) was defined as "a convenient mouthpiece; and a fit instrument to do all the dirty work of the Whig party in the board." On December 1, the Eagle carried an editorial--"That Omnibus Monopoly"--which illustrates Whitman's dexterity in conventional journalistic rhetoric and pseudo-artlessness as well as the malignancy of contemporary political exchanges.

\(^{1}\) This summary of the situation was compiled from several letters to the editor of the Eagle.

\(^{2}\) This apparently was the high point in Mr. Fowler's career, as it was impossible to identify him in any of the histories of Brooklyn available to the writer of this study.
It may be as well to observe, in recurring to this subject again, that, as far as our opinions of... it are concerned, we do not involve the persons interested in the granting or withholding of the license; it is the principle—it is the wrong which has been done. Have we to stand on the etiquette of the old rusty courts of Europe? In memorializing OUR SERVANTS, are we, the common people, to weigh nice phrases and observe the humble attitude of Austrian or Russian suppliants at the feet of the Emperor or Czar? Is every little word, \[43\] that may be twisted into an offence at the high and mighty dignity of the Mayor,

("Upon what meat doth this, our Caesar, feed, That he is grown so great?"

to be a reason for depriving us of our plainest rights? A very dignified and high-mannered gentleman is Mr. Fowler himself in the Common Council—blackguarding night after night, with his filthy tongue and vile phrases, the character of some of our worthiest citizens. ... Your clown when he accidentally gets a chance of claiming the position of a gentleman is the touchiest fellow in the world!

Van Brant's license was soon restored to him, and on December 8, Whitman admonished, "Well we advise Messrs. S. and F. never to let us catch them cutting up such a caper again!"

The two Whig gentlemen did not cut precisely that caper again, but their behavior continued to evoke harsh criticism in the columns of the Eagle. On January 7, 1847, the paper indignantly referred to Fowler's gratuitous attacks, in the meeting of the Common Council the night before, on several of his fellow aldermen (mostly Democrats). Fowler had "out-Heroded Herod." The motives for his disgraceful conduct, as Whitman professed to see them, was "probably ... nothing but his own envious,

\[43\] In a petition addressed to the mayor and aldermen, Van Brant had complained that his license had been "capriciously" revoked.
jealous, and disappointed nature—full of twopenny venom and baffled ambition." It was the mayor's duty to prevent such spectacles, but he had "sat meekly in his chair" through it all. The Eagle hoped that the mayor had "not yet become quite such a catspaw in the hands of a clique, as to make him powerless to quash these scenes." During the next few months, Whitman continued to inveigh against the ill-natured antics of Fowler, and against the inefficient way in which Stryker presided over the sessions of the Council. It may have been Fowler's personal character that Whitman particularly disliked rather than his political character. At least he so avowed in an article in the Eagle for February 2, in which he discussed more antics of the alderman under the heading of "The Caliban of the Common Council." "It is not the political complexion of the alderman alluded to," declared Whitman, "that induces such remarks as the foregoing; for . . . we candidly respect and give our good-will to, many of the whig members of the board, in everything else than their party character." Indeed, Whitman often claimed, the Whigs in the Council were as disgusted by Fowler's coarse and bullying ways as were the Democrats; and on March 24, the Eagle informed its readers, "We are sorry to add a portentous hint that the Sycoraxian's occupation is likely to be gone, in the next municipal corps—as the personage hitherto

Whitman's jibes at Fowler were returned on occasion. The Eagle for January 14, 1847, contained this item: "Among divers pretty compliments paid us by a certain Whig Alderman, (through the Advertiser) appears the remark that we 'look a great deal like Satan,' &c."
identified with the part is 'left out' from the new company." Fowler in fact shortly passed from the scene, for the Whigs chose another candidate to represent the Fourth Ward. But Stryker remained as a candidate for re-election to the mayor's office. On April 10, a few days before the 1847 election, Whitman remarked to his readers: "It is well known that since Mr. Stryker has been mayor of Brooklyn, he has been managed by two or three persons. . . . If the present mayor can't act for himself, what on earth is the reason for his wishing to be a candidate again?" Whatever Mr. Stryker's motives in running for mayor again, he was re-elected on April 13, and his party gained a majority in the Common Council.

Though the old Common Council as a whole had possessed more amiable qualities than had Alderman Fowler, it had not taken its duties seriously enough to please the Eagle. For example, Whitman had reported on March 16, 1847, that, on the previous evening, the Common Council's "six hours' session was productive of little else than drowsiness to all present and was for the most part frittered away in frivolous discussions about trivialities." The new Council seemed an improvement over the old when Whitman reported on "The New City Government" in the Eagle for May 4, 1847. "As to Mr. Stryker," said Whitman, "we never thought him at all fit for the office of mayor--and don't think so now." However, the new Whig Council had at least one merit--that of brevity in transacting business. "If the whigs behave well in their offices we shall treat them with consideration," promised Whitman. "If not--if they don't keep the streets clean, the lamps lighted, and observe a proper economy in outlays--also, giving us
Fort Greene park— they needn't expect any mercy." But the new Common Council did not, no more than the old, keep the streets clean, or the street lamps lit, or want to give the citizens Fort Greene for a park, or do many other things that Whitman thought they should. His whole tenure at the Eagle, before and after the election of 1847, was marked by a constant prodding of the city government to efficiently do its duties.

It was noted in the preceding chapter that the Common Council in both 1846 and 1847 was reluctant to appropriate more than a token sum for the celebration of the Fourth of July. In both years Whitman began campaigning early in the Eagle for a sufficient appropriation, and in both years was left to lament the niggardliness and lack of patriotism of the aldermen. Another project that occupied his two years with the Eagle was his urging of the Common Council to purchase the Revolutionary site of Fort Greene for a city park. Whitman anticipated the time when the area about Fort Greene would be a congested region of brick and masonry, but already that section of the city needed "lungs," as he frequently expressed it. In the Eagle for June 11, 1846, he wrote:

There, too, the mechanics and artificers of our city, most do congregate. There you will see row upon row of their neat wooden houses, with unpretensive appearance—and without the ornamental attractions, (except the plentiful children thereabout, may be called so,) which are characteristic of the Heights. We have a desire that these, and the generations after them, should have such a place of recreation as Washington Park [Fort Greene's proposed name as a park], where, of hot

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45 See GF, II, 46-50, for an example of Whitman's many editorials on this subject.
summer evenings, and Sundays, they can spend a few grateful hours in the enjoyment of wholesome rest and fresh air.

Despite the law which the legislature at Albany passed on April 27, 1847, to provide for the fencing of Washington Park on Fort Greene, it was not until after Whitman had left the *Eagle* that the Common Council provided for tax assessments to pay for the park.

Whitman's most persistent grumble against the city government was over dirty streets and street lamps that did not burn. Beginning in the fall of 1846 and continuing until he left the *Eagle*, Whitman time after time called on the Common Council and the city lamp inspector to do something about the street lamps which burned only fitfully or not at all on the whale oil which fueled them. On September 21, 1846, he warned, "The ground of this complaint must be removed, or there will be difficulty somewhere." The ground of the complaint was not removed, and Whitman in almost every issue of the *Eagle* commented sarcastically on the poor state of the Brooklyn lamps.\(^\text{16}\) On December 4, he asserted that though the city had contracted for "pure winter pressed sperm oil," it had received only summer or fall oil; and on December 8, he was indignant because the Council,

\(^{16}\) For example, the *Eagle* reported on November 23, 1846: "As it is our office to chronicle all the very remarkable things of the age . . . we record that last night, Sunday night, the *lamps in Brooklyn* burned until 9 o'clock in the evening. This is still more remarkable, as the preceding evening most of them went out before 8. The lamp-lighting department of Brooklyn is mismanaged, most outrageously!" The street-lighting problem also suggested Shakespearean allusions (of which the *Eagle*'s editor was tremendously fond) similar to that in the *Eagle* for December 22, 1846: "We understand that Simpson of the Park Theatre has engaged six of the Brooklyn street lamps to darken the stage in the ghost scene in Richard III, at its next performance." Also see OF, II, 55-57.
the night before, had ordered nearly $600 paid to the contractor who furnished the oil. The lamps continued their flickering career during the following year, causing the citizens of Brooklyn considerable inconvenience when the moon did not shine; and on September 7, 1847, Whitman was outraged by the raise in salary given the city lamp inspector: "As a payer of taxes for what we don't get an equivalent, we should just like to know what the common council means, by increasing the salary of the present lamp inspector $150 to a total of $750." Three days later he pointed out that dark streets were precisely "what burglars and rowdies desire." "Will the increase of salary sharpen the inspector's vision to discover and remove the evils we complain of?" asked Whitman. "Nous verrons." But the inspector's vision was not sharpened by his raise in pay, nor, apparently, did Mayor Stryker and the members of the Common Council heed the Eagle's constant scolding. Whitman vacated his editorial post in January of 1848, still expostulating at the "Egyptian darkness" that fell over Brooklyn almost every night.

Whitman was no more successful in prodding the street inspectors than he was in prodding James Van Dyke, the lamp inspector. Mrs. Trollope

47 Whitman was indeed a tax payer, as he had acquired the title, on May 25, 1847, of the house his parents lived in at 71 Prince Street, in the Seventh Ward. See Allen, The Solitary Singer, p. 599.

48 Whitman began using French phrases in his journalistic writings long before he came to the Eagle (and the New Orleans Crescent), as has been pointed out by Rubin and Brown, Whitman of the Aurora, p. 11. The use of French phraseology was a characteristic of many metropolitan newspapers of the period.
and Mr. Dickens had made the dirty streets of the American cities notorious, but they had not incited any pronounced movement toward cleaning them. The pigs were still there rooting about the garbage, and so was plain dirt (or mud, when it rained). On March 18, 1846, in an editorial entitled "Clean the Streets," Whitman commented on the filthy condition of the local thoroughfares and recommended that the street inspectors institute immediate work with "broom, shovel, and cart." He warned, "We shall keep our eye, (and nose, too,) open from this time forth—and if the officers don't carry out ideas of this sort, we shall lash them soundly every few days."

In the months that followed, Whitman was sometimes pleased but more often displeased by the way the street inspectors carried out their duties. During the summer of 1846, the streets were generally clean enough to suit the Eagle's editor, due largely to the frequent rains which washed Brooklyn's dirt into the East River. But in the fall and winter, they became uncomfortably untidy again. On March 21, 1847, Whitman wrote:

> Our invocation to the city government—pursued in the strain of thirty similar articles written within the past year—in behalf of clean streets, and suggesting the addition of more force to that effect—is taken by one of the whig papers of Brooklyn, as a deep-laid plot—a sort of Guy Faux [sic] affair, which is meant to blow up Brooklyn whiggery. Ridiculous! We want the streets of Brooklyn cleaned of all rubbish; leaving only the whig organs and whiggery, which are quite enough, in all conscience. . . .

Whitman, who placed the final blame for the "shameful condition" of the streets on Mayor Stryker, continued his invocations to the city government, noting on May 13, that the accumulation of dirt in Prince Street, where his family had its residence, was the result of that street not having been cleaned in nearly a year. The Eagle, in the summer and fall months that
followed, noticed only the rain as an active agent in cleaning streets; and on December 30, about two weeks before he vacated his editorial chair, Whitman noted that "Not in the memory of 'the oldest inhabitant' have Brooklyn streets been so abominably dirty as at the present writing," despite his unremitting crusade for cleaner thoroughfares.

Street obstructions, some resulting from the slowness with which various repairs were made, were also a subject for complaint by the editor of the Eagle. On September 28, 1847, he observed that the municipal government was dilatory in all things, including street repairing. "Some four weeks have now been used in patching that little bit of Fulton street, (hardly four rods in length,) just at . . . the very part of all Brooklyn which is used most as a thoroughfare for vehicles. . . . The work should, at the utmost, have taken no more than four or five days." The repaving of "that little bit of Fulton street" was not completed until two months later. On December 2, Whitman remarked that this repaving, "which should have been completed in a few days, consumed months." The fault was with "the executive power of the city," just as it was in the case of the slowness with which a public cistern was being built in Prince Street. The public cistern was desirable (Whitman frequently recommended the building of more public cisterns for use in fighting fires), but it would probably remain unfinished all winter, since the city saw fit to often employ but one man on its construction. Meanwhile, "not an evening passes without alarm and danger being created in the neighborhood, through some unadvised driver getting in the toils there, or some stranger half breaking
his bones." On January 10, 1848, only a few days before S. O. Arnold became the new editor of the Eagle, Whitman complained, "Those open mouths yet remain to the public cistern in Prince street."

Another sort of street obstruction, of a more or less portable nature, was also inveighed against by the Eagle. On May 26, 1846, Whitman remarked on the increasing habit of moving houses through the public thoroughfares. "Generally speaking," he said, "the privilege saves but a few dollars to some wealthy man, who is desirous of putting up a larger structure on his property." And since the practice interfered with the passage of traffic, Whitman believed that the Common Council, in the public interest, should not grant house-moving privileges to any person. The aldermen should remember that "Brooklyn is not now a small village, as it was fifteen or twenty years ago; it has become a man and must put away childish things."

The Common Council did not follow Whitman's suggestion that they deny house-moving privileges, and in the fall of 1846, the Eagle illustrated the justice, as it seemed to it, of its complaints by tracing the passage of a house down Myrtle Avenue. The first of the series of items following the peregrinations of the house appeared on October 12, when the Eagle noted that the house had commenced its travels on the preceding day and would probably block the street for several more days. Ten days later, the Eagle reported that the house "was seen last evening, in the position of giving 'one long, lingering look behind' into the avenue . . . as if on the point of paying its respects to Stanton street." Whitman paid his last respects to the perambulating house on November 6. "Wending our way
quietly down Willoughby street last evening we were suddenly brought to
a full stop at Stanton street," he reported, "by an immense ugly looking
pile . . . completely blocking up not only the street, but the sidewalks,
and extending into the lots on each side!" It was his "ancient friend
that same old house, which has been for several weeks past on its journey
down Myrtle avenue." Perhaps the house intended to make a tour of the
entire city; in that case, "the present generation (including you and us,
reader) will be sleeping in the grave," before it ever got opposite the
Eagle's office.

Whitman's attempt to badger the Common Council into prohibiting
the moving of buildings through the public thoroughfares was, of course,
completely unsuccessful; for Brooklyn in the late 1810's, was in the
process of almost doubling its population, and house-moving was but one
of the symptoms of that growth. After November 1816, Whitman seldom
reverted to the subject of house-moving. The Whig mayor and the Common
Council were more spectacularly vulnerable in their failure to keep the
streets cleaned and the lamps lighted, and the Democratic editor of the
Eagle found ample copy in these municipal shortcomings with which to heckle
the opposition party. If one judges by the Eagle of 1816 to 1818, the Whigs
were hostile to efficient city government in Brooklyn as well as to the
manifestation of national destiny in the southwest.

5. Banks and Currency.

Economic matters in the late 1810's were closely connected with
politics, as they are in any era. Earlier, Whitman's idol, Jackson, had
destroyed the bank of the United States, whose recharter had been urged by the Whigs, in the second term of his presidency. Another though lesser Democratic idol of the Eagle's editor was Van Buren, who had secured with difficulty the passage in 1840 of the Sub-Treasury Bill, which established an independent national treasury unconnected in any way with any bank, state or national, and which provided that the receiving and disbursing of government funds be done on a strictly specie basis. The independent treasury was, however, short-lived, for the bill which had established it was repealed in the following year by Tyler's administration. But Polk, who became president in 1845, had pledged during his campaign, with the approval of the Democratic-Republican Party, to secure the enactment of a lower tariff and the re-establishment of an independent treasury. He redeemed both pledges in 1846.

One of the salutary effects of the Sub-Treasury Bill had been the elimination of government deposits as one of the bases on which state banks had issued excessive and inflationary amounts of paper money.\(^9\) This virtue of an independent treasury was stressed by Whitman when he joined the Democratic band-wagon for a new sub-treasury bill in an article in the Eagle for March 19, 1846, titled "An Independent Treasury—How It Will Affect the Working-Men." It was the Whig doctrine, he pointed out, "to offer a man a dollar and a half in March, instead of his dollar—but at the same time scattering so much artificial money in circulation, as

\(^9\) See GF, II, 78-83, for an extended article by Whitman on this subject.
to make the nominally increased wages bring but three-quarters as much as the dollar only." The banks were like those ancient frauds, the pagan temples, and their "priests sit and send forth flimsy deception, not in Delphic sayings, but in printed sheets." The best remedy for this situation, asserted Whitman, was "for the government . . . to receive and pay out nothing but hard money, to retain in its own hands the entire and unlimited control of its own funds, without the least favor or partiality to any moneyed corporation, and indeed without recognizing their existence in its transactions."

On April 1, under the head of "A Truly Noble Reform," the Eagle triumphantly announced that the Sub-Treasury Bill had passed the House of Representatives by a large majority. The workingmen and farmers, opined the paper, should be particularly pleased by this, since they were the ones who ultimately suffered from the fluctuations of paper money. "It may seem otherwise to the superficial observer, who in times of financial depression beholds a few score great merchants 'bursting,' and large capitalists in difficulty," Whitman stated authoritatively. "But to one who has studied the subject, it has always been plain that on the masses rest at last the deposits [sic] of the surging waves." An independent treasury would keep active "a constant vein of solid and wholesome money." The Whigs (and a number of conservative Democrats connected with banking activities\(^50\)) were not as pleased about the bill as was the editor of the

\(^50\) For example, the New York Sun, a Democratic paper, was "bitter" about the independent treasury "scheme," according to a brief item in the Eagle for April 2, 1846.
Eagle, and on April 8, the latter replied to some of their criticisms. The New York Journal of Commerce had complained that it could not get a copy of that "Bill of folly and madness," so Whitman obligingly devoted half a column to the contents of the bill. He noted that the Brooklyn Star was predicting "one currency for the people, and another for the government." This was nonsense, said Whitman, for Section Twenty of the bill stated that the government would pay its creditors in gold and silver. The Star also professed to tremblingly anticipate an evil day of purely specie currency. Such a day, Whitman was certain, would never arrive, for paper money was a convenience when freed of its inflationary dangers. If the government were restrained from meddling with paper currency (and the new bill would do just that), the businessmen and financiers could settle among themselves on the safest way in which to regulate such currency. "Necessity, and the law of self-preservation and profit, and the sharp eyes of the Yankee people, will do less than they have ever done before, if they don't arrange forthwith all those means and appliances necessary to remedy the 'evil.'"

In the weeks that followed, Whitman continued his campaign for the Sub-Treasury Bill. Typical of his editorials on this subject was one, "Money That Is Not Money," on April 10. He spoke of the alarm of the New York bankers and of "Wall street, the mart of paper money dealings." The Whig papers daily predicted that the banks would fail if the bill passed. "They talk as though nothing supported artificial money except acts of legislatures," said Whitman. "And . . . they are nearer right than they
would be willing to admit if pinned down in a corner." He thought that one desirable effect of the establishment of an independent treasury would be the elimination of the less stable banks through failure; and he asked: "Working men! all men! will you that the government lends its potential credit to bolster up what without such credit will fall to the ground?" The government soon withdrew its "potential credit" from the banks, for the Sub-Treasury Bill was passed by the Senate and signed by President Polk on August 6, 1846, and the independent treasury system was established which lasted until the enactment of the Federal Reserve Act in 1913.

In an editorial already noted—"An Independent Treasury—How It Will Affect the Working-Men"—Whitman suggested that "when the next bloated bank gets too tall for its roof, and tears away the old edifice to make room for a bigger, we suggest as most appropriate for its copy, some of the temples dedicated to Mercury, the god of thieves." Bankers were "selfish . . . purse-proud, and full of all corruptions." Whitman reminded his readers that he was, of course, referring only to the majority of banks; for there were some exceptions—"several banks conducted on fair and honorable principles as far as it is possible for them to do so." A brief paragraph in the Eagle for March 27, 1846, entitled "Banking," seemed to illustrate the justice of Whitman's distrust of most banks. Its first sentence read: "In Maine there are 30 banks, of these 28 are worthless; three at three per cent discount, and one at 8 per cent discount, and four good ones." The remainder of the paragraph gave similar
statistics on the banks of New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut; of the seventy-two banks in these five states, only nineteen were good and the rest were worthless or doubtful, usually the former. Whitman did not indicate the source for these figures, but they probably were not greatly exaggerated. Banks were chartered by the individual states, but they were of widely varying stability. "While some of the banks were sound, most of these were eastern institutions, and even in that section the reserves required by law were often too small, and the credit extensions too great," states a modern historian. "There was much confusion, too, because of the plentiful, variegated, and easily counterfeited bank-note currency." 51 In addition, the values of the bank-notes were fluctuating. Probably much of Whitman's concern with paper money and the general weakness of the banks was motivated by his desire to see the Sub-Treasury Bill passed, for after August of 1846, he seldom referred to either of the subjects in the Eagle.

However, Whitman's motives were not entirely ulterior. He genuinely wished to protect his subscribers against worthless or depreciated paper money issued by unstable or insolvent banks. The lead article for the Eagle of March 6, 1846—"Shaving and Shinplasters"—objected to the frequent practice of New York and Brooklyn employers "of purchasing uncurrent money from Brokers, and paying it out to laborers and mechanics for

their wages." When the worker bought necessities with these notes, they were not accepted at face value, of course, but were discounted by the storekeepers. This was unjust to the workers, said Whitman, but their employers apparently believed that "in the hands of the poor, bad money is just as useful as good." The merchant who accepted these uncurrent "shinplasters" might be the loser if the notes became worthless before he could get rid of them.

But that the workman is frequently the loser, it is impossible to deny. Notes of Banks in an unsafe or insolvent condition, which are liable to break at any moment, and in which the community has but little or no confidence, are purchased at a discount, and paid out in the manner we have stated. If the man to whom they are paid happens to keep them over night, he is apt to find next morning that the Bank which issued them has failed --and then the laborer's wages and the comfort of his family are sacrificed, to enable his employer to profit by the shaving operation.

Even if it was the storekeeper and not the workman who had the notes in his possession when they became worthless, it was still the workingman who suffered. The merchant could get his money back only by increasing the prices of his goods, and as a result the losses resulting from this circulation of shinplasters "fall chiefly, if not exclusively, upon the laboring classes." This evil, it seemed to Whitman, could be eliminated if "our mechanics and laborers insist on receiving their wages in cash."

In the same editorial, Whitman remarked on the habit of "associations of knaves and swindlers" in New York of buying up worthless charters of "exploded" banks in other states, making themselves various officers of these firms, circulating their worthless notes and discounting
them until a large number are in circulation, and then "suddenly disappear, and leave the holders of the miserable stuff to suffer for their credulity." Just such a bogus banking firm was passing its bank-notes at that very time among the inhabitants of Brooklyn and New York, and in parts of New Jersey as well. For several months Whitman warned his readers against this company, known as The Bank of the Georgia Lumber Company, until the anticipated denouement closed the matter.

The Eagle for March 3, 1816, printed a query from a reader which asked if such a bank known as the Georgia Lumber Company existed in Maine, and if the Wall Street broker, Peck, was the same Peck who signed the notes of that bank as "President." The editor of the Eagle replied: "We understand that some persons are making great efforts to get the bills of that concern into circulation in this neighborhood. We think we have banks and bank paper enough of our own, and always view with suspicion all attempts to make foreign Bank notes part of our New York currency. . . We have had enough of shinplasters in this neighborhood." On the following day, the Eagle quoted from a letter which had appeared in the Newark Daily Advertiser relative to a flood of three-dollar bills issued by The Bank of the Georgia Lumber Company. According to the Advertiser's correspondent, the bank, which professed to be chartered by the State of Maine, was completely unauthorized to do business in that state. From this date on, Whitman persistently warned his readers against accepting the bank-notes of the Georgia Lumber Company. Typical of his warnings is the following item which appeared in the Eagle on March 11:
BANK OF THE GEORGIA LUMBER COMPANY AGAIN. -- The managers of this fictitious Bank are still making great efforts to force its worthless paper into circulation. We once more tell them and the community generally that any man who passes the bills of this concern... is liable to be imprisoned for a term of seven years. We know that some persons who claim to be very pious, respectable and exemplary citizens are engaged in this infamous attempt to swindle the public... Mechanics and laborers! have nothing to do with the vile trash, and if any scoundrel attempts to pass it, to you, make a complaint against him at the Police Office. That is the only way to break up the concern, and protect the public.

The notes of this firm were still in circulation on April 25, when Whitman again warned his subscribers against them, saying they were "not good for anything except tinder." Three months passed before this worthless currency ceased menacing the public. On July 15, the Eagle briefly noted that "this shinplaster concern has stopped." Its New York agent had disappeared the day before.

Some banks were worthwhile, and one such was the Brooklyn Savings Bank whose new home Whitman visited on August 10, 1847, and duly reported on in the next day's Eagle. He admired its inside stucco work, but he especially liked its function as a repository for the savings of "the

52Ironically, the first page of the Eagle for April 25, contained, as it had for the past month, a small advertisement (signed by D. R. Peck, 11 Wall St., New York) asking for Georgia Lumber notes at three-fourths percent discount. Of course Van Anden, and not Whitman, was responsible for the sale of advertising space in the paper.

53It was not only against "fictitious" banks that Whitman warned his readers. On May 20, 1847, he cautioned against doing business with the Mechanics and Farmers Insurance Company, whose president was a Mr. Salisbury. There was "no such company, and... hereabout no sane man would ever think of having 'Mr. Salisbury' to insure his property against fire risk... Mr. S. called upon us the other day; but failed to satisfy us that he was doing a legitimate business."
prudent poor." He speculated sentimentally on the private histories of the depositors, many of whom were working women whose savings were devoted to the "holiest objects"—the relief and sustenance of parents, husbands, invalids, and children. Indeed, "there might be seen, if they were unveiled, stout young hearts, made prematurely wise in the way of gain—but whose purpose sanctifies the chilling precocity for wealth." Whitman commended "to those of our readers who have no great plenty of this world's goods, the practice of putting by a weekly trifle for time of need." The savings bank formed the most convenient means of exercising this praiseworthy prudence. Though the Brooklyn Savings Bank may have issued bank-notes of its own, Whitman saw in its type of institution—in contrast with those too frequent banks that were either doubtfully stable or plainly fraudulent—a partial shelter for the masses from "the deposits of the surging waves" of paper-money fluctuations.

6. The Tariff.

Henry Clay finally got part of his American System into law when the Tariff of 1812 was enacted. Though this tariff was protective in character, Tyler had agreed to it because of the need for increased governmental revenue. Polk redeemed his campaign pledge to reduce the tariff when in 1846 the Walker Tariff (so-called after Polk's Secretary of the Treasury who

54 The Brooklyn Savings Bank had been established in 1827, "for the benefit of the laborer, the mechanic and domestic servant." Stiles, History of Brooklyn, III, 823.
was active in its passage) superseded that of 1842. The Walker Tariff was lower than the Tariff of 1842, but, as events proved, it produced more revenue than its predecessor. The new tariff had been vigorously opposed not only by the Whigs but by many northern and eastern Democrats. Their cry had been that a lower tariff would result in ruin for the manufacturers and financial depression for the country in general. On the contrary, the manufacturers and the nation as a whole became more prosperous than ever, and an even lower tariff was enacted in 1857.

The Eagle under Whitman's editorship consistently proclaimed, as was pointed out in the paper on November 2, 1847, "its enmity to high tariffs, and its friendship for the lowest possible ones, (even amounting to none at all)." Protection was "full as great a humbug, and as silly as Millerism." Whitman was basically a free-trade man, as he often asserted in the Eagle, and in part this stand was a result of his enduring dislike of excessive and restrictive legislation rather than of a fanatic faith in the inherent blessings of free trade. In the Eagle for March 20, 1846, Whitman noted with "almost devotional joy" the impending repeal of the British Corn Laws and the probable sharp reduction by the English of their high tariff on other articles of trade. The result would be near to free trade, but

55 Several factors contributed to the increasing prosperity of the American manufacturers: easier transportation because of extensions of the railroad system, a liberal patent policy which encouraged inventions, the population growth, and the rising living standard of the American people.
We are of course not so wild as to think that free trade is directly going to shower down on England . . . every blessing under the sun—and cause the people to become rich, well fed, well clothed, and happy. . . . It is as the removal of the corsets, the tight neckcloth, the pinching boot to the human body. It conveys no positive advantage,—it but lifts and carries off a disadvantage. The after doings . . . may be foolish, unjust, and unfortunate—but the perpetual capacity remains with that nation which is not hampered by restrictive laws, of quickly coming back to a wholesome condition again.

The Corn Laws were shortly repealed by the English, who also abandoned protection on a large number of other commodities. This encouraged the Polk Administration to push successfully the Walker Tariff.

Whitman of course was quick to deride the industrialists' gloomy prophecies of a financial collapse of the national economy if the Walker Tariff became law, and their efforts to align the workingmen and the farmers on their side of the question. Whitman remarked in the Eagle for March 7, 1846, that "the despair of the Massachusetts cotton lords and their satellites, at the prospect of the speedy reduction of the tariff to a revenue standard, is becoming ludicrous in the extreme." He laughed at their attempts to appeal to the mechanic, the laborer, and the farmer in behalf "of American industry—and 20 per cent dividends." The industrialists, Whitman declared, were not satisfied with the tremendous wealth which they had amassed by taxing the people; the workingmen and farmers, who really produced the country's wealth, "must still be subjected to onerous and unnecessary taxation, 56 that Abbott Lawrence, 56In the matter of taxation in general, Whitman anticipated Henry George's "single-tax" thesis. See OF, II, 71-76.
Nathan Appleton, and their associates, may revel in luxury." During the following months, Whitman saw to it that the large laboring population of Brooklyn remembered that the interests of the protectionists were opposed to theirs. As he remarked in the Eagle for September 3, 1846, "Has any one of our laboring fellow citizens such thin perceptions—does he imagine in his most abstracted dreams—that all this hubbub made by the pale-fingered richly-housed Whig manufacturers, and their organs, is for him, the laborer?"

The Walker Tariff was eventually approved by Congress, though with much difficulty, and went into effect on December 1, 1846. In the months (and years) that followed, the protectionists were as vocal as ever in demanding a high tariff despite the general prosperity. Whitman enjoyed being satirical at their expense by citing current industrial expansion, as when, on March 11, 1847, he asked, "Why don't they, in view of such facts as the following ('one of many') explode with grief and wounded sympathy?" The fact which followed was an exchange item which stated that $40,000 worth of stock, of a $100,000 total, had been subscribed to "at once" for a new cotton mill at Wickford, Rhode Island. On April 21, 1847, Whitman quoted a portion of a letter from Henry Clay to the "young whigs" of Auburn, New York, in which he regretted the loss of the election of 1844.

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57GF, II, 69.

58See GF, II, 65-67, for "a remarkably well sustained piece of satire" on this same subject.
because it had eventuated in the destruction of "the protective policy, under which we had made such rapid and encouraging advances." Clay's lament was best answered, Whitman said, by "the present condition of American commerce and the country. Never were our traders doing a better and sounder and more profitable business." The few months that had passed since the new tariff had gone into effect had convinced Whitman of the correctness of his belief that trade best regulated itself when freed of legislative restrictions. A part of "the corsets, the tight neckcloth, the pinching boots" had been removed from the economic body of the nation.

7. Wage-Earners and Immigrants.

The bulk of the voters in Brooklyn in the late 1840's was composed of the mechanics and laborers, and, as has been noted, both the Whigs and the Democrats courted their votes. An increasingly important element of these workingmen were the immigrants, particularly the Irish. They, too, were wooed by both the Whigs and the Democrats, though damned by the Nativists. The great potato famine of 1845-47 in Ireland caused the already steady stream of Irish to America to increase to a torrent.59 "They filled the labor gap left by the westward movement, for only 10 per cent became farmers, while the rest, generally too poor to buy land, and too intensely gregarious to endure the isolation of pioneer life, preferred to live in

59 By 1845, 1,000,000 Irish had arrived in America; of the survivors of the potato famine, 1,611,000 had arrived by 1860. Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Early America (New York, London, and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1950), p. 314.
the city.\textsuperscript{60} Though the most recently arrived Irish could not legally vote, many of their earlier-arrived compatriots could, and the day would come when they themselves and their numerous progeny could. Meanwhile, they were welcomed by construction contractors and by industrialists, who had lost many native workers to the operations of O'Sullivan's "manifest destiny." And they, and all the other emigrating nationalities, were welcomed by Walter Whitman, Esq.

"Come along, all hands, and welcome!" he hailed the peoples of Europe in the spring of 1846.\textsuperscript{61} It was no wonder that the impoverished Irish came, after their centuries of oppression by English landlords, remarked Whitman in the \textit{Eagle} for May 22, 1846, in his summary of "Foreign News" brought to New York by the steamship Britania. In view of the increasing starvation of the Irish, he asked, "shall we not welcome them? Shall they starve in their pent up and misgoverned island, while we have millions on millions of unoccupied and fertile acres, created by the same God who rules over them and us—and destined for the use of all his creatures who need it?" But not just the poorer sort emigrated from the Old World. On June 1, 1846, the \textit{Eagle} reported, after recollecting a time when immigration was much lesser, that "among the many thousands that arrived in our ports last week, we noticed in the streets of Brooklyn,

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{61}April 30, 1846. This welcome was preceded by the pleased observation that the German immigrants included the wealthy and educated as well as the poor.
on Saturday, a large number of apparently highly respectable people whom we should judge had not sought a home in this new world, from destitution of the comforts and necessaries of life. We bid them welcome to our shores!" Five days later in the *Eagle,* Whitman marvelled at the fact that 8,289 immigrants had arrived during the past week in New York alone.

"Curious to know where this immense accession to our population bestows itself," he said, "we took a stroll yesterday afternoon through Washington street, New York . . . and we truly saw fifty scenes which would have delighted Rembrandt himself." Extending from the Battery, the street was lined by "the most squalid habitations, each one being fitted out in the lower story as a low groggery." Here teemed the new arrivals from Europe, "in all manner of costume, and speaking all manner of dialect, from the ancient Erse and Teutonic, to the modern low Dutch." The immigrant had become so notable a component of the local scene that on July 13, 1847, the *Eagle* was constrained to give its readers a few definitions: "An emigrant is one who migrates or removes, bag and baggage, out of a country—an immigrant is one who migrates into a country. The same person who was an emigrant at the beginning of his journey or voyage, is an immigrant at the end of it."

As a newspaperman, Whitman was mostly concerned with the immigrants from Ireland; they formed the largest element among the newcomers and so had the greatest effect on the social and political life of Brooklyn. That the Irish contributed considerably to the rowdier life of the city cannot be doubted after reading the police-court news in the "City Intelligence" column of the *Eagle;* and that they were lacking in education
was inevitable in view of their usual peasant origin. But Whitman championed the "warm-hearted" Irish, as he often described them, and viewed their weaknesses with tolerance. He had no sympathy with the prejudices of the Nativists (and he generally identified the Whigs as latent Nativists). In an editorial in the *Eagle* for April 3, 1846, dealing with a laborers' strike, Whitman envisioned a "flippant whig gentleman" saying of the Irish, "They are a low ignorant set, and have no business here, at all!" Then Whitman framed this reply:

> Ah, Mr. Native, or Mr. Whig, you are true to your instincts, we see. The Irish laborers are ignorant in book-lore we grant—and perhaps uncouth in manners. But they are men like us, and have wants and appetites, affection for their offspring, and anger for all kinds of tyranny, and if they don't get work or food, they will starve to death. . . . Shall we suppose, because we came here a few years before them, that they have therefore no claim on the limitless . . . capacities of America for human happiness, not to say subsistence? Away with such miserly and monstrous doctrine! Let us, (for not all even of us democrats are free from the taint of this "foreign" prejudice) let us lift our minds out from the silly disposition to find fault with the foreigner, because he is not perfection and is derelict in some things. . . . The petty confines of the Old World are crowded to suffocation. . . . And shall we . . . not encourage . . . the drawing off from superannuated Europe of its poor? . . .

On September 30, Whitman referred to a letter from a Philadelphian which had been printed in the *Boston Evening Traveller* and which gave some of the causes of the destructive rioting two years before in Philadelphia between Nativists and Catholic Irish. One of the causes, as Whitman

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62 The Nativists were very much of a minority in Brooklyn. Of the 6,920 votes cast in the municipal election of 1846, only 284 were for the Nativist ticket. They were proportionately weak in New York City. See the *Eagle* for April 15, 1846.
quoted it, was "the introduction of a foreign population, unaccustomed to liberty regulated by law. The notion of liberty formed by these men is to do as they please." This was unjust, Whitman thought, as the Nativists had begun the riots and not the Irish. Furthermore, the Irish had brought a "wealth of sinewy arms, stout hearts, and an energetic will" to devote to the development of America's potentialities, and certainly there was more than enough room for them. Nor was it amiss to remember the contributions the Irish had made to the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812; and Whitman proceeded to list the heroes of both wars who had been either Irish by birth or by ancestry. "It is rather too bad, then," he concluded, "that a class of men who did their devoir in the very outset of our national existence . . . should still be subjected to these flings from people who ought to know and do better!"

Most of Whitman's remarks about the Irish in the Eagle were related to the Irish relief movement, in which both the government and private citizens were participants. An almost complete index (and summary) of the Eagle's support of the relief may be found in that paper's issue of July 7, 1847. The Whig Advertiser, referring to the Irish relief movement in Brooklyn, had said, "The first meeting was held, but not a word did the Eagle say to help the cause. The third passed and it remained

63 The Scotch-Irish were also included in the list, which allowed Whitman to refer to the parentage of Andrew Jackson.

64 The Eagle, March 4, 1847, remarked: "In the history of the selfish and dark and gloomy things of nations, this act of Congress dispatching the U. S. frigates Jamestown and Macedonian at the public expense with food for starving Ireland appears like a beaming star. . . ."
silent." Whitman indignantly quoted the Advertiser, and then said, "As early as the commencement of October last, we, in common with most other papers, seized the opportunity, on the receipt of the various arrivals of foreign news, to call the attention of our readers to the then approaching famine in Ireland," and after the fall elections, "we took frequent and warm interest in the relief movement." He then proceeded to cite the specific issues of the Eagle in which editorials had appeared supporting Irish relief, and pointed out that the Eagle, "with other Brooklyn papers," had received a vote of thanks for its efforts from the first meeting for relief. The political importance of the Irish was illustrated by Whitman's assertion that the Advertiser had endeavored to fasten "a partisan cast" on the relief movement: "It flourished in its editorials about the whigs giving more than the democrats--and endeavored to prove that the democratic administration was 'against' relief--and so on." Of course, on this and many other occasions, Whitman averred that the English editor of the Advertiser congenitally "hated" the idea of Irish independence. Meanwhile, he sent his files of the Eagle to Mr. Lees, and on July 9, he reported that the Advertiser agreed that the articles by him on Irish relief had actually appeared, but "were what printers call 'close,' that is the lines were not spaced apart!" This was an outrageous "quibble," cried Whitman; and he again accused the Advertiser of opposing Irish independence and of blackguarding O'Connell, the Irish patriot, and quoted supporting passage from that paper. "These make us regard the Brooklyn Advertiser as the 'enemy of Ireland and Irishmen,'" declared Whitman. "We appeal
to any true-hearted Irishman whether we are right or wrong."

Several hundred of these "true-hearted" Irishmen were involved in a labor dispute which furnished the most sensational local news (except, perhaps, for the city election) in the spring of 1846. Toward the end of March of that year, the laborers who were employed by the construction firm of Voorhis, Stranahan and Company, which was building the Atlantic Dock and Basin in South Brooklyn, went on strike for higher wages. The number of workmen on strike varied in stories in the Eagle from three hundred to six hundred, but it seemed to include all the laborers on the project, who, in turn, were apparently all Irish. The strike, which occasioned some violence, lasted until May and was closely followed by the Eagle. Ordinarily, Whitman had little to say in his paper about workingmen except as they were affected by paper money, the tariff, and, sometimes, slavery. But in his pieces on the strike at the Atlantic Dock, he offered some opinions on labor unions for the first and last time in that journal.

Whitman mentioned the strike for the first time in the Eagle on March 25, merely remarking that the strikers "say they are determined to prevent others from working at the old rates of 70 cents per day." On the following day, however, he printed a long editorial titled "Illy Paid Labor in Brooklyn." It began with this sentence: "There is hardly anything on earth, of its sort, that arouses our sympathies more readily than the cause of a laborer, or a band of laborers, struggling for a competence . . . and standing out against the exactions of grinding 'bosses'\(^\text{66}\)."

and speculators." Then Whitman reported that he had been informed that two evenings before, a large group of Brooklyn laborers had met to organize a "benevolent association" for the purpose of caring for its sick and burying its dead, and of regulating wages. At the meeting, letters had been read from three contractors who agreed to meet the demand of the workers for a daily wage of "7 shillings" (eighty-seven and a half cents). Voorhis, Stranahan and Company, however, had sent word that it would not make any terms except those which suited it. The Eagle, said Whitman, had no desire to meddle in the matter, but

It thinks that organized associations, to "regulate" the prices of labor, are the most fallacious things in the world. There is not, to our knowledge, one single instance of their having met with permanent success. They are, moreover, when proceeding beyond a certain limit, contrary to the dictates of that clear, high, immutable truth, the freer and the more without restrictions of any kind you leave trade and prices to regulate themselves, the better for all parties.

Clearly labor unions were of the same breed as tariff laws and morals legislation so far as the free-trade, Jeffersonian editor of the Eagle was concerned. But Whitman's sympathy remained for the workers as such. He referred to their miserable pay for a working day which extended from sunrise to dark, to their brief "dinner" period, the penalty they received (one-quarter of their day's wage) if they were only three minutes late to roll-call. "And many of these men have families of children to feed, and clothe, and educate--and potatoes are a dollar a bushel, and flour

67 A letter from a committee member of the Brooklyn Laborers' Benevolent Society, printed in the Eagle for March 27, stated that the three contractors had also agreed to a ten-hour day.
and beef unusually high!" he said. "Not four dollars a week—and the plentiful crop of children which most poor men get, living on such a sum for seven days! Let our philanthropists not go to oppressed England and starving Ireland for samples of scanty comfort; if these things are so, we have enough ground for our indignation in our very midst."

On April 2, the Eagle announced that a very good reason existed for the slowness with which the dirt heaps in the city streets were being removed: "the new Laborers' Association forbid the acceptance of the established prices by a portion of the men, unless all are set to work."

Whitman regretted that the laborers were going "to the very excess of injustice which they complained of in their own former employers." But Whitman had been misinformed. The next day the Eagle contained an editorial captioned "Oppress Not the Hireling!" which began:

Several of the members of the new Laborers' Association called upon us yesterday—and from the statement they made, we are constrained to believe that we have not done that Association, in all respects, justice. It did not prevent men from going to work at the prices demanded, unless all were set to work; our information ... must have been incorrect. ... On the contrary, its members will gladly receive work ... in any quantity, or from whoever will give it.

While upon this matter, we may as well improve the occasion to say a few words on the payment of labor in this country, and about the treatment of the lower grades of honest laborers. 87½ cents per day is all that Brooklyn laborers ask—and we do say ... that the man, or set of men, who refuse to give that price, show a most heartless meanness, and that if the curse of ill gotten profits does not attach to their wealth, it will not be because it is undeserved! Just a little over $5 a week! and that with children to support, as most of them have!

Whitman followed these remarks with an extended defense, referred to earlier
in this chapter, of immigrants in general and the Irish in particular. It was, he said, "the outpourings of honest heart-impulses."

Messrs. Voorhis and Stranahan remained adamant to the demands of the strikers; and on April 15, the Eagle reported that a party of Germans, who had been hired to replace the striking Irish, had been set upon by the latter, armed with clubs and stones, and driven from the dock area. Two days later, Whitman complained because the ringleaders of the Irish, whose names were known, had not been brought to justice. On April 20, the Eagle reported that three nights earlier a large shanty erected at the Atlantic Dock by Voorhis and Stranahan for their German workers, had been burned by the Irish; and since that night "a military corps" had been on guard there. Also, the company intended that very morning to put a large number of Germans to work on dock and basin; the sheriff and "the whole police force of the city" had already gone to the dock to guard the Germans and were to be followed shortly by General Underhill and several of the city's militia companies. The next afternoon, as he revealed in the Eagle for April 22, Whitman had visited "the scene of military operations at the Atlantic Dock." Two hundred Germans were working inside the lines on the dredging machines in the basin. A large crowd of men, women, and children were "gaping in wondering astonishment at the scene." "By particular favor we suppose," said Whitman, "(for the other loafers were kept

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68 See pp. 156-157 above.

69 The Irish had long been squatters in shanties on the company's property, and they steadfastly balked all efforts to eject them during the strike.
at a respectable distance,) we were passed through the guard, and proceeded over the drawbridge towards the barracks.* The scene was one of extraordinary repose, for the strikers, who ordinarily loafed in force about the dock, were nowhere to be seen. They were at that moment, Whitman explained, assembled with "two or three thousand persons, from Brooklyn and New York," upon Bergen Hill. There the Rev. N. O'Donnell, of St. Paul's Catholic Church, appealed to them to disperse, but a deputation from the New York Laborers' Union persuaded them to go to a hall, where the said deputation made "inflammatory speeches."  

Despite the thrashing in the streets of occasional Germans by occasional Irishmen, the environs of the Atlantic Dock remained quiet, and the militia returned to their civilian duties on April 23. On the same day, officers were roaming the city, rather unsuccess fully, with warrants for about twenty of the Irish ringleaders. Whitman fancied the storm was over. But it was not, for at dusk that day, as the Eagle reported on April 24, a party of the German workers at the dock, going to the South Ferry to return to their homes in New York, were attacked by a group of Irish. In the melee which followed, the Germans were worsted and fled. Deputy Sheriff John Swertcope appeared on the scene and called upon several citizens (one of whom had the interesting name of Dr. Moriarty) to help him stop the fray. The deputy and his allies managed to arrest two of the leading rioters, but their Irish compatriots

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70 In an editorial on April 24, Whitman accused these New York "rowdies" of inciting the Brooklyn laborers to riot.
rescued them. This battle, however, marked the end of violence in the strike. The Grand Jury immediately indicted a large number of the Irishmen involved in the rioting, and the Germans were molested no longer. By May 6, Whitman was able to announce that "a large number of the disaffected workmen have resumed operations, while many of the remainder have sought employment elsewhere." On May 11, he visited the Atlantic Dock where he saw the Germans and the Irish working peacefully side by side. Those Irish who had returned to the employ of Voorhis, Stranahan and Company, had been forced to accept that company's wage rate. The Eagle for August 22, writing of the five hundred men employed at the dock, stated that half the force was German and half Irish, and that the company intended to preserve that ratio as a safeguard against future strikes. "The wages given at the present time are 80 cents per day," remarked Whitman, "to those who labor in the bank--mostly Irishmen; and 85 to the dredgemen . . . who are all Germans." The standard summer wage before the strike had been eighty cents, so the Irish had gained nothing by their walk-out.

It is interesting to note that Whitman, after his "Oppress Not the Hireling!" of April 3, never again, in connection with the strike, spoke of the Brooklyn Laborers' Benevolent Society with any sympathy or accused employers of "heartless meanness" for not paying their "honest laborers" eighty-seven and a half cents a day. Naturally the physical violence practiced by the striking Irish was enough to alienate the sympathies of the Eagle's editor. But it was the theory behind the violence which was most repugnant to him: that the workingmen had the right to
"regulate" the price of their labor. As has been seen, Whitman believed that an organization devoted to that goal was a contradiction of the "immutable truth" that the less interference in trade and prices (including that of labor) the better for all concerned. His contention, he must have felt, had been validated by the course and result of the Atlantic Dock strike.

Irish laborers were not the only persons resentful of the low wages they got. The Eagle for August 19, 1846, cited the New York News as saying that the sewing girls of that city planned to hold a meeting to show their employers "that they had some 'independence' left, and that they will not be dealt with so shamefully for the future." Whitman commented on the "extortion" practiced toward the sewing girls and then added:

> Old gossips may prate about virtue and morality, but if any one will watch . . . these patient and gentle N. Y. sewing girls from day to day, and tell why they prefer the crust of bread and pallet of straw to silks and satins, luxury and fine living, they will be wise indeed. No wonder the pest houses and brothels in that city are increasing in number every day: no wonder that so many are seeking refuge from poverty and distress in those places, while such unrighteous treatment is dealt out to them. Something should be done, and done quickly, to remedy the evil.

When Whitman returned to the subject of underpaid working women again on November 9, he explained why he did so: "But when we see how the . . . incessant, honest efforts at reforming any old abuse, by means of newspaper-writing, at last succeed . . . we are inclined to think that in this subject of poor pay for females' work, good results will sooner or later follow from the faithful adherence of the press to . . . the matter."

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71 UPP, I, 137.
In a brief paragraph in the Eagle for November 20, Whitman remarked on the inconsistency of public opinion which sympathized with the workingman whose wages were lowered below a reasonable figure but did not sympathize with the workingwoman in the same position. And all workingwomen received "miserably poor" pay. Some people suggested that they should go into service; but, said Whitman, they forgot "that the supply of servants is already profuse, and that it is a more unpleasant life to an American girl, than any other which could be mentioned." In the few articles which Whitman wrote in the Eagle on this topic, he did not suggest any concrete means by which women might secure adequate wages. "The only remedy we know of," he said on one occasion, "is to be found in the operation of an awakened public opinion."

A third class of Brooklyn working people were the boys, largely apprentices and junior clerks. The Eagle almost never referred to any abuses in their employment, preferring to give them good advice on self-education and physical exercise. Occasionally, Whitman pontifically lectured the apprentices on their conduct toward their masters. "Be careful how you allow yourself to indulge in a spirit of secret fault finding

72 "Servants" in GF, I, 154-156, is not Whitman's even in part. The editorial, as its commencement indicates, is at best a paraphrase of a piece which appeared in Greeley's Tribune. It is possibly a direct quotation sans the benefit of quotes, as its diction and sentence style is not Whitman's. Whitman intended no deception, as he frequently and clearly indicated in the same manner ("continues the Tribune") other articles from exchange papers.

73 GF, I, 151.

74 See GF, I, 133-135; II, 207-209; UPP, I, 148-149.
with your employer," he advised apprentices in the Eagle for July 29, 1846. There were few masters without faults, and the faithful apprentice who overlooked his master's faults was sure to be handsomely rewarded at last. And if one unhappily had a cruel master, "even him you can bring to your feet by gentleness." While Whitman seemingly admitted that some masters were cruel, he must have felt that no great abuses existed in the apprentice system, as at no time did he lecture those who employed apprentices.

Those who were employers of junior clerks, however, were criticized by Whitman on a few occasions. On June 3, 1846, the Eagle briefly noted that it had received a letter, "apparently from a clerk in a dry goods store," urging that stores be closed at eight in the evening. The arguments of the correspondent were sound, but his communication had been much too long to be printed. No more was said on the topic until September 4, when, in an editorial entitled "Junior Clerks," Whitman quoted the Boston Bee as saying that clerks should meet and take measures to improve their condition. This reminded Whitman that two weeks earlier a young man had called at his office who had just been discharged by his New York employer. His salary had been fifty dollars a year. His "employer came over to Brooklyn—where, we believe, he resides—and outlaid just forty times the amt. of the young man's annual wages in a pew or pews in one of our fashionable churches." Most of the junior clerks in America, said Whitman,

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75This editorial—"Hints to Apprentices, &c."—was a reprint of one which Whitman wrote for the Brooklyn Star in 1845. See Freedman, Whitman Looks at the Schools, pp. 79-80.
worked like "dray-horses" and many received no money; and those who were paid in money ($50 to $150) were expected to board and neatly clothe themselves with that sum. Whitman lectured their employers.

They appear to forget that young fellow have stomachs which possess a marvelous affinity to bread and beef—have generally a great deal of spirit and ambition—are susceptible to kindness and generosity . . . like to enjoy . . . some of the numerous pleasures God has vouchsafed in this goodly world—like to have a few leisure hours now and then, and a few extra dimes in their pockets, for contingencies. All these things are seldom realized by those who employ clerks; it is a mere strife with them, to get the utmost possible service, for the lowest possible payment. Then, too, how rarely the employer enters with any thing like friendly interest into the personal hopes, aims, and schemes of those who work for him! . . .

Personally, Whitman concluded, he thought "the clerk market over stocked—and should never, except under peculiar circumstances, advise a boy to 'go into a store.'" But even so, the junior clerks were as much flesh and blood as their employers. And in the following year, Whitman was pleased to note in the Eagle for December 4, 76 that the dry goods stores of the city had agreed to close during the winter at eight o'clock instead of the customary nine o'clock (except for Saturday evening, at which time there was no limit). It would be a good practice, he thought, if all retail stores did the same so that their clerks might have "the use of their evenings." Clerks, and especially junior clerks (or "boys"), were "compelled to be less independent than mechanics," and their hours were longer than those of mechanics, lasting as they did from seven in the morning until nine or half-past nine at night. And of course their wages were

76 GF, I, 152-154.
inadequate. "It is irksome, at any time," declared Whitman, "for young people to be confined from morning till night in a sedentary way." One may be certain that the peripatetic editor of the Eagle wrote from the heart when he penned this line.

"There is a complete 'coast guard' all around the island, of leisurely cits who are in quest of seaside pleasures," Whitman remarked in a brief item unobtrusively tucked away in a corner of the second page of the Eagle for August 23, 1867. "The toiling million sic, however, are forced by poverty to remain amid the bustle, din, heat, smoke and turmoil of the city.---Alas, there is too much difference in men's condition sic." These sentences bear the mark of having been dashed off as a filler, and the last of them is so conventionally sentimental that one cannot credit it with having been composed other than perfunctorily. Certainly its sentiment was rarely, if ever, explicitly expressed in the Eagle at any other time during Whitman's stay on the paper. And the poverty of the "toiling million" was most often alluded to in connection with Whitman's favorite economic-politico projects of the independent treasury and low tariff. The young editor of the Eagle understood and sympathized with the plight of the under-paid worker, as has been noted. But he was confronted in the late 1840's by too many things more engrossing and demanding than poverty to devote much time to crusading against it. 77

77 Speaking in his later years of this period of his life, Whitman said: "The labor question was not up then as it is now--perhaps that's the reason I did not embrace it. It is getting to be a live question--some day will be the live question--then somebody will have to look out--especially the bodies with big fortunes wrung from the sweat and blood of the poor." Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden. 3 vols.; (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1915), I, 193.
The difference in men's conditions could not compete for the interest of a successful young journalist with manifest destiny, the Mexican War, Oregon, the Wilmot Proviso, the tariff, the sub-treasury, the Irish famine, the Brooklyn boom, politics, or even, as will be seen, with the movement to abolish capital punishment.
CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL SCENE

1. The Humanitarian Impulse.

One of the notable currents in the society of the American Republic from its beginning was that of humanitarian reform. The activities of Dr. Benjamin Rush are in the mainstream of this current during the early years of the Republic, for Rush supported educational and prison reform, humane care of the insane, and peace and temperance movements. Later reformers, especially in the 1830's and 1840's,\(^1\) shared Dr. Rush's philanthropic catholicity. William Lloyd Garrison, for example, was not only an abolitionist but also a worker for world peace and a delegate to the first World's Temperance Convention, held in London in 1846. Humanitarian reform was not an American phenomenon, owing its advent largely to the European Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement. Yet in the 1840's, the mass of the American people were intelligently aware of the arguments and objectives of contemporary reform, whereas the mass of the European population, even in England, was generally only half-conscious of the tenets and aims of humanitarianism except as they directly affected its individual members. This contrast between the Old and New Worlds may have been

\(^1\)After the Compromise of 1850, the anti-slavery movement tended to usurp the attention of many American reformers.
the result of the greater literacy of the Americans and the abundance of cheap newspapers available to them. So thought Alexander Mackay, a British barrister who toured the United States in 1846 and 1847. He was pleased to note that "on the great majority of questions of a social and political import which arise, every citizen is found to entertain an intelligent opinion. He may be wrong in his views, but he can always offer you reasons for them. In this, how favourably does he contrast with the unreasoning and ignorant multitudes in other lands!"  

The United States—with its democratic institutions, its religious tolerance, and its ample lebensraum—was a propitious spot for the cultivation of reforms, not to mention religious cults and social utopias. It lured from the Old World such reformers and utopians as Robert Owen and Frances Wright; but it had a thriving native stock as well. As a social historian has remarked: "The American reformer was the product of evangelical religion, which presented to every person the necessity for positive action to save his own soul, and dynamic frontier democracy, which was rooted deep in a belief in the worth of the individual... Education, temperance, universal peace, prison reform, the rights of women, the evils of slavery, the dangers of Catholicism, all were legitimate fields for his efforts."  

Whitman, like most of his fellow editors, commented on


3Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1944), pp. 2-3.
the earnest laborers in these various fields of reform and occasionally joined forces with them, though never so fanatically and indiscriminately as did Horace Greeley. He offered an explanation for his not being the complete reformer when he said to Horace Traubel in 1888, "I was in early life very bigoted in my anti-slavery, anti-capital-punishment and so on, so on, but I have always had a latent toleration for the people who choose the reactionary course." 4

Though Whitman may have been obstinately attached in his Eagle days to the anti-hanging cause, he was not inclined to radical theories of humanitarianism. Under the heading of "Quixotic Labors," he had the following to say of the notorious arch-reformer, Robert Owen, in the Eagle for June 6, 1846:

We notice that Robert Owen, the philanthropist and human reformer, has arrived again in this republic. ... Very well. We surely don't think R. O. will do any harm; in all probability, too, he will do no good.

At the time of the 'World's Convention,' got up in Clinton Hall, New York, we attended the debates of that singular gathering; 5 and were somewhat in doubt whether to laugh at the whole thing as a humbug, or commend it inasmuch as it contained the germs of bold though fruitless inquiry into the wrongs and evils of the world. The first day was certainly occupied with a greater quantity of bickering ... about unimportant forms, than we ever remember

4Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, I, 193.

5This so-called "World's Convention" took place in 1845, and was one of the more-or-less impromptu "congresses" which the elderly Owen (he was 75 in 1845) delighted in convening for the sake of airing his views before them. When in his eighties, he still made excursions from the country to London, calling "Congresses of Advanced Minds" and "Congresses of the Reformers of the World." See G. D. H. Cole, Robert Owen (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1925), pp. 230-232.
of having seen in any deliberative assembly before. Assuredly
such men (in this connection we except Mr. Owen; his demeanor
was patient and dignified) are the last ones to come forward
as reformers of the world . . .

Of Mr. Owen we may add that he seems to be an honest and
enthusiastic old man, and to believe what he would have others
believe. But the present system of society has, we opine,
little to fear from his hardest blows. There is truth in Mr.
O's speeches and addresses, two or three of which we have
listened to with much pleasure; and yet it is utterly chimerical
. . . to attempt remodelling the world on an unalloyed basis of
purity and perfection. God did not see fit to do so, and we
hardly expect the thing will be accomplished by Mr. Robert Owen.

Owen set about his routine of organizing meeting before which he expounded
his dream of a socialistic (and atheistic) utopia, and urged his hearers
to promote "a complete social and political revolution." "Ah, Mr. Owen!"
Whitman commented reprovingly, "when God has ordained that evil shall
exist, do you think that you can banish it altogether?" 6

Common sense told one that in a dualistic world evil was fundamental
and could not be eradicated entirely; but, as Whitman and his sentimental
generation knew, it could be alleviated. "How sweet is the remembrance of
a kind act!" rhapsodized the Eagle on March 28, 1846, in a style worthy
of an era which admired the writings of Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney. "As we
rest on our pillows, or rise in the morning, it gives us delight. We
have performed a good deed to a poor man; we have made the widow's heart
to rejoice; we have dried the orphan's tears. Sweet, oh! how sweet the
thought!" And in a muddled fashion one might dally with the idea of a
utopia, being careful to locate it very tentatively and vaguely in what
amounted to almost another dimension of time. So dallied the Eagle for
August 14, 1846, as it editorialized on the word "Philanthropy."

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6June 23, 1846.
One of the most beautiful words which our language has borrowed from the Greek, is... Philanthropy, signifying the "Love of Man." It has a musical sound; and the very utterance of it begets pleasant thoughts, and inspires prophecies of good... A vision, however, far off, of the relation existing between all men, as members of one great family; the duty and pleasure of loving and helping, one the other; the dwelling together of the nations in peace, as being of the same flesh and blood and bones, and bound together by the ties of a common brotherhood... these are the thoughts and feelings which must have lived somewhere, in some hearts in the olden time; and which, struggling for utterance, gave birth to this beautiful and musical speech... Let us rejoice in its existence, and seek to give [it] divine second birth in action.

But Whitman knew that the heaven of the philanthropists was indeed "far off," and he never asked the impossible when he appealed to the humanitarianism of his Brooklyn readers. Most of the reforms he advocated in the Eagle were sensible, and none were unique. They ranged from anti-capital-punishment to anti-swill-milk, and Whitman's remarks upon them illuminate the social scene of the 1840's.


Much of the "human interest" in the newspapers of the 1840's was provided by stories covering police-court proceedings. Benjamin Day, who established the first successful penny newspaper—the New York Sun—in 1833, appears to have been the first to capitalize on this sort of sensationalism when he hired George W. Wisner, a veteran reporter of the happenings at London's Bow Street police station, to cover the New York police courts. Wisner "relied largely on police reports and the coarse humor of the police courts for the interesting matter in his columns"; 7

7 McClung, The Daily Newspaper in America, p. 608.
and in doing so, he created the American police reporter, whose merits consisted in "being facile with his pen, and sufficiently indifferent (after the fashion of the press generally, of that day) to the feelings of the poor creatures left to its mercy." Whitman, who was police reporter as well as editor of the Eagle, frequently wrote in the accepted Wisner tradition when he prepared his daily report on what he had seen and heard during his morning visit to the Brooklyn police court. The police court ordinarily was a busy place each morning and its typical business is illustrated by the following item from the Eagle of July 9, 1847: "STATISTICS OF IMMORALITY.—Seventeen warrants were issued yesterday at the police office; of which nine were for assault and battery; five for disorderly conduct, drunkenness, and breach of the peace; and three for petit larceny." This daily procession of persons brutalized, as they often were, by drink and an unwholesome environment might have elicited some reformatory and humanitarian comments from the editor of the Eagle as he recorded its exhibitions of human folly and tragedy; but it did not. "Andrew Ryan, an aged subject of Alcohol Rex, and who has subsisted from the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, at the public expense in sundry jails, alms and watchhouses, was last night taken in charge by a watchman," reported Whitman on February 27, 1847. "When brought up to the police office he formed the most perfect

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8Ibid., p. 609.

9On the previous day, the police court had dealt with thirty cases, twenty-six of which had been for assault and battery.
specimen of perpetual motion ever seen in these demesnes, being afflicted with a shaking that would have done credit to a western ague. He was convicted of being a 'vagrom man,' and dealt with accordingly." Such was the flippant tone which characterized the Eagle's accounts of routine police business.

Though Brooklyn prided itself on being freer from the more sordid and violent crimes than was the metropolis across the East River, it had more important law-enforcement problems than the simple restraint of drunks, wife-beaters, bullies, and vagrants; and Whitman turned his attention to these more important matters with a greater seriousness than marked his treatment of the "Andrew Ryans." During Whitman's two years with the Eagle, Brooklyn was plagued by burglaries, which received due notice, along with advice on precautions to be taken, in the "Local Intelligence" column of the paper. "Burglarious demonstrations," as Whitman sometimes described them, steadily increased during 1846, and few arrests were made. The Brooklyn police, who worked on a fee basis, complained of being insufficiently remunerated; and on November 2, the Eagle demanded that they be adequately rewarded unless the city officials were resigned to seeing the number of burglaries continue to increase. "Something should instantly be done in this matter," Whitman announced, "or

10 On October 27, 1846, Whitman confessed that he had failed to report one burglary: "By one of those mishaps incident to the conduct of a newspaper, we were unfortunately made, in our police report, to represent a highly respectable lady as being the complainant against a person for an act of indelicate assault, instead of one of burglary. We accordingly take pleasure in making the desired correction."
Brooklyn will get a bad reputation, as an unsafe dwelling place." The burglaries increased, as Whitman had predicted, especially in the suburbs where an efficient watch was particularly lacking. The *Eagle* for November 9, suggested that the suburban residents of the city protect themselves with "a brace of patent revolvers ... together with a good watch dog." Perhaps some citizens followed this excellent advice, but on May 30, 1847, the *Eagle* printed the following melancholy report: "The old saw of 'thick as leaves in Vallambrosa' is no longer expressive enough, and it is accordingly to be changed to 'thick as burglaries in Brooklyn.'" For some time past we have regularly recorded at least one burglary per night." Again Whitman urged that the police be paid more for their efforts.

Earlier, on May 5, the *Eagle* had reported an assault by a foot-pad on a respectable citizen walking home from the South Ferry. On that occasion, after damning the poor street lights, Whitman had placed most of the blame for the crime on the city's inefficient police system: "It suggests itself to us ... whether there should not be good watchmen, paid a good price; a man can't take a mere pittance, and work as though he had reasonable wages." And Whitman commended the matter to the attention of his fellow citizens and the city fathers. On June 7, Whitman indignantly announced that the city would go on being inadequately protected against "midnight outrages." The Common Council had added twelve men to the watch

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11 For a watch dog, he advised "a cowardly 'cur of low degree'" whose craven howls would invariably wake the householder and frighten off the housebreaker.
in the sixth ward, the favorite theatre of operations for burglars and where as many as five burglaries a night occurred despite the increased police force; but the aldermen had decided that they could not raise sufficient funds to increase the watch in the rest of the city or to raise its pay. "Far cheaper would it be," declared Whitman, "for every householder to pay directly the equivalent of his valuables for ample protection than to wait until he is robbed of them, and his life jeopardized." Sometime after this date, the Common Council did take a step to decrease the number of burglaries in the city, but, as the following item from the Eagle of September 28 shows, soon recanted: "INTERESTING TO THOSE WHO ARREST BURGLARS.--The resolution which offers a standing reward of $25 for the apprehension and conviction of every burglar in this city was repealed last evening, at the instance of Ald. Smith. This is a great pity, and we fear that Mr. S. will see his mistake ere long." But no dramatic denouement marked the withdrawal of the reward; the closing months of Whitman's editorship saw burglaries decline, perhaps because of the cold weather, until the Eagle had nothing more sensational to report in that line except the purloining of silver spoons by Negro servants.

Juvenile delinquency provoked no humorous comments from the editor of the Eagle, for he seemed to have little tolerance for the foibles of children and youths. The Brooklyn juveniles engaged in their share of petty thievery, but only once did Whitman suggest that something might

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Whitman, who, in the Eagle, defended the stage against those who attacked it on moral grounds, appeared to grant that its influence was not always harmless when he reported on a Dennis Macaulay, who had stolen a
be done about it. In the Eagle for July 21, 1817, he suggested that the police keep their eyes upon the "too frequently disreputable" junk shops. "The lures which they hold out to the young and thoughtless to perpetrate petty crimes," he said, "no doubt tend in time to greatly swell the number of the desperate rascals who infest large cities." Whitman's most frequent comments were on the bands of boys who roamed the streets on Sundays and at night. From time to time, as on June 13, 1816, he expressed the hope "that the numerous gangs of boys and other disorderly persons will be induced to forget their usual Sabbath amusements of pitching coppers, fighting dogs, &c." The fifteen Sunday officers, he warned, had orders to arrest all who behaved disgracefully on the Sabbath. The watch was also instructed to stop the vandalism of the gangs of boys who so often made "night hideous." However, the watch was no more successful in this than in apprehending burglars. On September 4, 1816, Whitman reported that a gang of boys had dragged the putrifying carcass of a cow through a street in South Brooklyn, stopping before various houses to give their occupants "a good smell." The same gang, he accused, were in the habit of turning in false alarms of fire as "thick as leaves in Vallambrosa." Whitman did not know if the gang was too formidable for the police, but he did know that "the officers are stated to be remarkably scarce whenever the b'hoys choose to cut up their pranks." There was a large number of dozen brooms. "The latter boy," he said, "was arrested in the pit of the Chatham theatre where such characters most do congregate, to enjoy their ill-gained proceeds in admiration of the drama, which is said to 'hold the mirror up to nature.'" March 12, 1816.
similar gangs in Brooklyn, and it was "about time a commencement was made somewhere to stop their pernicious proceedings."

Apparently the watch did not make a commencement. On July 31, 1847, the *Eagle* warned: "The young gentlemen who alarmed the neighborhood of Myrtle avenue on Thursday evening by their noise had better be more careful in the future, or they may wake up the watchman." And on August 2, Whitman blamed the ineffectual police for the continued rowdyism. "Perambulating wretches" not only made the "night hideous with their unearthly voices and obscene songs," but engaged in "more tangible outrages." Houses were despoiled of their railings, iron work was wrenched from stoops, and the awnings of stores were beaten to the ground. The Brooklyn police were useless: "In the first place there are not half enough of them, and, in the second place, what we have are not good for anything." One could walk through the city late at night and never catch a glimpse of the watch. "The watch system of Brooklyn invites rowdyism to do its prettiest; and the invitation is accepted, too." Sometimes the police were able to apprehend a juvenile delinquent, as Whitman reported in the *Eagle* for May 27, 1847. On the evening before, he had glanced out of his editorial window at the foot of Fulton Street and seen a police officer arrest a "little boy about knee high, who had been guilty of the mortal offence of

13 The captain of the Brooklyn Watch, Jeremiah Higgins, appears to have been remiss at times. On May 27, 1847, the *Eagle* ironically implied that Higgins had been too drunk on the preceding evening to perform his duties. On August 3, Whitman published a letter from a correspondent who stated that Higgins had been so drunk the evening before that he had had to be taken home. The subject was not pursued by the *Eagle* however.
stealing one apple from an old woman's stand opposite our office." The numerous spectators objected, but the officer led the boy off, holding a hand over his mouth to suppress his cries. "After some time ineffectually spent in finding a police magistrate, the highhanded young culprit was taken before the mayor, who promptly and properly discharged him. This is rather a diminutive business, but we suppose the officer made two or three dollars out of it."

Murder and suicide were as rare in Brooklyn as drunkenness and rowdyism were common. Whitman professed to dislike the reporting of sordid crime of violence, but fortunately he had no murders\textsuperscript{14} and only one sensational attempted suicide\textsuperscript{15} to cover on the local scene. However,

\textsuperscript{14} The Eagle for May 4, 1847, reported that Alva Hotchkiss, a jeweller, had been murdered and robbed on his way home from the South Ferry. On the following day, Whitman was aroused by "the recent murder of Mr. Hotchkiss" to the point of condemning the city lights and the city police. Yet the Eagle of the same date stated that Hotchkiss was still alive, though expected to die at any moment (his assailant had used a sling-shot). Almost every day the Eagle referred either to the "murder" or the "assassination" of Mr. Hotchkiss in stories that at the same time reported his progress from a moribund state to the amnesiac state he finally reached. One wonders where Whitman's wits were when he wrote something like the following, which appeared in the Eagle on May 31: "We understand that this unfortunate gentleman is in about the same condition that he was after his assassination, and that very little change ... has as yet taken place."

\textsuperscript{15} The Eagle for March 15, 1847, reported "a scene of striking horror," quite like a scene from Sue's Mysteries of Paris. A Mr. Rule of South Brooklyn had given a bad check in New York for $20.58. Officer Higgins visited Mr. Rule with a warrant for his arrest. Rule was courteously permitted to retire and change his linen, but instead he removed his clothes and cut his throat. Higgins stopped Rule from seriously wounding himself, but was assailed by Rule's family, who thought Higgins had done the wounding. The latter was rescued by some passerbyers, and Rule was conducted to the New York Tombs. "We are told," said Whitman, "that Rule is a man of more than ordinary education, a native of Ireland, which he left some twenty years since; and was formerly a bookkeeper in the office of the New York Evening Star."
enough such violence occurred elsewhere in the nation to provide the citizens of Brooklyn with the melodramatic reading which attracted a large audience then as now. Whitman had scarcely assumed the helm of the Eagle when, on March 16, 1846, he informed his readers that the family of a Mr. Van Ness of Fleming, New York, had been butchered by a person disguised as a Negro. For the next few days, the Eagle reiterated the gory details—the bloody bodies of Van Ness, his enceinte wife, their infant; Van Ness' mother-in-law running after the murderer with her "intestines protruding" (or her "bowels gushed out"), and the hired man, Van Arsdale, severely stabbed but successfully fighting off the assassin with a broomstick. The murderer was soon captured and was found to be a young Negro, William Freeman, who had just been released from Auburn State Prison after serving five years for stealing a horse from the late Mr. Van Ness. Freeman's carnage was the most sensational of its peers; the exchange papers provided other murders, though with fewer victims. On March 20, under the exclamatory headline of "Another Bloody Affair!" the editor of the Eagle declared, "We are quite sick of reading the numerous murders that happen of late!" On this occasion, Edward Rulloff, "a school teacher and part doctor," had slain his wife and child only to have unusually high water near Ithaca disinterr the box in which he had hidden their bodies. A very common heading in the Eagle during Whitman's tenure was "More Bloody Work," and the usual tale that followed expressed complete revulsion for murder, but insisted, nonetheless, in letting the honest folk of Brooklyn know that brains had been spilled by hoe, shovel, or axe.
A more sophisticated type of murder was the sort noted by the Eagle on December 4, 1846. Under the "New York, &c." column, Whitman remarked, "'Loving not loathing,' we present the sad case, (ah, how many like it there have been, and are yet to be, in the American Gomorrah) of a young girl, as reported in the N. Y. prints." The story that followed told of a seventeen-year-old girl, deserted by her lover, who died from the effect of medicines taken to produce a miscarriage. Perhaps the notorious Madame Restell, who blatantly advertised her "Preventative Powders" at five dollars a package in many of the New York newspapers, had been the indirect assassin of the young girl, but Whitman said nothing of her. In the fall of 1847, Madame Restell was before the New York courts on the charge of performing illegal operations. Whitman followed the trial with interest, describing Madame Restell as the "child-murderess" and wondering if she would escape again (as she had in 1841, under similar circumstances) because of her wealth. On November 11, the Eagle deplored the news that the "she-wolf . . . was yesterday pronounced guilty of a misdemeanor (1) by the jury." Madame Restell's inadequate sentence was for one year in Sing Sing, but her conviction was later reversed while Whitman was in New Orleans and occupied with other matters.

Whitman had little to say in the Eagle about what characterized the criminal type. But he did indicate, on May 25, 1846, what he fancied was the antithesis of a murderer. A man known as "Babe" had appeared on the Long Island shore amid the wreckage of a schooner, and the absence of his shipmates led the authorities to prosecute him for piracy. He was sentenced to death but was soon pardoned, which Whitman noted with pleasure.
on May 25. "We went into that interesting establishment \( \text{the Tombs} \), some time ago, to take a look at the prisoners," said Whitman. "Babe seemed to feel jolly enough; he was fat and ruddy, and laughed like a real good fellow. Indeed, it struck us, when we heard his loud clear laugh, that he would not have committed such bloody deeds—for a man with a clear ringing laugh is never an ingrained villain."

An ingrained idleness characterized, in Whitman's opinion, many of the lesser lawbreakers such as vagrants and habitual tiplers. The jail sentences meted out by the Brooklyn police court were served in Kings County Jail, where, as Whitman often noted, the inmates were assured of food, shelter, and leisure—particularly in the winter. The Eagle for June 18, 1847, reported that the County Board of Supervisors had appointed a committee to investigate possible sites for a workhouse, and Whitman added:

> The county has quite long enough been to the expense of supporting in idleness and comparative comfort those who disturb the peace of the city; and it is settled that many worthless and dissolute persons have been tempted to infringe the laws for the sole purpose of securing an asylum. A workhouse would put an end to this abuse, and be a great stroke of economy . . . by the prevention of law-breaking. For some time past the number of able-bodied prisoners and paupers have been unusually low; but . . . there is ground to believe it will soon reach its accustomed amount. The millenium has not yet arrived, nor is human nature a whit better than it has always been. . . .

Meanwhile, the county officials should provide their prisoners with some sort of work. Noting in the Eagle for July 10, that a vagrant had been sentenced to jail at hard labor for fifteen days, Whitman was moved to remark:
Curiosity is alive to know what is done in prison, which is entered upon the police records as being so "hard." We never happened to see the convicts doing anything harder than masticating wholesome victuals, lolling on comfortable straw mattresses and staring stone walls out of countenance. This would be "hard" enough to a man of active habits but to such lazzaroni as the city is infested with, it proves a perfect elysium. . . . It is a wonder to us that the supervisors have not long since attached some little reality to these hitherto fictitious sentences.

When autumn came, Whitman was convinced that the Kings County Jail appealed to Brooklyn's petty criminals as a welcome haven for the cold months. He reported in the Eagle for October 11, that Patrick Hickie, arrested for stealing some silver spoons, had been furnished with "comfortable winter quarters" for the ensuing six months. To Whitman, Hickie was representative of a numerous class of "thieving beggars" who had nothing to lose in stealing. If detected, he was rewarded by the value of his loot. "While on the other hand, if detected, his condition would be improved by the occupancy of a shelter during the winter months without care, labor, or trouble, and enabled to emerge like a chrysalis on the approach of warm weather into a renewed state of existence." Shortly after this, the county determined on the construction of a cess pool in the jail yard; and it was with satisfaction that Whitman wrote the following few lines which appeared in the Eagle for October 30: "There are at the present time only about fifty five prisoners confined in the jail of this county, some fifteen of whom are furnished with constant and agreeable employment in digging upon the sewer recently commenced. A few more able bodied gents wanted immediately."

Whitman's only objection to the Kings County Jail was its failure to enforce "hard labor" sentences; but he was aware of other undesirable
conditions existing in other prisons, particularly in the New York City
Prison (the Tombs) and the two state penitentiaries. In an editorial in
the *Eagle* for August 1, 1846, he remarked that "with all our boasted
improvements, we have not much bettered the condition or reformatory
influence of our places for criminals." He then referred to the con-
tents of a publication recently issued by the New York Prison Association
describing the conditions in the Tombs, where as many as 10,000 persons
were confined in a year's period. While Whitman expressed dismay at the
profane way in which the male prisoners of that institution spent their
Sundays, he was primarily indignant at the intermingling of hardened
criminals with children, lunatics, paupers, and other comparative innocents.
The state prisons, on the other hand, were criticized in a number of
articles in the *Eagle* for their severe disciplinary measures which
degraded both the punisher and the punished.

The so-called "Auburn System" came into being when it became evident
that the practice at Auburn Penitentiary of confining prisoners in indi-
vidual cells day and night resulted in an excessive amount of sickness and
even insanity. In 1823, workshops were built inside the walls of Auburn
where the prisoners worked together in the day, being returned at night
to their cells. Not only was the general health of the prisoners improved
by this system but the prison was able to show a profit above the expense
of its upkeep in the sale of the products made in its shops. This new
development in penology was made to operate efficiently by means of a

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16 Of, I, 117.
severe discipline, which included walking to and from the cells in lock step and absolute silence. The slightest infraction of a rule was punished, ordinarily by flogging. When the Mount Pleasant State Prison was built at Sing Sing in 1826, it, too, was organized in the Auburn pattern. Whitman, who spoke out against the flogging of seamen and school children, spoke out as loudly against the flogging of criminals.

A prisoner at Auburn, named Plumb, had been flogged to death for feigning insanity; and Whitman rose in righteous anger in an editorial in the Eagle for March 10, 1846, titled "The Officers of Our State Prisons." "At the risk of arousing a ready cry about 'mawkish sympathy' from that worst part of the conservative faction, which is composed of unbelievers in the good of humanity," began Whitman, "we would make a few suggestions about the officers in our state prisons." The death of Plumb, which was not the first of its sort, showed that the rulers of Auburn were "persons of hardened and morose natures, disposed to judge harshly and punish severely—the last men in the world . . . for the position they hold." Whitman reminded his readers that it was now generally agreed that the insane responded best to mild government; certainly then, the criminal, still possessed of his faculties, should be more tractable when ruled with kindness. "0," he exclaimed, "it is a disgrace to this wide and noble country—it is an insult to the very soul of our constitution, which assumes the rule of reason, not might—that a man should be scourged to

17See Freedman, Whitman Looks at the Schools, p. 45.
death—that others should be daily tortured and lacerated—for any crimes they might commit!" Especially was this so in view of the pettiness of the faults for which flogging was the punishment. Plumb, so it was claimed, had assumed madness. "Others are tied up naked, and lashed till the blood runs down their backs, because they have spoken to a fellow convict, have fallen into a fit of anger, or some other equally heinous offence!" Whitman concluded his article with a call for reformation based, as so many of the reforms of the time were, upon Christian ethics: "We call upon those who have any faith in human goodness—any abhorrence of brutal cruelty—any honor for Him who, amid the agonies of the crucifixion, turned his dying sight upon a felon, with words of promise and bliss—to act reform upon this subject!" From time to time Whitman reverted to the subject of the use of the whip in the state prisons, usually emphasizing its brutalizing effect upon its victims. A typical comment is one which appeared in the *Eagle* for June 30, 1846. Whitman said that he did not, of course, wish to have the prisons made pleasant places, but there were few matters "more worthy the attention of philanthropists" than that of prison management. "Still does the lash hold its livid rule in our prisons . . . Still is the remnant, (little enough in some!) of humanity left in the wretched convicts there, crushed out of them—systematically, as it seems!"

There was one state prison official of whom Whitman approved, however—Mrs. Eliza W. Farnham, matron of the women's division of Sing Sing (as Mount Pleasant Prison already was being called, after the village at which it was located). Whitman first mentioned Mrs. Farnham in the *Eagle* of May 1, 1846, when he commented on a letter she had written to a New York paper,
which had borne "some refreshing testimony in behalf of mildness among prisoners." The doctrine of humanity depravity, remarked Whitman, had been so long held that it was a difficult task to promote the humane treatment of criminals. "In this connection, the world, at present, sees orthodoxy arrayed against the precepts of Christ"; apparently it was widely believed that only the good deserved "love and sympathy." Mrs. Farnham's letter showed the good effect on criminals of "that forbearance which is due to them," said Whitman, "on account of their unhappy early training, their neglected moral nature, and perhaps many extenuating circumstances connected with their very guilt." Whitman quoted from the letter two anecdotes which illustrated his and Mrs. Farnham's sentiments, one of which concerned a Negro girl who was put to work in the flower garden at Sing Sing and was later found "bathed in tears" because the flowers had recalled her past innocence. A few months later, the Eagle itself was the recipient of a similar letter from Mrs. Farnham, which Whitman printed on July 31, 1846, under the head of "Prison Reform.... A Noble Effort, Well Promulged by a Noble Woman."

The New York Sun, however, did not think at all well of Mrs. Farnham's theories, and on September 2, 1846, the Eagle attacked the Sun for its "sentiments averse to prison reform, and to amelioration of the old rigidity of law." The Sun advocated that sanguinary revenge so contrary to the spirit of Christianity. "Of all the cant and stuff we hear in this artificial world," declared Whitman, "the worst and weakest... is that cant which calls humanity for the sons and daughters of vice 'mawkish
sympathy." Then the editor of the Eagle concluded his piece with a paragraph on the reform which received more notice in his journal than any other—the abolition of the death sentence. Instead of the murderer being himself murdered by society, let him be imprisoned for life. "Let the assassin's heart be gnawed by remorse—as it will sooner or later be, however deeply he may have steeped himself in guilt. ... There let the long seasons of his weary time roll heavily on, till his iron soul is conquered, and the deep fountains which sleep even in the wickedest bosom are touched. Perpetual imprisonment? Good God! is not that enough? Why we are almost shocked at our own inhumanity, when we write an argument for so cruel a doom in any case."

The New York State Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment, whose office was in New York City, was active in lobbying at Albany and in organizing local societies over the state. In addition, it published a monthly, the Spirit of the Age, which Whitman recommended to his readers from time to time. Brooklyn had a local "anti-hanging" society, but it seems to have functioned only fitfully and inefficiently. On the evening of March 13, 1846, according to the Eagle of the next day, Whitman and about one hundred other persons had attended, despite a downpour, a meeting called by the society at the Brooklyn Institute lecture room. Unfortunately, none of the officers of the society appeared and the meeting

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18 This was before W. H. Channing became the editor of the periodical in 1849, and made it into the advocate of almost all existing reform movements.
resulted in a few impromptu speeches on the evils of capital punishment. Seemingly the later meetings of the society were equally unsatisfactory. On November 20, the Eagle noted that a hanging was scheduled for that day in the yard of the Tombs, and that ironically the same day had been set aside by the State Society for the Abolition of Capital Punishment for a state-wide propagandizing effort by means of lectures, debates, and newspaper editorials. "What is our Brooklyn Society doing, by the bye?" asked Whitman. We hope it will not be discouraged by a few malapropos occurrences at its meetings of last spring . . . let no petty difficulties stand in the way!" But apparently the society was discouraged, for on January 8, 1847, Whitman commented on the hostility of the state legislature toward the anti-capital-punishment movement and then wondered what had happened to "the Anti-Hanging Society of Brooklyn." After this date, the society was not mentioned again in the Eagle.

However, Whitman by himself was a kind of society for the abolition of capital punishment. In his many comments in the Eagle on the death penalty, he gave several reasons for his opposition to it. Though the modern world chose to practice only those Christian precepts which were "practical," legal murder was as clearly contrary to the laws of Christ as was wanton murder. But disregarding the moral aspect of the matter, the execution of a convicted murderer was patently illogical; hanging was "teaching the pricelesslessness of human life, by destroying it" (as Whitman

19 For some of Whitman's editorials on this subject, see OF, I, 97-117, and UPP, I, 108-110.
noted on March 16, 1846, when he recorded another instance of capital punishment)—an obvious contradiction. It did not seem to the editor of the *Eagle* that "the hanging plan" deterred anyone from taking a life. On May 7, he noted that the lower house of the state legislature had refused to pass a bill for allowing the people to vote on capital punishment, and it did not appear to him that the abolition of the death penalty would make a great deal of difference.

During the month of March, and the first week of April, we have the record of over forty atrocious murders, with fifty one suicides, (there were doubtless more, of both, but these we collect from a cursory examination of the prints,) two of the former being the most horrible fratricides—one case in which a man absolutely tore the quivering body of his child to pieces and then slaughtered his wife—two parricides—and more than half the rest attended with circumstances of peculiar cruelty. Does the fear of hanging, then, deter from the commission of murder? . . .

A particularly vicious result, as Whitman saw it, of the "hanging plan" was that many murderers escaped punishment of any sort because some jurors were unwilling to compromise their consciences by sentencing a fellow human to death. Whenever a murderer was acquitted during Whitman's stay on the *Eagle*, the readers of that journal were sure to be told that once again a jury had permitted a villain to go free rather than condemn him to the mandatory death sentence. If a jury did find a murderer guilty, in many states (though not in New York) his hanging was a public spectacle—sometimes the scaffold was hidden by a canvas covering—which excited the baser natures of the spectators to such a degree that often the event had the air and the accompanying vices of a carnival. Public executions also, by some mental chemistry which Whitman never clearly explained, impelled
some spectators to kill either themselves or another person. On July 16, 1846, Whitman described two recent hangings of a particularly unpleasant nature, which, he said, were "rich with inferences." He cited four cases in which witnesses of executions either murdered someone on the day they watched said hangings, or else hung themselves on the same day or within a day or two. Even private executions had a deleterious effect upon the public, as Whitman noted in the Eagle on August 20, 1846.

The law of this state forbids public executions; but it cannot forbid newspapers from publishing accounts of the executions— which amounts to the same thing—only 'a great deal more so.' Indeed the detailed narratives of hanging, which newspapers give, circulate more widely, and are dwelt on more elaborately; the moral effect of a hanging spectacle is therefore just as much diffused by print, as though it were presented actually to the eyes of the people. . . .

Whitman continued, declaring that the Eagle, too, "must be in fashion, and give the latest execution--that of Wyatt." He described Wyatt's swoons, his last speech, and then ended his article with this ironical sentence: "And then the proper officer cut the rope, and the platform fell, the man fought the air a while--and then all was still: for the 'great moral lesson' had been achieved."

Whitman did not depend solely upon his own pen in his campaign for prison reform and the abolition of capital punishment. From time to time, the literary section on page one of the Eagle contained a sentimental poem or sketch in which a prisoner solicited the sympathy of the reader by dying or by revealing a heart of gold. Notable Europeans were summoned to Whitman's banner. On January 13, 1847, the Eagle printed a long story
of the career of the celebrated English prison reformer, the late Mrs. Elizabeth Fry. On March 28, 1846, three-quarters of a column were devoted to some of Dickens' remarks on capital punishment, which ended with the comment that if he, Dickens, were on a jury trying a murderer, he would rather find him mad than hang him. On December 21, 1846, a brief paragraph read: "'As I grow older,' said Goethe, 'I become more lenient to the sins of frail humanity. The man who loudly denounces, I always suspect. . . . The hypocrite always strives to divert attention from his own wickedness, by denouncing unsparingly that of others. He thinks he shall seem good in exact ratio as he makes others seem bad.'" But there was one sin for which Whitman felt no leniency. He noted on February 1, 1857, that a slave, one Cato, had been sentenced to hang in South Carolina "for a most horrible outrage committed on a white female." For once he was not indignant: "If there be any wisdom in capital punishment in any case, it is in such a case as this. Mere murder is white-robed innocence to deeds of this sort." Perhaps, for Whitman, this was the exception which proved the rule.

3. Fires and Firemen.

The Brooklyn firemen, as well as the Brooklyn police, were kept busy by the activities of criminals during Whitman's editorship of the Eagle. The midnight bell so often tolled for fire deliberately set that on June 11, 1846 (according to an advertisement in the Eagle for that date) Mayor Stryker and the Common Council were moved to proclaim that a
thousand dollar reward would be given for the arrest and conviction of
the incendiary who recently had caused a destructive blaze, or of any
arsonist who in the future should set a house afire at night. Apparently
the Common Council withdrew the offer later, for on February 24, 1847,
Whitman asked that body to provide such a reward. "The crime of midnight
incendiariism would seem to be alarmingly upon the increase in this city," he said. "The last three fires are reported to have been caused by
incendiariism... There can be little or no doubt, from what appears,
that there is either a systematic gang of ruffians who employ this means
of gratifying their propensity for plunder, or else the conflagrations
alluded to have been caused by motives of revenge." In Whitman's opinion,
it behoved the Common Council to offer a large reward, as an inducement
to the local police officers, for the arrest of these "abandoned midnight
villains." Much might be done in that way to "prevent a repetition of
events so terrible even in anticipation to every inhabitant of a densely
populated city." Whitman emphasized his appeal by printing, in an adjoin-
ing column of the paper, under the heading of "A City Fire," the des-
cription of an extensive fire he had witnessed, "a season since," in New

20 UPP, I, 154-156. The piece originally appeared in the New York
Aurora for April 1, 1842, under the title of "Scenes of Last Night" (see
Rubin and Brown, Whitman of the Aurora, pp. 36-38). The Eagle's version
was altered a bit to include a few introductory lines relating the holo-
caust to a possible repetition of it in Brooklyn, the original editorial
"we" was replaced by "I," some changes in diction and sentence structure
were made, and the irrelevant account of a visit later in the evening to
a temperance meeting was omitted.
York. The picture he drew of the scene was vividly realistic, confirming his prefatory statement about "public fires"—"Alarming as they are, there is a kind of hideous pleasure about them."

The fire companies that fought the local conflagrations, both premeditated and accidental, were composed of volunteers—about thirty to a company. The romantic fireman appealed to Whitman. Engine Company, No. 5, turned out with its machine, apparently a new one being shown off, on March 23, 1846 (according to the next day's Eagle): "And a dashy, bright, saucy, strong limbed set of 'boys,' they were, according to appearances. We don't know when we have seen a better show of firemen than this company with its friends, as it passed by our office yesterday." The editor of the Eagle often spoke of the Brooklyn firemen as being "a brave set of fellows"; but on January 9, 1847, after describing the "Ball of the Brooklyn Firemen, for the benefit of their deceased brothers' widows and orphans," he made some comments which indicated that not everyone idealized the volunteers.

It is too common among supercilious people to look on the Firemen as turbulent noisy folk, 'b-boys' for a row and 'muss,' only: this does the great body of them a prodigious injustice. A few are to be found, no doubt, whose conduct makes them open to such a charge . . . but as a class, the Firemen of Brooklyn have mostly generous traits—swift to do their duty—and can be commended as men without whom the public safety would hardly be preserved a week!

But a few months later Whitman's attitude toward the firemen approached that of the "supercilious people." The Eagle on August 21, reported that

21 According to the Eagle of December 14, 1847, Brooklyn had fifteen engine companies, one hose company, and four hook and ladder companies.
a false alarm on the preceding evening had ended in a free-for-all between certain of the engine companies who had engaged in a post-alarm race, a pastime which included bumping machines in hope of disabling that of one's rival company. At one time, said Whitman, five engines were tangled together; but of them all, "the conduct of no. 5's party was unbefitting either sensible men, or decent citizens." The latter company had taken the long way home for the pleasure of running into the engine of No. 3 as often as possible, and "the disturbance created immense confusion," which was quelled only by the mayor himself at the head of the police. The volunteers of Company No. 5 had fallen in Whitman's estimation.

The greatest evil of the fire department . . . arises from the volunteers--a word, in that connection, which is equivalent to rowdyism, and everything contrary to manliness and good order. A lot of half grown boys, ambitious of all the vices and petty excesses that they see maturer persons commit, attach themselves to the fire machines, meet at the engine houses, and early get habituated to all the precocious wickedness of cities. These youths are first at a fire, and quickest at all cowardly mischief; for, true to an old rule, they have little of the courage of men, though bold enough, when they go in gangs. We call upon the city government of Brooklyn to put in force the laws which forbid these fellows from attaching themselves to the city engines, and disturbing the public peace, as they almost invariably do when they turn out.

The rowdyism among the firemen of Brooklyn did not, however, prevent them from energetically and efficiently subduing blazes. On the evening of September 29, 1847, between seven and eight o'clock (reported the Eagle

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22The decency of Engine Company No. 5 may have improved, as the Eagle on October 9, reported "a very agreeable reunion of the members of this company . . . at captain Sharpe's hotel" at which there were "toasts, and speeches, and stories, and recitations, and songs from many." A great deal of champagne was drunk in a most peaceful fashion, Whitman reported.
for September 30) a business building burned near the foot of Fulton Street. The prompt efforts of the fire companies confined the fire to the building in which it originated, at the cost of two injured volunteers. The fire, but not the spirits of the firemen, was extinguished shortly after eleven o'clock. Company No. 7 chose to go home by way of Fulton Street, though its way lay in the opposite direction; and the result was that it "commenced the practice of that beautiful sport which occasions most of the difficulty in the department, viz: 'running into' No. 5." The residents along the street were startled from their sleep by "fearful oaths and imprecations . . . frightful and revolting in the extreme." No. 5 finally cut the drag-rope to No. 7's engine and a battle-royal ensued in which the men of Company 7 were "handsomely threshed [sic]" and forced to abandon their machine. The mayor arrived too late to do anything except tow, with assistance, the abandoned engine to its house in Front Street. "It is a pity," Whitman said, "that with the gallantry and enthusiasm which they possess and the brave bearing which they exhibit in moments of real and critical danger, our firemen should so sully their reputation as good members of society by engaging in scenes of the lowest rowdyism."

The firemen, especially of Company 7, were chastened perhaps after this escapade, for the Eagle did not complain again of their conduct. And after all, they had their complaints too. For one thing, Brooklyn lacked sufficient public cisterns in some parts of the city, and the Eagle was continually demanding that the Common Council build more lest the predominantly wooden city suffer a holocaust. Too, the firemen were
harassed by false alarms; this, Whitman thought, resulted from the key to the fire-bell tower being hung in a nearby public house where anyone could take it. But worst of all, the fire bell was always being "mis-rung." On October 21, 1847, the Eagle noted that in the morning the bell had rung for a fire in the fifth district when it should have rung for the fourth—much to the confusion of the firemen. "We have repeatedly called attention to the mis-management of the alarm bell," declared Whitman, "which is getting to be a worse nuisance than ever." Though the Brooklyn firemen were hampered by lack of water, false and faulty alarms, and a rowdy element, they performed an indispensable public service without monetary reward. Whitman paid tribute to them in the Eagle for October 30, 1847, when he reprinted, from DeBow's Commercial Review, an article on "Firemen" which lauded their heroism, courage, and chivalry, and described them as "brave sentinels and soldiers of peace." The Brooklyn firemen were not precisely "soldiers of peace," but the sedentary editor of the Eagle, saunterer and spectator par excellence, admired them as men of action and of physical daring.

4. Temperance.

The temperance movement in America became a force to reckon with when in 1833 the United States Temperance Union (which became the American Temperance Union in 1836) was organized. Later, especially in the early 1840's, other national anti-liquor societies, such as the Sons of Temperance and the Washingtonians, developed. At first the temperance movement had
attacked only distilled liquors, allowing abstainers the pleasures of wines and malt beverages. But in the late 1830's, a radical faction arose in the ranks of the temperance reformers and demanded a total abstinence in things alcoholic, which drove wine, beer, ale, and hard cider beyond the pale of respectable temperance. Soon total abstinence became the shibboleth of the temperance societies, and the word temperance acquired a gratuitous meaning which has persisted into the twentieth century. A further development of the temperance movement was the campaign for prohibition in the 1840's, which, for a number of reasons, seems an illogical phenomenon for that individualistic era. As Carl Fish has said of this early prohibition movement: "Such a program seems to fly directly into the face of the individualism of the period and that conception of governmental functions which was being reinforced by the laissez faire doctrine of the only group of British thinkers whose influence reached America." Nonetheless, the movement received sufficient support in the State of New York for the state legislature, in 1845, to pass a bill calling for a statewide vote—with the exception of New

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23Carl Russell Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850; A History of American Life, Vol. VI (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 266. Fish suggests this apparent inconsistency may be explained by three factors: radical reformers considered liquor one of the bonds which had to be removed for the individual to secure genuine personal freedom; the prohibitionists, like many other reformers, were so bemused by the idea of the millennium that they expected their reform to reach fruition in their own lifetime; the prohibition movement was fundamentally a New England movement, and New England believed in "community responsibility."
York City—on the question of local option, or "license or no license" for pubs. The measure put before the electorate of the state was not completely prohibitory, since it concerned only distilled liquors which, wherever local option was approved, were not to be sold by the drink or in quantities less than five gallons. The voters of 856 New York towns went to the polls in May of 1846; and 528 towns, including Brooklyn, voted "no license." 

Whitman, as has been noted in an earlier chapter, opposed "no licensing" because it was contrary to his conviction that legislation should be kept to the barest essential minimum and that morality could not be legislated. He consistently spoke out in the Eagle against the principle of "no license." On May 20, 1846, the Eagle announced that the citizens of Brooklyn had voted against the liquor traffic, and Whitman supposed that New York, as it had for other Brooklyn vices, would "act as a sort of sink to carry off our surplus tippling and intemperance." But he feared, he told his readers, that an effect of the election would be "that many persons, who are precluded from buying in smaller quantities, will send home their five gallons at a time; and if the consumption be augmented by the increased supply, the monster which has been ostensibly checked may grow more hideous in the midst of the family circle." Three

Local option was short-lived, however, as the legislature repealed the act in 1847.

"In achieving great moral reforms, we have very little faith in statutes." GF, I, 69.
days later, Whitman, admitting the unpopularity of his sentiments, presented another argument against the new law. Most intelligent opinion, he said, agreed on the evils of spirituous liquors; but no such agreement existed on the propriety of regulating temperance by legal force. "There is, most assuredly," he declared, "a powerful instinct in the masses of this country, averse to restrictions on commerce... We do not think they will be willing to see liquor vendors arrested, fined, and imprisoned for one of the plainest rights of trade... and they should not."

Whitman believed that the practical results of the new liquor law amply substantiated his contention that the law was vicious and contrary to the ideals of democratic government. In an editorial—"Prohibition of Liquor-Vending"—in the *Eagle* for October 17, 1847, he noted that a Virginia paper had reported that John B. Gough, the noted reformed drunkard and temperance crusader, had been invited to spend the winter in that state lecturing, and that it had been suggested that Virginia enact a license law similar to that of New York. It was commendable, said Whitman, to invite Gough to lecture on temperance.

But if the people of Virginia knew what miserable effects follow the New License law in this State, they would hardly be emulous

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26 Whitman does not seem to have thought very highly of reformed drunkards as temperance lecturers. He remarked, in the *Eagle* for June 16, 1846, that he had attended a temperance talk delivered by the Rev. Mr. Harvey, a hale veteran of the Revolutionary War despite his 111 years. Rev. Harvey looked a vigorous seventy-five, due, doubtlessly, to his lifelong temperance. "He is worth," said Whitman, "a score of emaciated and feeble lecturers, who have become so from excessive potations, and reformed with blasted constitutions, though he uttered never a word."
The new law, Whitman continued, muddled up one's notions of right and wrong: good laws should be impartial, which the license law was not. On Staten Island there were four adjoining townships—"all in a row." In the first and third townships, selling liquor was legalized; in the second and fourth, it was not. "It is a poisonous thing for the popular conscience that such confusion is created; besides, it invites comparisons," he stated. "You can never satisfy a man why a privilege should be withheld from him which is granted to his neighbor over the way. All the sophistry in the world will never satisfy him." Whitman concluded his editorial by condemning the narrow fanaticism of certain temperance advocates.

It is justly claimed for this age that among the many true reforms that have found ardent advocates— and success— Temperance in its beautiful simplicity stands conspicuous. . . . We, too, admire this beneficent progress— this baffling of appetite, and the redemption of so many men from intemperate cravings which degrade their nature. . . . But we cannot go to that extreme which loses sight of other, and as great, Truths. For it must not be forgotten that there are other great truths in the world . . .

There were, Whitman reminded his readers, many customs "far far meaner and wickeder than drinking a glass of brandy; and if it be acknowledged that it
is the province of the statute book . . . to destroy them . . . we shall
open a work so interminable and immense that a finite mind cannot scan
it—whose hopeless end is lost in obscurity, and whose success it would
be folly to expect!" But regardless, the plain truth was that "the best
government is that which governs least."

Though Whitman detested the prohibition movement, he was a constant
advocate of temperance and a firm believer that its cause could be effec­tively promoted only through persuasion. The intemperate individual had
to be personally convinced that tippling was ruinous; and the Eagle, during
Whitman's editorship, endeavored to provide the arguments that would lead
to this desirable end. The literary section on page one of the paper
served as an instrument in this worthy effort: from time to time it con­
tained temperance tales by such popular literary figures as Mrs. Sigourney,
temperance poems by such poets as Eliza Cook, and from November 16 to 30,
1846, an abridged version of Whitman's early temperance novel, Franklin
Evans. News items, often taken from exchange papers, also served as
temperance propaganda. Frequent headings appeared in the Eagle like

27 The novel was first published in 1842, in pamphlet form, by Park
Benjamin's New World. When it was reprinted in the Eagle, it bore the
title of Fortunes of a Country-Boy and a "J. R. S." was named as its
author. The sermonizing introduction and conclusion were omitted, as were
some interpolated tales. One of the latter—"Little Jane"—was reprinted
in the Eagle on December 7, 1846, and tells, with consummate sentimentality,
of the regeneration of an inebriate by the death of his angelic little
sister. An American literary historian has cited this tale as illustrative
of "the cult of the temperance child." See Herbert Ross Brown, The Sentimental
Novel in America, 1789-1860 (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University
"Intemperance and Parricide," "How Rum Can Change a Young Man Into a Brutal Scoundrel," and were followed by reports of drunken sons killing their aged fathers with axes and crowbars and besotted brutes knocking down inoffensive little boys in the street for the sport of it. Sometimes, as on October 25, 1817, such an item would be preceded by a personal appeal from the Eagle's editor: "Here is another frightful evidence of the effect of rum-drinking, in 'common life.' Will not some of our younger men, in Brooklyn, take warning?"

"Moral suasion," as the period called it, was the most Whitman could engage in as a Jeffersonian Democrat. "The duty of the promulger of all moral reforms," he asserted in the Eagle, "is very simple—being nothing more than to advocate and illustrate, the more enthusiastically the better, his doctrine—and carefully abstain from identifying it or himself with any of the cliques or the passing notions of the time."28 Whitman's conviction was that temperance could not and should not be legislated; and he informed his subscribers, without equivocation, that such was his sincere belief. Further, he showed them that it had failed to submit to legislation in the State of New York. Whitman himself probably was not a teetotaler, but he was certainly temperate in the better sense of the word and so illustrated—for his own satisfaction—his doctrine that temperance was enforced by common sense and not by

28GF, I, 72.
coercion. So far as the temperance "cliques or passing notions of the
time" were concerned, Whitman did not identify himself with them. He
apparently was not a member of any formal temperance society, and he
rejected the idea of prohibition. Personal problems such as intemperance
had to be solved, finally, by the individual, for "in his moral and mental
capacity, man is the sovereign of his individual self."29

5. Slavery.

Whitman's anti-slavery feelings, as mirrored in the Eagle, mainly
expressed themselves in editorials advocating the adoption of the Wilmot
Proviso.30 The practical basis on which Whitman erected his attitude
toward the inflammable slavery question is expressed in the following line
from one of those editorials: "With the present slave States, of course,
no human being anywhere out from themselves has the least shadow of a
right to interfere; but in new land, added to our surface by the national
arms, and by the action of our government, and where slavery does not
exist, it is certainly of momentous importance one way or the other,
whether that land shall be slave land or not."31 In view of this state­
ment, echoed in many other Eagle editorials, Whitman could not be and was
not an abolitionist. He disapproved of slavery and thought it an anach-

29GF, I, 70.
30Ibid., 187-228.
31Ibid., 200.
ronistic institution in a republic; but he believed its dissolution would come about by gradual emancipation, which, as he sometimes pointed out, had been the desire of Washington and Jefferson. The love of "impartial" liberty, he thought, would increase with each new generation so that finally the contradiction between slavery and the ideals of the Declaration of Independence would become evident to all—and then slavery in the United States would come to an end.

The fanaticism of the abolitionists had worked against the dissolution of the peculiar institution. On November 7, 1846, the Eagle noted approvingly that the Louisiana legislature had enacted a law which permitted municipal councils to grant the manumission of slaves. "We have often thought," said Whitman, "that if the ultraism and officiousness of the Abolitionists had not been, the slave states at the south would have advanced much farther in the 'cause of freedom' to their slaves than they have advanced.---The abominable fanaticism of the Abolitionists has aroused the other side of the feeling---and thus retarded the very consummation desired by the faction." As an example of what slave states might do on their own initiative, the Eagle for February 23, 1847, cited the passage in one house of the Delaware legislature of a bill for abolishing slavery in that state. Two or three of the slave states already would have been free states, Whitman declared, had it not been for an "angry-voiced and silly set" composed of "a few foolish and red-hot fanatics---the 'abolitionists,'" "We have," concluded Whitman, "wondrous faith in the quiet progress of wholesome principles in this country."
Though Whitman wrote no angry editorials on slavery as it existed in the South, his stern demands that the institution be excluded from the new southwestern territories were based on two main points which constituted criticism of that institution in the southern states themselves: slavery was inconsistent with the other and democratic institutions of America, and it unfairly competed with free workingmen and brought "the dignity of labor down to the level of slavery, which, God knows! is low enough." It was Whitman's hope that the majority of the white southerners—themselves not slave-owners—would eventually recognize these truths and abolish Negro servitude.

Other than this, Whitman had little to say in the Eagle about slavery. He deplored the inhumanity of the slave trade, which still was being carried on, often by American vessels, between Africa and Brazil, and wrote indignantly of its horrors. But he temperately avoided drawing a moral from news stories dealing with incidents involving slaves—the contrary of his practice when he printed the account of a hanging. The Eagle for April 8, 1846, under the head of "A Beautiful and Instructive 'Moral Lesson,'" described the execution in New Orleans of a female slave for "cruelty to her mistress." The "moral lesson" drawn was the barbarity of public hangings and not the evils of slavery. The slave's master had had a "licentious passion" for her and had made her mistress of his house;

32 GF, I, 209; UPP, I, 172.
33 GF, I, 167-191.
as a result, she had taken advantage of her position and had abused her owner's wife. The abolitionists were fond of insisting upon the immorality attendant upon slavery; but the nearest Whitman approached any such criticism was to say, "If any one deserved severity, it seems to us to have been the husband, not the miserable, ignorant, contemptible negress." On July 11, 1846, the Eagle reported that an old negress and a negro boy and girl (all slaves) had been sentenced in Alexandria, Louisiana, for poisoning an overseer. The negress was to be hung; the boy was sentenced to wear a five-pound iron collar about his neck for a year, and the girl received the same punishment with the addition of twenty-five lashes a month for a year. The punishment of the boy and girl would have been condemned as barbarous by an abolitionist, but Whitman made no comment at all.

Whitman envisioned the Negro as a free man, but it is possible that he did not envision him as a citizen exercising the suffrage and living in social equality with the white American. The Negro slave was not romanticized in the Eagle. On the contrary, on the few occasions that he was mentioned, he was ordinarily pictured as ignorant and uncivilized. The Eagle for March 18, 1847, gave the heading of "Can This Be In The Nineteenth Century?" to an account, taken from a Mobile paper, of four Negro slaves who exhumed the body of a white man for the sake of its fingers, toes, and tongue, which were valued as charms ensuring success in gambling. On March 24, Whitman noted without comment that the culprits had been sentenced to receive lashes ranging in number from thirty-nine to fifty. How were the ignorant and relatively primitive Negroes, once they
were manumitted by an enlightened South, to be adjusted to freedom in a society governed by white mores? Whitman never said. 34

The free Negroes of Brooklyn were never the subject of any humanitarian passages in the *Eagle*. They were usually depicted in that paper—and ordinarily their only mention was in the police news—as if they were performing in an eternal minstrel show. 35 They had their own public school, which Whitman described as being equal to "the better sort of those devoted to their more fortunate brethren." 36 However, Whitman had nothing to say in the *Eagle* about Negro education as such. The only reference to Negro suffrage in the *Eagle* appeared on November 5, 1846: "There were 1148 votes cast in Brooklyn in favor of Negro suffrage—and 14310 votes against the same. Majority against, 3162." The editor added no comment.

34 Though it is impossible to tell from anything Whitman wrote in the *Eagle*, he may have favored the resettlement of the freed Negroes as he did in the Brooklyn Daily Times in 1858. He noted in the *Times* that the new constitution of Oregon forbade either free or enslaved Negroes to enter the state. "Who believes that the Whites and Blacks can ever amalgamate in America?" he asked. "Besides, is not America for the Whites? . . . As long as the Blacks remain here how can they become anything like an independent and heroic race?" If they were resettled "in some secure and ample part of the earth," then they could develop into "freemen, capable, self-reliant—mighty." See Holloway and Schwarz, *I Sit and Look Out*, p. 90.

35 For example, "the police office was darkened by a large assembly of the Ethiopian race," said the *Eagle* of October 22, 1846, attracted there by a breach-of-promise suit brought by a forty-five-year-old Negro widow (with twelve children) against a young mulatto who had married another. The proceedings, which went against the defendant, were related in burlesque fashion. Though Whitman usually spoke of Negroes as Negroes or colored persons, he was capable of using a more invidious term, as when (September 11, 1846) he spoke of a minor malefactor as "a crazy nigger . . . Sambo Poney."

As was noted in an earlier chapter, Whitman had become an active worker in the Free-Soil Party by September of 1848, when he began editing the Brooklyn Freeman. In the first issue of the Freeman, Whitman praised Jefferson as an "abolitionist"—the very epithet which in the Eagle he had applied only to a class of reformers that he despised. It does not seem enough to say that this change in Whitman from a temperate critic of slavery to one so fanatic that he could glory in the term "abolitionist" was simply the result of his espousal of the cause of the Wilmot Proviso. There must have been something more, and a clue to this something may lie in the report in the Eagle for December 10, 1847, on a lecture entitled "The Worth of Liberty."

Mr. Giles's lecture on this topic, at the Institute, last night, was one of the most powerfully written and warmly delivered speeches we ever heard. Rarely has the divine proportions of liberty been praised by more eloquent lips; rarely, if ever, has the accursed nature of tyranny and slavery, in all their influences and results, been portrayed in words more effective and clear, or in a manner more enthusiastic! The lecturer's picture of a slave, the thing without the feelings of a man—not a husband, not a parent, not a wife, not a patriot—and impossible to be either, in its proper sense—was burningly fearful and true. It will live long upon our memory, and, we doubt not, in the memories of many a man and woman who heard it.

Undoubtedly the lecture was concerned in part with liberty in its broadest application and not entirely with its relation to the problem of American slavery, for Mr. Giles invoked those many persons who had suffered exile

37. This may have been the Rev. M. Giles who, in the winter of 1846, delivered a "noble oration" at the Institute on the sufferings of Ireland. See GF, I, 174.
and death for the sake of that "divinest possession of our race, LIBERTY." But Whitman's concluding remarks impress one as at least indirectly alluding to the South's peculiar institution: "For ourselves, and in the name of all who love freedom and hate oppression, we would thank Mr. Giles for this not merely intellectual treat, but for his noble promulgation of some of the best principles in the spirit of Christianity, and that lie at the foundation of our republican government and the rights of all human beings."

Whitman's response to this lecture—and he very seldom expressed such unqualified approval of lectures—suggests that his tolerance of slavery as a matter to be dealt with by the states in which it existed may have been gradually disintegrated by the persuasive (to one who had much of the reformer in himself) arguments of the abolitionists. However it came about, the Whitman of the Freeman no longer possessed unimpaired, as had the Whitman of the Eagle in the preceding year, a "wondrous faith in the quiet progress of wholesome principles in this country."

6. Other Humanitarian Matters.

From time to time during Whitman's editorship, the Eagle discussed other subjects for reform or philanthropy than prisons, hanging, liquor, and slavery. Homeless children, the poor, the insane, the blind, the equine, and the women were some of them; and since these were matters of interest to the humanitarians of the 1840's, it was inevitable that Whitman should write of them. However, relatively little space was given to these topics in the Eagle. And the abused horse received as much, if not sometimes more, notice as its hapless two-legged fellow creatures.
The busy commercial streets of Brooklyn were, of course, filled with horse-drawn vehicles, and Whitman had only to look out of his editorial window to see brute man maltreating the noble horse. Not uncommon in the Eagle were items such as the following, which appeared in the issue for July 1, 1847: "We just see (twenty-minutes to 1 o'clock) a two-legged brute off against one of the stage houses in Fulton street, beating his horses ferociously in the face, nose, and ears, with a stout whip handle. Infamous!" In his first editorial on this subject, which appeared in the Eagle for March 11, 1846, Whitman suggested to the overloaders and beaters of horses that they go to the "brown skinned savage" of the desert (whether Indian or Arabian is not clear) and from him learn how splendidly the horse responds to gentle treatment. "We confess to a real affection for a fine horse!" declared Whitman. "So strong—so harmonious in limb, shape, and sinew—so graceful in movement—with an eye of such thoughtful and almost speaking brightness . . . No man with a man's heart can be brutal to such a creature!" On March 31, the Eagle again carried an editorial on "Overworking the Horse." Whitman had crossed the East River on the Fulton Ferry the day before and had seen a team mercilessly beaten and strained because it could not, without the aid of several men pushing at the wagon wheels, pull its load up the incline from the ferry to the floating wharf. Whitman felt it proper to admonish this cruel treatment in the columns of his paper.

It may seem to many persons that the evil we are mentioning is too small a one to call for elaborate newspaper comment; but we consider not so; The merciful man hath consideration for his beast, saith the Scripture; and the implied injunction is repeated
in a variety of places. Who that has any spirit in him, does not love a horse? Civilization itself is bounden to that animal for much of its blessings; and without him, a large part of our comforts and enjoyments would be completely taken from us.

Certainly, without the horse, there would have been no omnibus to carry the editor of the Eagle up Broadway or out to Greenwood Cemetery. But even so, one feels that his liking for the horse was genuine and that his indignation was sincere, and not perfunctory, when he denounced, as he did on July 22, 1846, "a wretch of a fellow" who struck "a much nobler brute over the head and eyes with a heavy leather strap, with an iron buckle attached—opposite our office this morning. The execrable creature!"

Whether or not the ill-treated horses outnumbered the poor humans in Brooklyn, it is impossible to say; the latter, certainly, received much less attention from the Eagle. Whenever the local society for aid to the poor conducted a campaign for contributions—usually in December and January—Whitman obligingly lent the columns of the Eagle to its notices and sometimes inserted brief appeals of his own, occasionally supported by bits of pathetic verse. During the rest of the year, he had almost nothing to say of the impoverished—of Brooklyn, that is. Whitman was quick to reprint stories from the New York papers which illustrated the destitution that, along with vice, formed the darker elements of the chiaroscuro of the Gomorrah across the river. On April 23, 1847, the Eagle told of a penniless Irish immigrant couple found near death on a doorstep in New York. The father held a dying child in his arms, while the mother held one already dead. "And this," concluded Whitman, "is a specimen of the pictures almost daily presented in that city."
But Brooklyn had its poor too, as Whitman recognized in an editorial entitled "The Poor in Brooklyn," which appeared in the Eagle for January 29, 1847. "The numbers of those who apply at the office of the Superintendents of the Poor, for assistance during this inclement season," Whitman commented, "will average one hundred daily." Most were women, some of whom had been on the relief rolls for years. Some were gainfully employed but bent on fraud. Still others had fallen from comfort to the extremes of poverty and were reduced to the humiliation of asking for alms (and Whitman described such a one in the fashion calculated to summon forth the tears of the sentimental). The Superintendents of the Poor, said Whitman, were good and conscientious men, but they were often hampered in their distribution of relief by the limitation of their funds; in order to let all share, they frequently had to give little where more was necessary.

So it appeared that in Brooklyn as well as in New York the poor were inadequately succored. But this deficiency could be remedied if private charity were not blinded to its proper scope, according to Whitman. In the Eagle for April 10, 1846, "pharisaic philanthropists" were attacked in a wrathful editorial entitled "The Charity By Which 1000 Miles Gets Much Cash, And Home None." The editorial had been engendered by a story in one of the morning New York papers telling of the response to its statement, a few days earlier, of "the want of money of a negro man at Washington to redeem his wife." A New York gentleman promptly contributed one hundred dollars, money arrived in anonymous letters, and other sums, declined as not needed, were offered by various individuals. Then it was
discovered that the Negro did not need the money, and the contributions remained in the hands of the editor of the New York paper, who reported that "he don't know what to do with it." Whitman knew what he could do with it.

We might suggest whether the garrets and cellars of New York could not answer the doubt—whether the ragged foul-tongued children in the streets, are not fit objects of improvement: but we know with what disdain such fields of benevolence would be viewed, by those whose voracious tenderness takes in not only Virginia and the circle of the slave states, but the interminable range of all the Indies, not to mention every kingdom where the Papal religion is paramount.

The same gentleman, said Whitman, who had rushed to the aid of "the oppressed African" would have referred a sick and helpless widow with starving children to the officers of the Alms House. These were the "pharisaic philanthropists" who "go into paroxysms of distress for the slave at the south, or the untutored savage of distant tropical islands," and expend great effort and money for their help and salvation. But these same nobly charitable persons "give no day, nor hour, nor cent, to the scores of sick, sinful, and starving ones to be found in any of our great American cities."

Whitman particularly approved of the charitable actions of one person in Brooklyn—Mrs. Andrew Oakes, wife of the Kings County coroner. Brooklyn, like New York, had juvenile waifs upon its streets, and Mrs. Oakes, as she had been doing gratuitously since 1842, took them into her home until their parents or relatives were found or until they were placed in an orphanage. Mrs. Oakes' self-imposed duties were surely not easy, for the Eagle reported on May 5, 1846, that Mrs. Oakes had had the care of
twenty children since the first of the month. On June 13, the Eagle stated that Mrs. Oakes had taken care of ninety-six children since March 29, and hoped that the Common Council, which planned to establish a "depot for lost children," would make Mrs. Oakes the matron of the depot and pay her at least $200 a year. The Common Council voted on June 28, according to the next day's Eagle, to continue her house as "the city receptacle for lost children" and to pay her one hundred dollars a year and a sum of fifty dollars for past services. This salary appeared to Whitman to be inadequate in view of the valuable services Mrs. Oakes rendered to the city, and he described good work done at the New York "receptacle"—which "we had occasion once or twice, to visit . . . in search of a young runaway"—where the matron was well paid. But Mrs. Oakes' salary apparently remained at one hundred dollars. Mr. Oakes, a cabinet maker by trade, died about a month later, and shortly after his death Whitman suggested in the Eagle that the next coroner be a physician, as was the practice in other large cities. The Advertiser promptly accused Whitman of blackening the character of the deceased Mr. Oakes and wounding the feelings of his survivors. Whitman replied to these allegations in the Eagle for August 17. He described how he had known Mr. Oakes when he, Whitman, had been a schoolboy, and how kind Mr. Oakes had been to everyone, grown person and child.

And this leads us to note one of the finest traits of the deceased Coroner—his willingness, with his wife, gratuitously to afford food, shelter and a resting place to lost children, found in the streets. Here, now, is a specimen of real acting out that sublime suggestion of Christ, "Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of these, ye did it to ME," which puts to scorn all the vaunted charities of
organized associations, for aiding whose distant and indirect good by little gifts of money, many men take such glory complacently to themselves! A perpetual benison, say we, on the memory of a man who could do a deed like this!

Any venial faults that Mr. Oakes may have had were of no importance in view of this trait the absence of which in "pharisaic philanthropists" Whitman had angrily denounced a few months earlier.

In 1846 and 1847, Miss Dorothea L. Dix was in the midst of her strenuous campaign for the improvement of the care of the insane. Whitman rendered tribute to her on a few occasions by reprinting in the *Eagle* brief paragraphs from exchange papers praising her work, but he had very little himself to say about the insane. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Kings County had an apparently well run asylum for the insane (to which Whitman's brother Jesse was to be committed in 1864) and no local need existed to prompt any crusading in Miss Dix's field. However, Whitman did remind his readers of the existence of the institution and the good it did. The *Eagle* for June 3, 1846, printed a very long article, by an unidentified correspondent, sympathetically describing the inmates of the Kings County Lunatic Asylum and their surroundings. Whitman himself visited the asylum briefly during an excursion in the countryside around Brooklyn later in the month, but he had nothing new to add to the account given earlier in the *Eagle*. Other than this—except for one or two perfunctory remarks—only one editorial comment was made in the *Eagle*

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38 In "A Drive Out of Brooklyn," June 18, 1846, Whitman stated that the previous article on the asylum had been done by another hand.
on the care of the mentally ill. In the spring of 1846, a bill was intro-
duced into the Senate at Albany to establish an asylum in the western part
of the state where none existed. The unhumanitarian sentiments of several
of the senators led Whitman to write an editorial on the matter which
appeared on May 2, in the Eagle. One senator had stated that since the
state had done so long without an asylum in the western section of the
state, he could see no reason for now establishing one. Another senator
had opposed the bill because the thirty-thousand-dollar appropriation it
entailed would load posterity with debt. Such quibbles were perfect non-
sense to the editor of the Eagle, who was convinced that proper care at
the proper time would rehabilitate a majority of the insane. "Doubtless
a very large majority—far more than half, we imagine—could have been
easily and effectually cured, and restored to reason," he said, "if means
had been taken in time; if there were a well conducted Asylum in that
part of the country." Hospitals were accepted institutions. "Are the
ailments of the mind," asked Whitman, "less deserving of compassion than
a broken leg or fever?"

The Eagle displayed a brief interest in the blind in the summer of
1846, after Whitman made a visit to the New York Institution for the Blind,

According to the statistics that Whitman quoted at the beginning
of this editorial, the area for which the asylum was intended had a popu-
lation of 800,000, including 600 "deranged persons." Of the 600, 400 were
confined in poor houses, and the rest in padlocked rooms in private homes
—or else were allowed to roam about unsheltered. An Asylum for Idiots
was also contemplated in another bill; there were 2,000 of these in the
state, according to one senator.
which was reported in the issue for June 9. Whitman's account of this visit was written in the popular sentimental key; as he stood in the asylum's chapel and looked at the assembly of children whose sightlessness had pitifully narrowed their scope, tears sprang in his eyes. The next day's Eagle reported, this time without pathos, a musical concert given the evening before at the Brooklyn Institute by some of the pupils from the blind asylum. Whitman particularly liked the young ladies who sang, as they "for the most part possessed very sweet voices." The ten-piece band played with noteworthy precision but suffered from "an apparent lack of energy and expression; and this fault was quite evident in all the performances of the evening." This lack, Whitman theorized, was "probably traceable to the defective physical constitution under which the blind must necessarily labor from the little exercise they are enabled to take."

In the following month, Whitman crossed to New York to take in the semi-annual exhibition of the Institution for the Blind. According to the Eagle for July 17, the sight presented there was the most pitiful its young editor had ever seen: "There are over a hundred mute entreating faces—and all so pale, so wilted, so meek." A long account of what Whitman had seen at the exhibition appeared in the next day's Eagle. The pupils of the institution were taught box making, knitting, willow work, and mat and carpet weaving. Whitman admired the skill of the blind children in those crafts, but the greatest wonder of the exhibition was to

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Freedman, *Whitman Looks at the Schools*, pp. 112-114.
him the fact that "the great forte and passion of the blind seems to be music." This time he praised the band's performance without any strictures (he had discovered, by the way, that the students were given gymnastic exercises). He was especially enthusiastic, however, over the talent on the pianoforte shown by two young boys. Struck by the great natural ability of the blind in music, Whitman wondered "that its cultivation is not made more of a feature than it is even now—not only as a source of recreation but as a professional matter." For example, bands of which no locomotion was required could recruit their members from the ranks of the blind without any lessening of their musical efficiency. It was surely better for the blind to follow their natural talents than for them to be limited to some purely mechanical craft such as weaving or box making. Whitman did not pursue this idea in any later editorials, and Granger's Brass Band was spared any importunities.

The rights of women, as that phrase was understood by the militant feminists of the 1840's, received less notice in the Eagle than did the pupils of the New York Institution for the Blind. Whitman, as was noted in an earlier chapter, did not approve of discriminatory wages for working women, and he applauded the Wisconsin Constitution for giving women the right to hold property after marriage. When he reviewed Margaret Fuller's Papers on Literature and Art, he defended the capacity and the right of the female mind to create higher forms of literature than sentimental

\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}GF, I, 73-74.}\]
nearly novels or verse. But it is doubtful that Whitman thought, as did Miss Fuller, that all occupations should be open to women, or that the suffrage should be extended to them; and certainly he could not approve of the abolition of marriage, as advocated by Frances Wright. Woman, as woman, generally was idealized in the Eagle in the sentimental fashion despised by some feminists because it often exalted woman as the all-enduring wife. The leading editorial in the Eagle for March 17, 1846—"The Wrongs of Women"—provides a compendium of the sentiments which often appeared in that journal. The editorial had been germinated by an account in the Rochester papers of the cold-blooded desertion of a sick wife by her husband, which resulted in her death from not only illness but grief as well. "No true man," asserted Whitman, "can ever be without a deeply seated impulse of love and reverence for woman . . . With all its failings, its flippancy, its affectation, and its fickleness—the female character is surpassingly beautiful!" The crowning glory of woman, indeed of mankind, was "motherly love." A class of shallow puppies made a practice of seizing on some of the trivial weaknesses of women and using them as arguments to mock and ridicule the sex. "How dare they speak, on principle, against the class of which their own, and every hearer's mother, form

12UPP, I, 132.

13Whitman did not by any means idealize all of the individual women mentioned in the Eagle. The drunken and vagrant women brought before the police judge were described contemptuously, with no allusion to any hidden virtues. Female abortionists were monsters. All Irish servant girls who cried rape were not really raped or in danger of it. The new Seduction Bill passed in Albany tempted unscrupulous women to sue for breach of promise where none existed.
part?" demanded Whitman. The conduct of the brute in Rochester assumed a blacker hue when one remembered that "a wife is almost invariably true to her husband through all kinds of disasters, disgrace, and poverty." Had not Whitman seen "dirty looking criminals" before the Brooklyn police court, forsaken by all but their wives? "We should never forget," he admonished his male readers, "that the nature of woman, in itself, is always beautifully pure, affectionate, and true—and where those qualities appear not on the surface, they are but hidden by the artificial forms of life, or kept back by the distorted bent of the world's example."

A brief editorial in the Eagle for September 8, 1846, entitled "'Political Women,'" well illustrates Whitman's liberal yet moderate stand on many of the topics which agitated the reformers and their conservative opponents in the 1840's. "Some wretch of a fellow," the editorial began, "sends us the following—why, we know not." Then followed several lines from Sue damning women in politics as all being sterile, mannish, deluded—as all resembling old maids. "We publish the above," explained Whitman, "to say that it ain't so. Women may take an interest in politics—particularly in this country, without compromising their 'position' as women—unless they are so intemperate as to violate the rules of decorum which apply alike to both sexes. It is not improper for a female to have a mind of her own (nor an absolute miracle either) and to express it." But, said Whitman in conclusion, he confessed, "however, to a fondness for seeing, in all the developments of thought and action, in woman, an infusion of mildness and of that spirit which 'falleth as the gentle dew from heaven.'"
In other reforms, as in the matter of women's rights, that were discussed in the columns of the *Eagle*, Whitman usually supported the moderate views but rejected the extreme. Perhaps it was his "latent toleration for the people who choose the reactionary course" that preserved him from fanaticism.  

7. Churches and Religion.

Brooklyn, as "the city of churches," supported a variety of Christian sects, among which were the Dutch Reformed, Congregational, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian, Universalist, and Catholic. Naturally it was incumbent upon Whitman, as editor of a paper read daily by persons of varying beliefs, to show no denominational prejudice in his comments on religious matters. He was successful in doing so.

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Education, on which Whitman wrote much in the *Eagle* and approached often with the attitude of a reformer, has been omitted in this study because it has been exhaustively examined in *Mrs. Freedman's Walt Whitman Looks at the Schools*. In her volume Mrs. Freedman reprints almost every one of Whitman's comments on this topic in both the *Brooklyn Star* and the *Eagle* and precedes them with a summary of his ideas on the subject. Whitman took a broad view of education as contrasted to the prevailing attitude of the time. He believed that the arts as well gymnastics should be included in the school curricula; he favored substantial increases in the pay of teachers; he advocated normal school training for all teachers; he believed that learning should be more pleasant for the child in order to be more effective; he campaigned for cleaner, brighter, healthier school buildings; and above all he demanded again and again that flogging be abolished in the schools. His articles on these and other desirable reforms in education are characterized by an earnestness of tone.

The *Eagle* for July 17, 1847, reported the following statistic without comment: "Brooklyn contains fifty churches, and not one theatre."
this because, for one thing, he himself was not a member of any church. Very probably, in 1846-48, his attitude toward organized religion was much as that expressed later in stanza forty-three of "Song of Myself": "My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths, / Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern." Such bias as Whitman showed in his remarks on religion in the Eagle was directed toward intolerance, controversy, "hell and damnation" preaching, and what he called the "prostitution of the religious sentiment."

The comments in the Eagle on religion were generally confined to the book-reviews and to the reports in the Monday issue of the church services of the previous day. Whitman's reviews of religious works, of which forty-five were noticed, were of little interest, for they lacked enthusiasm. Most of them simply displayed his determination to maintain professional disinterestedness or, when the nature of the book permitted, his approval of private or family devotions. On one occasion, however, he was moved to show his dislike for religious controversy. Reviewing on June 13, 1847, Rev. A. B. Chapin's Puritanism and Genuine Protestantism, he said: "It is a controversial work; and we have not read it. The world, we think, would be far better bettered, if the strife was to do best 'the will of the Father,' rather than to dispute which was the most authentic 'religion.'"

46 A notable exception was the review of Tupper's Probabilities. See UPP, I, 136.

47 Whitman himself was a critic of the Puritans, though not precisely in Rev. Chapin's sense. In the Eagle for December 12, 1846, he quoted a remark from a New York paper to the effect that the Puritan administration
The reports in the Monday *Eagle* of the Sunday church services were often more interesting than the reviews of religious works. These reports became a fairly regular feature in the paper in the late spring of 1846. The *Eagle* stated on May 11: "We shall, next Sunday, glean the materials for reporting the sermons of two or three of our Brooklyn preachers, with accounts of their style, &c., which cannot fail of being interesting to our readers—and these we shall continue every week. Of course our sketches will be of such a nature as to be entirely unexceptionable and pleasing to all parties." By far the greater number of the church notices that followed were "communicated" to the *Eagle*; but occasionally Whitman would attend one of the Brooklyn churches himself and the next day regale his readers with a temperate description of the church's architecture, choir, and preacher. His taste in church architecture and ornament inclined to the

in both Old and New England had been terribly slandered. This was true, Whitman admitted, of the first; but as to the latter, "we have overrated our 'Puritan Fathers.' They were bold and fearless—had a wonderful fortitude, and a staunch determination to enjoy their own opinions;—but they were too harsh and bigoted and fanatical—had too little Christian love—and persecuted others far more than they had ever been persecuted themselves. For it is a mistake to suppose that the 'Pilgrims' fled from oppression abroad; they might have had comfort enough, either in England or Holland—but they were too opinionated and domineering in spirit to remain there. Such hardy virtues as they had, were profitable, doubtless, in founding a nation, amid the wilds of the northeast. But we see no reason for this perpetual adulation and sympathy for virtues which they not only had not, but were marked by the very opposites of. . . . The real fact. . . . is that if such persons as the early N. E. settlers were to come among us now, they would be drummed out of society by common consent. This we say without wishing to sneer at them at all the age in which they lived was not a bright one—and they are among the better specimens, even as they were.
simple and plain. He preferred, in choirs, the female voice to the male; and on one occasion suggested that it would be a good innovation to have choirs composed exclusively of women's voices. He was never really uncomplimentary of a preacher's speaking style, but on one occasion only did he go so far as to use the adjective "excellent" to describe such a style. Speaking of the Rev. Mr. Spear of the South Brooklyn Presbyterian Church in the Eagle for June 15, 1846, Whitman said: "His voice is excellent... He has neither the twang of the old-fashioned Presbyterian clergyman, nor the ungraceful abruptness of too many of the contemporary orators from the sacred desk." So far as the contents of the sermons he heard were concerned, Whitman contented himself with a brief summary without comments, as befitted an editor pledged to please "all parties." But on one occasion he was stimulated to express his personal approval of the tone of a young Episcopal clergyman's sermon. As related in the Eagle for November 23, 1846, Whitman had attended on the previous day "the neat little secluded country church of St. Luke's," where he heard the Rev. Mr. Cox, a guest speaker from western New York. He was impressed by Rev. Cox's sermon: "There was none of the rant and denunciation which are too apt to

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48 For Whitman's dislike of pretentious churches (on artistic, religious, and democratic grounds) see OF, II, 91-96.

49 June 8, 1846.

50 The nearest he came to being uncomplimentary was on June 8, 1846, when he described Rev. Hodge of the First Baptist Church as having "little talents as an orator"; but he added that Rev. Hodge appeared to be the sort of speaker that one could grow to like because of his distinct enunciation and the "plain terse sentences" in which his ideas were delivered.
characterize the trinitarian sermons of the day; nor was there the remotest approximation to the usual introduction of the more repulsive features of religion, one of which is to frighten hearers by means of dire anathemas into a proper observance of their duties."

Though a number of sermons were reported in the Eagle whose narrow and fanatic sentiments must have been distasteful to Whitman, only one so angered him that he disregarded his rule of editorial impartiality. The outbreak that resulted had had its groundwork laid several months earlier in a comment Whitman had made on April 27, 1816, on an item in the latest news from Europe. "How shameful is the following prostitution of the religious sentiment!" he had exclaimed on that date; and he told how, in referring to the recent great victories of the British over the Sikhs in Punjab, the directors of the East India Company had described the successful carnage as having taken place "under the guidance and blessing of Divine Providence." Two days later, he recorded a similar "prostitution" when he reported that the Archbishop of Canterbury had composed a prayer thanking "the Almighty" for the victories over the Sikhs and that prayers of thanksgiving had been offered in all the Anglican churches in Britain. It was not surprising then that Whitman should be shocked into protest by a pious repetition in a local pulpit of the sentiments of the East India Company. The Eagle for July 27, 1816, contained a communicated account of a sermon delivered in a Brooklyn church by a Rev. J. H. Morrison, a missionary in Hindustan, in which he referred a number of times to the slaughter of the Sikhs as God's method of opening India to the spread of
Christianity. The following note, enclosed in brackets, appeared at the end of the account:

Note by Ed. Eagle.--Though not our business, or disposition, in general, to comment upon these reports, we cannot let one item of Mr. Morrison's address go in our columns without our dissentient.--Instead of "the operations of the British in India," being "a means adopted by God," to spread Christianity, we think those operations a bitter insult to Christianity, and prompted more by the Devil than a God of love.

For several weeks after this, whenever Whitman found a particularly bloody account of the battles in the Punjab, he would print it as an ironic comment on Rev. Morrison's sermon. Perhaps the most effective was the one which appeared in the Eagle for August 18, and was taken, said Whitman, from an "official" account of one of the battles: "The river was full of sinking men. For two hours, volley after volley was poured in upon the human mass—the stream being literally red with blood and covered with the bodies of the slain... NO COMPASSION WAS FELT, OR MERCY SHOWN."—And this is what the Rev. Mr. Morrison calls 'a means adopted by God to spread the Gospel in India'!

Sectarian intolerance and disputation was an element in the Brooklyn social scene. The Eagle for April 6, 1846, under the head of "Too True," quoted the following remarks of the late Dr. Channing: "A dark feature of the present age... is the spirit of collision, contention and discord which breaks forth in religion, politics, and private affairs.... Christians forsaking their Lord, gather under various standards to gain victory of their sects.... The age needs nothing more than peace-makers... to preach in life and word the gospel of human brotherhood...."
An item in the *Eagle* for May 25, suggests that Whitman may have aimed this quotation at local sectarians.

**A GRACELESS REPROBATE.**—While the Rev. Mr. Thayer, [51] of the Universalist Church, was conducting the services yesterday at the funeral of a little child in Tillary street, and after he had administered some words of comfort to the bereaved and afflicted parents, a well-dressed person stepped up to him and whispered in his ear the following text: "When the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the ditch."—This was done evidently with the intention of insulting the minister. The person is said to be a member of one of the Presbyterian congregations in this city. We were aware that the doctrines of the Universalist church were unpopular in certain quarters; but did not know that it is necessary to adopt such means, especially upon such an occasion, to reprove them.

Doubtless Whitman found the liberal doctrines of the Unitarians and Universalists more congenial than the harsher ones of some of the more orthodox Protestant sects, but he avoided taking sides in the dispute between these two groups and had almost nothing to say on the matter. However, he found it necessary to publish a letter from one of the

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51 The Rev. T. B. Thayer, pastor of the First Universalist Society since 1814, was popular among a certain portion of the Brooklynites, judging from the number of marriages he performed as listed in the vital statistics section of the *Eagle*. He was certainly popular with Whitman, who praised and printed a number of his philosophic-poetic essays and poems, and who often referred to him in the *Eagle* as his friend. He gave Rev. Thayer's sermons many "puffs" in his paper (one sermon was on "The doctrine of endless punishment, with its accompaniments, leads to infidelity"—quite suited to outrage the Presbyterians). In one issue, the *Eagle* devoted one and a third columns to the reporting of one of these sermons. Thayer was also, like Whitman, an anti-hanging man.

52 On October 24, 1846, Whitman said of Rev. F. A. Farley, pastor of the Second Unitarian Church: "We like his unimpassioned, but smooth and mild, sort of eloquence—the easy and graceful reading, and the absence of all commonplace, which mark both his discourses and their delivery. His discourses are frequently remarkable for their deep views, and yet easily comprehended ones."
"orthodox" relative to complaints apparently being aired about Brooklyn by the Unitarians and Universalists. 53 Under the heading of "Complaint of the Brooklyn Unitarians—and the 'Orthodox' Defence," Whitman wrote the following comment:

Although the Brooklyn Eagle has an immutable vermilion edict, (issued by itself to itself,) that no influence, fair or foul, shall ever sway it into espousing any sectarian 'side,' in theological affairs, it sees little reason why it should deny one of the most esteemed Christians and citizens of the burgh, his courteous request for the publication of the following letter. B. E. of course, is irresponsible for aught in such communications as this—as in its sermon reports—except that nothing actually unkind to persons gets the circulation of its columns:

The unsigned letter that followed denied that the Unitarians and Universalists in Brooklyn were persecuted; in fact, the writer declared, they were more ready for doctrinal fights than anyone else. One may well doubt that the editor of the Eagle agreed with the claims of this "orthodox" letter.

If one may judge by the absence of any remarks in the Eagle to the contrary, there was relatively little anti-Catholic feeling in Brooklyn. There was certainly none in the Eagle. There had been a time in 1842, however, in the Aurora, when Whitman had approached a sort of anti-Catholicism. Bishop John Hughes of New York had demanded that the parochial

53 The Unitarians (dating in Brooklyn from 1833) and the Universalists were united in tribulation. In 1841, when the Universalists tried to rent a hall for a year, there was "much opposition . . . among the orthodox denominations in the city, and further use of the hall was denied them by its owner, on the ground that 'Brooklyn was bad enough without having Universalism preached in it.'" However, the Unitarians offered them the use of a small building, which they accepted. In 1843, the Universalists acquired their own edifice. Stiles, History of Brooklyn, III, 779, 809-810.
schools of that city receive a share of the public education funds—and succeeded in this demand after exerting political pressure. Whitman wrote a number of editorials for the *Aurora* in which he harshly denounced Hughes and his demands. However, it has been correctly noted that "the political philosophy motivating Whitman's attack upon Bishop Hughes was not Nativism but Jeffersonianism." Whitman had been concerned to keep the state and church separate; the religious doctrine of the Catholic Church did not enter the matter.

Whitman's animus toward Bishop Hughes had apparently evaporated by 1846, or perhaps Hughes was for Whitman simply a convenient symbol of a sect which had been and still was the object of a great deal of that religious intolerance that Whitman disliked so intensely. At least the *Eagle* for May 28, 1846, showed Whitman championing Bishop Hughes after a fashion. "The *Journal of Commerce* [a New York newspaper] is a very sensible journal indeed upon most subjects," he said, "but it is the lot of newspapers, like humanity, not to attain utter perfection. The *Journal* never loses a fling at that target for protestant orthodoxy, the Pope, his works, or his ministers. Especially doth it delight in a sly dig at Bishop Hughes, the catholic prelate—such as the extremely silly twist given in one of its little editorials this morning." Furthermore, the *Journal* printed "a long and labored vindication of the tyrant Nicholas... that nun-flogging and Pole-exterminating worthy!" Apparently the

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55Ibid., p. 8.
Journal thought "it is no sin to wage any kind of war which has for its object the abrogation of Romanism." Whitman himself admired Pope Pius IX for his reformations in the Papal States, and his comments on the Catholic religion were always tolerant and sometimes complimentary. The pomp and ceremony that surrounded the exercise of Catholicism was not, of course, of any significance to Whitman. The Eagle for November 13, 1846, quoted from the New York Commercial Advertiser the description of the sumptuous binding of a Roman Catholic prayer book. Whitman appended this comment:

It is too much thus, with people's piety in other things than sacred books! ... It is the matter—the meaning inside—that is the thing, after all; forgotten as that fact may be. All the curious devices of binding, (the fixed ceremonials of worship,)—all the ornaments and tinsel, (the graceful style, or peculiarity of church devotion)—all the preciseness of clasps and corners, (the rules of outward faith,)—all the gilding on the edges of the leaves, (the sanctity of face and manner)—are mere dross, if the good meaning is not inside. . . .

Though Whitman did not care for the ceremony of Catholicism, he admired the stout adherence of the Catholics to their faith. In the Eagle for June 29, 1849, speaking of the Irish troubles, Whitman said, "We are not catholic ourselves, but we admire the manly and high-hearted courage which, in the face of popularity and profit—in the face of the tithe system in Ireland, the most infamous system of ecclesiastical extortion that we know on earth—yet stays true and undaunted in its allegiance to the ancient faith of its fathers! the faith of so many of the great and good

56 From time to time, Whitman reprinted from exchange papers articles lauding the progressive spirit of Pius IX. Typical is one titled "The Enlightened Statesman-Pope" from the Washington Union, reprinted in the Eagle on November 18, 1847. In it the Pope was called "the great reformer of the age."
of the past!" The Catholics, too, furnished Whitman with an example of that rare thing in the 1840's—sectarian good will and cooperation. The Eagle for August 15, 1846, under the head of "Something We Love To Record," quoted the Boston Journal's story that during the funeral procession of Bishop Fenwick in Boston, the bell of the Unitarian church was tolled in alternation with that of the Catholic church. This was done because the Catholics had tolled their bell during the funeral of Dr. Channing. "Is not this a beautiful incident?" asked Whitman. "Ah, how much might be done in this way to soften the asperities of sectarian prejudices . . . to commend religion to the attention and reverence of the unbelieving and the wicked. Such incidents . . . are like oases in the great wilderness of sectarian dissension and opposition . . . Heaven grant that we may have more such and more--till the whole broad earth shall become like the olden Paradise!" After his fashion, the Whitman of the Eagle preached "the gospel of human brotherhood" that he was to express later more eloquently in Leaves of Grass.

8. Health, Doctors, and Drugs.

Whitman usually seized every chance to refer in the Eagle to the "salubrity"--a favorite word--of Long Island and Brooklyn. On May 20, 1847, he supplied his readers with some indisputable statistics. "When one remembers that the population of Brooklyn is between seventy and eighty thousand," he said, "it may well appear astonishing that the deaths here number only at the rate of eighteen or nineteen a week!" Boston was
not much larger than Brooklyn; yet its death toll was about seventy a week. New York, with five times Brooklyn's population, had twelve times as many deaths. Whitman accounted for the healthfulness of Long Island by citing its generally dry soil, its salt breezes from the sea and sound, and the resultant "happy temperature."^57

But, as Whitman had reminded his readers on June 17, 1816, in even the healthiest localities, the hot season usually produced considerable illness. At that time of the year, nature took her revenge on "indiscretion, ignorance, and gluttony." Whitman thought it well to give his subscribers "a hint or two" which would promote summer health; and in doing

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^57 In an earlier piece (June 17, 1816) Whitman had given an additional reason for Brooklyn's good health: it had no, as yet, "impure spots" like the Five Points slum section of New York. Brooklyn was not a complete paradise, however. Malaria was prevalent in some of its suburbs, as well as in other parts of Long Island. Whitman mentioned malaria only once—on September 23, 1817. His attention had been called to the disease because, due to the wet weather, it had been more common than usual since August, even in those parts of the island where it was endemic. Cases had occurred "even in the heart of Brooklyn." Ship fever, brought by Irish immigrants, assumed epidemic proportions in some wards of Brooklyn throughout 1817 and into 1818. Whitman had little to say of it other than to accuse the public officials of dereliction of duty in placing those ill with the disease in the county almshouse where the infection spread to the unlucky poor. Rabid dogs became a problem every summer in Brooklyn, as they did in most American cities. A city ordinance required that dogs be muzzled; but, as Whitman remarked on July 9, 1817, "the streets are thronged with dogs, which with utter contumaciousness entirely refuse to provide themselves with muzzles." The Common Council offered a bounty of one dollar for every set of dog ears turned in to them. Whitman, who at no time displayed any liking for canines, suggested (July 9, 1817) that "an ingenious person with a small quantity of prussic acid might do an extensive business upon a small capital." Apparently few people had the stomach for this sort of business, and Whitman lamented from time to time that few dogs were slain, blaming the aldermen, of course.
so, he stressed what were the three cardinal tenets of his philosophy of health—abstention from medicine, frequent bathing, and temperance in eating. Common sense (bathing and a moderate diet) was better than drugs.

The death rate was particularly high among children. Whitman was impressed by a statistic which was going the rounds of the newspapers: only one-half of the 450,000 children born each year in the United States lived to be twenty-one years old. In an article in the *Eagle* for November 11, 1846, Whitman imputed this melancholy fact to the ignorance and incapacity of parents, nurses, and servants in matters of health, and to the "poisonous habits and wretched imitations" that beset the lives of children as they approached maturity. It appalled him to reflect on "how seldom we see a perfectly healthy child, or youth!" This excessive mortality among children was not just a statistic to the editor of the *Eagle*; he reported on July 30, 1847: "We dont [sic] remember the week that so many deaths happened in Brooklyn, as are mentioned in the records of intern­ments [sic] here for last week.---An alarmingly large proportion of deaths are those of children. Poor little creatures!" Apparently many of the

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58 These three essentials of health were urged again and again in the *Eagle*. Moderation in eating was a desideratum indeed for a generation made dyspeptic by starchy, greasy foods; and diet reformers had arisen—most notably Sylvester Graham with his boiled vegetables and Graham bread. Hydropathy was to some extent popularizing bathing and the drinking of water. Though Whitman thought baths like Gray’s best, he sometimes reminded his readers that only a basin of water and a large towel were necessary for "a thorough ablution." In a time of medical fads, Whitman's objections to medicines were based, as will be seen, on a distrust of not only drugs but doctors and druggists as well.
children had died from dysentery, for Whitman followed his remarks with cures and dietary regimens (taken from exchange papers) for that disorder. The year before, on September 4, he had suggested a simple remedy for dysentery. He knew, he said, a case of the disease in Brooklyn that had been stopped in its early stages by "plentiful draughts ... of un-iced Croton water and the use once or twice, of the shower and swimming bath," and a little adjustment in diet. "Mr. dosing and purging Doctor!" declaimed the healthy habitue of Gray's Bath, "there are more medicines we wot, in the simple products of nature, than are dreamed of in your philosophy! .... We are no hydropathist; but happen to know this case—and give it for the general weal."59

Dysentery, however, was not the only cause for the alarming rate of mortality among the children of Brooklyn in the summer of 1817. The Eagle for August 7, stated: "We are informed by a sensible and experienced physician that the immense mortality now rife, has, among other causes, that of swill milk. This idea is the more plausible when one remembers that the mortality and sickness are principally among children." Whitman had been campaigning against the use of swill milk before this date, and he was to continue to campaign. The menace of swill milk was not small.

59 Whitman seems to have been favorably disposed toward hydropathy. His review, October 21, 1816, of James Gully's Water Cure in Chronic Diseases was brief but expressive: "The publishers of this work deserve the good will of the whole community...." On reviewing the anonymous Water Cure in America on January 10, 1818, he noted that books on hydropathy were marked by "the confident tone in which both patients and physicians speak of the means of remedy." He liked "the openness [sic] of those means; every thing being done fairly and above board."
A medical man of sorts who lived in New York when Whitman was editing the *Eagle* and who was a critical observer of the social scene says: "In the larger towns the poor are supplied with the milk of diseased cows, tied up, without air or exercise, and fed into scrofula on the hot slops from the distilleries and breweries." Whitman exposed those who were selling swill milk as bargain-priced "real" milk (pure milk was six cents a quart; swill milk, four cents) and pointed out dairies which used swill as feed; but perhaps his best piece of propaganda on the subject was a repulsive description of a swill dairy. He began a long editorial in the *Eagle* for June 29, 1847, with a recommendation of "natural" milk as a wholesome food for both children and adults (not more than a pint at any meal). Swill milk, however, thinned the blood and finally caused scrofula—and it was disgustingly filthy. How could anyone, asked Whitman, put that "nauseous compound" into his own or his child's mouth?

If the reader has ever beheld . . . the manufactories of swill milk, surely he will not need any arguments on the subject. There, under a low roof, in rows of small partitions, which, in their larger departments, are divided from each other by little stagnant creeks, covered with a thick green and yellow slime, emitting the most repulsive odor—there are kept—mummy-fashion, almost—the blear-eyed flabby-fleshed animals, (we will not call

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60 Thomas L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 2 vols. (London: John Maxwell and Company, 1864), 1, 368. Nichols was a Grahamite, hydro-pathist, and sanitary reformer, acquired a medical degree from Columbia in 1855, and died in England in 1901, noted as an advocate for dietary reform. Nichols, who was a writer and editor as well as reformer, lived in New York from 1840 until 1855, and possibly knew Whitman. He speaks of "an original American style of poetry invented by Walt Whitman, a New York poetical loafer, not destitute of genius, and patronized by Emerson." *Ibid.*, 299.
that are made to furnish the semi-poison. An endless trough runs around through all the stalls, and is kept always flowing with warm swill. Gnawed by a sense of something wanting, and never supplied, the poor beasts are constantly sucking in the liquid, and are never furnished with food or drink in any other form. Their teeth are then rotten, black and nasty to an extreme—the gums blotched with abominable sores, and their throats inflamed. Their eyes go far beyond those of the habitual drunkard in redness and hot swollenness. Their skins, which properly kept, would be sleek and glossy, are covered from week to week with the accumulated filth of their narrow dens. The abominable air that surrounds one of these places—bad in winter, and utterly intolerable in summer—is enough of itself to make any animal, human or brute, bereft of health. Such are the places where, and the creatures from whom, swill milks is manufactured.

It is to be suspected that some of Whitman's readers were, after this article, converted to his belief that six cents was cheap enough for pure, healthy milk.

The Americans of the 1840's—careless of hygiene and sanitation, ignorant of the proper methods by which to check the spread of infectious diseases, and inclined to unwholesome habits in eating and drinking—provided the doctor and druggist with a steady employment. How capable professionally many of the doctors of the time were, is a question. According to Thomas Nichols, "the Americans, who do everything in a hurry, educate their doctors in their usual fashion"; but what was even worse "is the fact that there is no standard—no real science of medicine ... Everyone may do what is right in his eyes." Whitman had a profound distrust of doctors, but it was largely based upon his antipathy to their habit of prescribing drugs rather than upon a suspicion of the thoroughness of their professional education (which he never mentioned). Correspondingly, he distrusted druggists because they dispensed the drugs the

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61 *Forty Years in America*, I, 363-364.
doctors prescribed, because they had uncritical faith in their drugs, and because they often were criminally careless. This lack of confidence in doctor and druggist was first voiced in the *Eagle* on April 16, 1846, in an editorial entitled "Is Not Medicine Itself a Frequent Cause of Sickness?"

In looking over the pages of a new statistical work, on New York, we observe that there are in that city 242 apothecaries' shops—and in them 242, (or more) druggists mix their physic stuff, and paper their doses, and shake their potions and lotions. . . . Why do folks take so much physic? It is now pretty well established that not the mere taking of drugs cures disease. . . . We submit to almost any of our readers, who may be "ailing," in any way—who may have that worst curse on earth, a ruined constitution—whether he or she cannot look back through a long career of medicine-taking? The violent stimulants and narcotics which are favorites with a majority of the physicians, cannot be used without the most serious and permanent effects on the system—both in the present and in time to come! . . . How much of the fevers, aches, rheumatisms, chronic and acute complaints . . . come to us through the physic vial, and the pestle and mortar? And the consciousness of this fact is starting up all kinds of medical humbugs—some of them possessing a few points meritorious, but none of them, in our opinion, worthy to take the place of that universal, that remedial role for every complaint, which nearly all of them claim to be. 62 Indeed there is much humbug in the pompous pretensions of the medical art. There are very few real specifics for disease in the whole catalogue of the pharmacist. Doctors and apothecaries pretend to know altogether too much. It will go down among those who understand very little of physiology

62*During the 'thirties and 'forties [of the nineteenth century] a variety of new schools of medicine, each with extravagant claims, demanded freedom to propagate their creed. Dietary panaceas and water cures were urged upon the people. The Thompsonians and homeopathists, among others, preached a hygienic millennium while they attacked the orthodox medical profession. The common people listened—and believed. Out-and-out commercial quacks with their elixirs, syrups, and magical pills succeeded even better in winning disciples." Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1943), p. 339*
and anatomy . . . but to all others, much of the loftiest pretensions of either the "regular" doctor, or "quack" doctor, is but a matter of sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

This editorial was the first shot in a brief skirmish with the medical profession and a more extended one with the pharmaceutical. 63

The Eagle for June 1, 1816, contained an editorial—"Innovations in Medicine—Physic Vs. Health, &c."—which seems to have irritated some of the medical men of Brooklyn. Whitman commenced the editorial by referring to the recent refusal of the state legislature to charter a homoeopathic institute and a hydropathic college, and to the "most terrific war waging between the old doctors and the new school" in Brooklyn and New York. He belonged to neither school, he claimed; but in the remarks that followed, he was kinder to the new school than to the old. He said of homeopathy and hydropathy:

63Throughout Whitman's stay on the Eagle, items appeared from time to time with headings such as "The Last Druggist's Blunder," "Another Shocking Result From Druggist's Carelessness," and "More Druggist's Carelessness." The stories that followed these headings related instances in which blundering apothecaries had given their customers poisons instead of the relatively harmless preparations called for by their prescriptions. In fact, Whitman himself seems to have been the victim of a bungling druggist. The Eagle for August 17, 1847, remarked: "Ever since we came very near being poisoned, and a family of seven or eight with us, by the carelessness of a druggist in Myrtle avenue, who sent us a prodigious dose of oxalic acid instead of tartaric acid, (which was wanted to put in some batter cakes,) we have known how to sympathise with those who are the victims of such inexcusable conduct." (This item apparently was first reprinted by Mrs. Freedman in her Whitman Looks at the Schools, p. 43. Mrs. Freedman's transcription has a few errors in it: she wrongly capitalizes "avenue" and "tartaric," turns "batter cakes" into "butter cakes," and modernizes Whitman's spelling of "sympathise." Mrs. Freedman suggests, whimsically perhaps, that this "narrow escape from poisoning" may have had something to do with Whitman's transformation, which began in the late forties, into the embryonic poet of the Leaves. See p. 10.)
In our opinion their excellence is nearly altogether of a negative kind. -- They may not cure, but neither do they kill -- which is more than can be said of the old systems. They aid nature in carrying off the disease slowly -- and do not grapple with it fiercely . . . to the detriment of the patient's poor frame, which is left, even in victory, prostrate and almost annihilated . . .

Orthodox physicians, as a body, were "altogether too conservative; too great slaves of precedent, and too haughty in behalf of their standing." Almost all diseases of a serious nature, Whitman assured his readers, were "the result either of hereditary causes, or a train of circumstances acting, perhaps slowly and silently, long and long before the disease itself breaks out." To assert "that a man, -- however great his book-lore, or however many college lectures he may have heard -- can, after asking a few questions and getting a few symptoms, cure such a result, or even attempt to cure it with any chance of success, is preposterous!" But physicians invariably acted as if they could when called to attend a sick person; and because they knew they were expected to "do something" for the patient, they prescribed a mysterious medicine which left the patient more ill than before. Medical truths, Whitman stated, should be built upon investigation, analysis, and painstaking experiment; not upon "prejudices, fears, and vanities."

A few persons (presumably physicians) had replied "somewhat sharply" to this attack on conventional doctors, Whitman remarked in the Eagle for June 4. And he repeated his charges in much stronger terms: "Their pride makes them ashamed to confess an ignorance, which none short of supernatural power could avoid. Blindly thus, they sacrifice human life to
their own miserable vanity! This is monstrous . . . " On the follow­
ing day, Whitman reported: "One of our medical friends is 'into us' again this morning, in a note, because we have no faith in the immaculacy of doctors, drugs, and of bleeding.--He accuses us of being tinctured with the 'dangerous ultraism of the age.'" Perhaps so, said Whitman, but he did not deny that the old system had its merits. Indeed, he thought him­self "open to the merits of all medical theories." Here in fact lay the major fault of the old school of medicine (and of the new as well): it pedantically refused to recognize the merits that lay in other systems. This unfortunate dogmatism resulted from the burial of the minds and talents of physicians under "the rubbish of the schools." What contemp­orary medical science needed was "a comprehensive scope of thought to . . . take in the whole bearing of things, as far as they relate to medicine, disease, and that 'fearfully and wonderfully made' mystery, the human frame." After this editorial, Whitman either lost interest in trying to reform the medical profession or else he judged it the better part of

64GF, II, 200.

65 At a later date at least, Whitman probably would have included psychosomatics in "the whole bearing of things." Reviewing Dr. George Moore's The Use of the Body in Relation to the Mind on December 21, 1846, he remarked: "Few persons realize how intimate the relation of mental causes and processes toward the body, and its well or ill being." Whitman's interrelation between the mind and bodily functions may have dated from his reading of Dr. J. G. Spurzheim's Phrenology, which he enthusiastically reviewed on November 16, 1846; though on March 27, he had quoted a Dr. Metcalfe as stating that a tranquil mind contributed to health and longevity. For an account of Whitman's attitude toward phrenology in his Eagle days, see Edward Hungerford's "Walt Whitman and His Chart of Bumps," American Literature, II (January, 1931), 350-384.
discretion to drop the subject, for he stopped his attacks—except for a few mild and incidental remarks—on orthodox medicine. 66

Whitman continued, of course, his propaganda for wholesome habits and common sense in hygiene. His hydropathic bias never lessened: he recommended bathing whenever he had the opportunity and the drinking of water (never iced and always in moderate amounts) only slightly less often. He reminded his readers, too, that over-eating was probably the cause of most of their ailments. Tobacco, either chewed or smoked, was denounced as not only a socially vile habit but as injurious to the stomach. Fresh air—which probably should be considered a fourth cardinal tenet in Whitman's philosophy of health—was excluded, in his opinion, from most of the homes in Brooklyn because of the prevalent use of cast iron stoves and coal fires, and the general habit of sleeping in closed bedrooms. Whitman reported in the Eagle for July 31, 1846, that he had attended a lecture the previous evening given by a Mr. Gordon, who had developed a theory of ventilation. Mr. Gordon's idea "was to have rooms so constructed that a force pump may increase the pressure of the atmosphere... and by thus making the medium in which we exist much denser,

66 For a while Whitman was ranked with the medically conservative when he derided the claims made for ether (or letheon) in some brief comments in the Eagle. But on May 5, 1847, he reported that a lady of his acquaintance had had eight or ten teeth pulled while under ether, and no pain had been felt or ill effects suffered. On June 30, he briefly admitted his previous error and stated that ether was all that was claimed for it. He was completely convinced of its efficacy after watching a child's dislocated thumb put back in place, as he reported on October 11, without any of the usual severe pain of such an operation, due to the employment of ether.
our bodies would become more buoyant than at present, as we find the case to be when in the water. Besides condensing, the apparatus is so contrived as to keep up a constant renovation of atmosphere." Whitman was impressed; it was obvious that if the householders of whole blocks would combine in such a venture, the cost would be trifling. But the audience at the lecture had been very small, and Whitman was sorry to see how little people were interested in a project conducive to good health.

The health of the ladies was not overlooked by the Eagle. The common sense rules of hygiene and diet applied to them too; but then they had those ailments peculiar to their sex. Whitman limited himself to condemning tight lacing, but in his book-reviews he encouraged women to enlighten themselves on the subjects of female physiology and diseases. Reviewing Mary S. Gove's Lectures to Women, On Anatomy and Physiology on September 26, 1846, he said, "As respects physiological truths, the sentiment of the intelligent world is now pretty well settled down to the conviction that the more and wider these truths are known, the better." And he condemned the "mistaken 'delicacy!'" which encouraged ignorance of physiological facts. On March 4, 1847, Whitman reviewed Dr. Edward H. Dixon's Woman, and Her Diseases, From the Cradle to the Grave. "Let any one bethink him a moment," he asserted, "how rare is the sight of a well developed, healthy naturally beautiful woman: let him reflect how widely the customs of our artificial life, joined with ignorance of physiological facts are increasing the rarity . . . and he will hardly dispute the necessity of such publications as this." In a manner, Whitman's remarks in

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67 GF, II, 305-306; UPP, I, 131.
this review were anticipatory of the perfect woman of the *Leaves*—who is a healthy organism dedicated to the supreme function of motherhood.

It was possible to discuss tight lacing with propriety, and Whitman condemned that fashion frequently in the *Eagle*. The ill effects of tight lacing upon the health of women were, of course, staple fare in the lectures and writings of such medical reformers as Mrs. Gove and Dr. Dixon; and Whitman repeated their warnings in occasional editorials in his paper. His most extensive essay on this subject appeared in the *Eagle* on September 11, 1846: tight lacing permanently deformed the natural grace of the form, injured the abdominal organs, and—in the 1840s—the corset often enclosed a portion of the chest—led to consumption. These arguments were doubtless familiar to the readers of the *Eagle*; but on one occasion Whitman offered a moral argument against tight lacing. "There is a certain class of be-chained, be-ringed, and be-spangled things, called dandies, which infest our streets, to the great annoyance of well disposed persons, and who may perhaps affect to be pleased with those exquisite specimens of tight lacing with which our eyes are often pained. But why does such an unnatural spectacle as that of a tight laced lady impart pleasure to a dandy?—Is it because it renders her more beautiful and graceful? Not at all. The reasons are such as we do not feel disposed at present to specify. Suffice it to say, they are such as no modest female could approve."

The young editor of the *Eagle*—contemptuous of drugs and doctors, confident of the efficacy of nature's curatives—was father of the man who wrote in 1877: "Shall I tell you reader, to what I attribute my already
much-restored health? That I have been almost two years, off and on, without drugs and medicines, and daily in the open air. There on the banks of Wolf Creek his paralysis was lessened by the gentle physic of "Adamic air-baths," dips in the clear creek water, and "slow negligent promenades . . . in the sun." These were, as he had told the subscribers of the Eagle in 1846, nature's "better, safer, and more pleasant alternatives" to medicines and the fierce regimens of those slaves to precedent—the physicians. These were common sense opposed to "the rubbish of the schools." Indeed, Whitman felt—and generally correctly so—that the reforms he advocated in the Eagle were the dictates of common sense as opposed to the "prejudices, fears, and vanities" of those who worshipped precedent.

68_CW, IV, 183.
Britisher Alexander Mackay, reviewing his travels in the United States in 1816 and 1817, expressed an opinion of the state of literature in that republic not shared by many Europeans and some Americans. "In a country of whose people it may be said that they all read, it is but natural that we should look for a national literature," he said. "For this we do not look in vain to America." American literature was young, but it was "far above mediocrity," having produced excellent works in all branches of writing except the drama. Whether or not the United States had a national literature had been debated by Americans for several decades, and this dispute was at its height in the 1840's. On one side of the controversy were those who believed that it was nonsense to speak of a "native" literature; for, in their opinion, the current of American literature should flow from the mainstream of European literature, in which it had had its being. The sentiments of this group were expressed by a reviewer in the North American Review in 1846, who spoke of "certain coteries of would-be men of letters . . . [who] waste their time and vex the patient spirits of long-suffering readers, by prating about our want of an independent national American literature.

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1The Western World, II, 237.
... They seem to think that American authors ought to limit themselves to American subjects, and hear none but American criticism."\(^2\) Actually, declared the reviewer, a national literature had already been well started and would advance "under the stimulating influences pouring in from every quarter upon the agitated intellect of the country." The opposing view was typified by an unsigned article on a national literature which appeared in the Democratic Review in 1817. The writer of the article began by citing statistics which showed the present as well as the potential greatness of America. "And yet," he deplored, "this great country . . . has no native literature, but is, in letters, in a state of colonial and provincial dependency upon the old world." He complained of the imitative spirit of American writers, who had no clear conception of "the idea and necessity of nationality." An indigenous American literature could be created only by "homewriters" writing on "home themes"—American scenery, events, traditions, manners, and history, illuminated by an "intense and enlightened patriotism."\(^3\)

Whitman was in complete agreement with the writer in the Democratic Review,\(^4\) and he used the columns of the Eagle to promote the idea and

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\(^3\)Anonymous, "Nationality in Literature," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, XX (March, 1817), 265-267.

\(^4\)For the influence of the Democratic Review on Whitman, see John Stafford, The Literary Criticism of "Young America" (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), p. 126.
the development of a distinctively national American literature. Here in 1846 and 1847, Whitman's life-long crusade for a national literature had its beginning. His earliest pronouncement on this subject appeared on May 12, 1846, in an editorial headed "American Literature."

The founding of an "original American literature" is desirable only if it is to be a great, lofty and noble literature. The object is stupendous, almost holy—and no presumptuous and unskilful hand should dare attempt it. We confidently believe that such a school of intellect will some day arise, (and before long, too,) which will possess the requisite capacity and genius. It will arise, because there is for it a necessity... The past has had its glorious gods of intellect—its Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe. But the same subtle thought burns yet in the minds of the children of men... Without any irreverence, we think it not amiss to say that we of America must rival even the literary greatness of the past... Are we not confessedly the most intellectually burrowing and feverish of all nations in the world? What people on earth have done so much in sixty years, in the various departments of the mind, as we, in proportion?...

American authors, true ones, must be encouraged. American publishers must bring forth the talents of their own land, and not be content with flooding the country with the waves of foreign trash that do no good in any way, except to the printers and binders. The people, however are the ones—the intelligent body of America—who form the responsible party in the matter. Talking of an ill-supported American literature as the fault of publishers alone, is nonsense... they have shrewd eyes to the profits, and once convince them that the people will buy, and they embark in "native" literature as quick as any thing else!

The American reading public constituted the greatest obstacle to the development of a national literature. The preference of American readers for foreign works was however not only inimical to the development of American talent but also exposed the citizens of the republic to the anti-democratic propaganda that, Whitman was convinced, permeated European writings. "He who desires to see this noble Republic independent
of all unwholesome sway," said Whitman in another editorial, \(^5\) "must ever bear in mind the influence of European literature over us." Undoubtedly such writers as Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Hume, Rousseau, and Gibbon had "glorious merits." Yet, he cautioned his readers, "it must not be forgotten, that many of the most literary men of England are advocates of doctrines that in such a land as ours are the rankest and foulest poison. . . . for they laugh to scorn the idea of republican freedom and virtue." Meanwhile, "perfect cataracts of trash"—Bulwer, Ainsworth, Marryat, De Kock, and others—came to the United States from abroad. "Shall Hawthorne get a paltry seventy-five dollars for a two volume work—Shall real American genius shiver with neglect," Whitman asked his Brooklyn readers, "while the public run after this foreign trash?"

A distinctively national literature seemed to Whitman to be demanded by the uniqueness of American ideals and institutions. In an editorial entitled "Independent American Literature," \(^6\) he spoke of the writings of the past as "treasures to us Americans more precious than the treasures of kings." But, he asked, "have we in this country nothing to add to the store of their manifold genius? And will we fail to remember, too, that the genius of the Old World has shaped itself to

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\(^5\)"Home Literature," GF, II, 2\(42\)-2\(45\); UPP, I, 121-123; also see "Anti-Democratic Bearing of Scott's Novels," GF, II, 264-266 and UPP, I, 163-164.  

\(^6\)GF, II, 237-241.
a different state of things from what exists in the new?" Though some in America worshipped the literary masters of the past, and others made ridiculously inflated claims for "writing that is merely American because it is not written abroad," Whitman was convinced that "there is a true public opinion forming here which will ere long do equal and exact justice to all, in this matter."

One would expect to find the argument for a genuine national literature carried into Whitman's comments on the 425 books (and five pamphlets) which he reviewed while editor of the Eagle, but Whitman's intention as a book-reviewer was to acquaint his readers with literature that was moral and instructive, regardless of its origin. In an article --"The World of Books"--which appeared in the Eagle for November 26, 1847, Whitman was excited to the following effusion by "looking over the long list of works" in Harper's Illustrated Catalogue:

What a world there is, after all, in books! . . . In them are put, for safe keeping, the genius and discoveries of man, the trials and experiments of the learned, and all the mysteries of science. Beautiful thoughts of poets, and passionate writhings of the o'erstrung brain, and eloquence such as moves the massy hearts of nations, are embalmed there . . . The lives of the good and great too, incentives to encourage and virtue, reside aneath their pages . . . What would be the most sacred treasure of all, Sacred Writ itself, except for the bookish art? What would become of this "intelligence of the age," that we hear so much about? In books are the staunchest expositors of wrong, and the readiest inducements to right. We care not what kind of books--we mean in what department--they are, so long as confessedly not open to the charge of intentional immorality. We say that all books do good and have their office.

Whitman welcomed the prodigal yield of such publishing houses as Harper's, for being an earnest pedagogue, he found matter in those sundry books for
the schooling of his subscribers. He believed the people of the United States (hence, those of Brooklyn) to be a newspaper-ruled people and therefore amenable to education and improvement through the medium of newsprint. As a department in the Eagle, Whitman's book-review column had a share in his pedagogic plan.7

Whitman was more editor than critic in his book-reviews; his usual method for noticing a book was to quote from its preface or text, or, more often, merely to note the book's publication and, perhaps, its format. In that minority of reviews, however, which contained Whitman's personal comments, he was more critic than editor, but less a literary critic than a judge of personal and political morals and an advocate for self-improvement. He was more concerned with educating his readers than with judging authors as artists. He did not entirely neglect literary criticism in his book-reviews, but his response to divergent styles prohibits the researcher from concluding that he had developed a specific critique of literary composition. Whitman commended the polished and clear style of Douglass Jerrold and condemned the involved style of G. P.

7To Whitman, the literary criticism of the New York papers was meretricious. He wrote on September 25, 1846: "There is a great deal of small potato criticism in the newspapers of New York. . . . How often have we seen a new book, well written and quite original, passed by with silence, or damned with faint praise; while tinsel and vapid nonsense has been puffed by the efforts of friends into public notice! . . . . They want in N. York some periodical of more comprehensive and critical ability than any that as yet exists in this country. Much is said about the profusion of cheap literature, and its injurious effect on popular taste.--But there is really no harm in books being cheap, if they are good. A high-toned critical authority would do much to root out trashy literature."
usually, the *Eagle* took no cognizance of a book's style, and if an author's mode of composition was criticized, the didactic tone of the work in question often palliated its literary deficiencies. 8

The didactic merit of any work was the quality which really engaged the attention of Whitman as a book-reviewer with a duty to his readers. His most frequent comment upon a book was that it contained a moral lesson—which was, of course, the most frequent comment of his fellow reviewers in the 1840's. It is somewhat surprising, then, that when Whitman had the opportunity to condemn some of the trash which flooded America from across the Atlantic, he did not. His treatment of Bulwer well illustrates this inconsistency. On December 2, 1846, he reported the publication by Harper's of Bulwer's *Lucretia*, saying only, "Its author's name alone will doubtlessly give it a prodigious 'run'"; and eight days later he made no comment on the eagerness of American readers to buy foreign trash when he announced that the novel had sold 25,000 copies in the two days following its release. The publication of Bulwer's *Leila* was reported on December 28, 1846, by a single sentence noting that the novel was issued by Harper's in a pocket edition.

8 Reviewing Rev. Joseph Alden's The Lawyer's Daughter, May 31, 1847; Whitman said: "We have before spoken in the highest terms of Alden's writings: they are not brilliant in the way of genius, but they are always charming for their good sense and truth to nature, always inculcate a moral, and leave no reader at the end of their perusing them without a hint toward good. Such books deserve well of criticism, for they perform a wide and deep benefit in the sphere of their operation."
Finally Whitman expressed an opinion when he reviewed Bulwer's *Zanoni* on April 30, 1847: "This novel is a wild and vague affair—and though there are glimpses of true fire showing through it now and then, the feeling at the end is a sort of dissatisfaction—either with the characters or the author." Whitman's dissatisfaction, despite his earlier editorial inclusion of Bulwer with trashy European authors, is with the style of the novel apparently rather than with any unwholesomeness or its trashy competition with solid American works.9

Whitman's fervent belief in the superiority of democracy over all other political creeds provided another importantly emphasized topic in his reviews. Only such specialized categories as religious and health publications did not contain some allusions to the pre-eminence of republican government. His favorite device for illustrating that important fact to his readers was, as has been noticed in an earlier chapter, to present a sordid picture of Old World governments and institutions which contrasted strikingly with the benefits of the liberal democratic government of the United States. The *Eagle* also fostered patriotism and appreciation for democracy in the citizens of Brooklyn by bringing to their attention American history and biography,10 New World travels,

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9 Two of Ainsworth's novels were reviewed: *The Tower of London*, May 19, 1846; and *The Miser's Daughter*, September 27, 1847. Both are described as full of incident and interest, and there is no suggestion in either review of the criticism found of Ainsworth in "'Home' Literature."

10 Reviewing Jared Sparks' *Library of American Biography*, Whitman said, "Every youth in this country should be familiar with . . . the great and good men who ushered into life rational liberty, and planted the landmarks of political rights." Freedman, *Whitman Looks at the Schools*, p. 189.
scientific and social achievements in the United States, and American fiction. Consistent with Whitman's republicanism was his plea for a national literature; but his attitude toward native literature, as his opinions on all the ideas promoted in his book-reviews, was appropriately more fully expressed in his editorials. Relatively few of his reviews referred to the need for an indigenous literature, possibly because he felt that the moral and instructive qualities of a work were more fundamental and more valuable for the education of his readers than its possible application to a theory of national literature in which they likely had little intelligent interest. Also, it is doubtful if Whitman himself at that time had more than a vague idea of what elements such a theory should contain. Nevertheless, it is possible to assemble a tentative critique for an original American literature from his scattered comments in his reviews on that subject.

Whitman had little to say about American fiction in his remarks on the 100 works of adult fiction (and nothing at all in those on thirty-three juveniles) reviewed in the Eagle. Melville's Typee and Omoo were given appreciative notices on April 15, 1846, and May 5, 1847, respectively;\(^\text{11}\) but it was not remarked that their author was an American.

Reviewing William Gilmore Simms' The Wigwam and the Cabin, Whitman agreed

\(\text{Of Typee, Whitman said, "As a book to hold in one's hand and pore dreamily over of a summer day, it is unsurpassed." He liked Omoo because of its "richly good natured style" and because it was thorough "entertainment." For the complete reviews, see Charles Robert Anderson, "Contemporary American Opinion of Typee and Omoo," American Literature, IX (March, 1937), 21.}\)
that Simms was "unquestionably one of the most attractive writers of the age," but objected to "Caloya," one of the tales in the volume, because its last chapter "is rendered particularly objectionable by the introduction of a revolting drunken scene—and the tale as a whole is certainly calculated to reflect no credit on American literature, either at home or abroad." Whitman did not care to have native writers picture those American coarsities which Mrs. Trollope, Mr. Dickens, and others had already commented upon so eloquently, even when, as in "Caloya," the drunken characters were a Negro slave and a degenerate Indian.

Only three of the reviews of fiction suggested that American novels should possess peculiarly American characteristics. Reviewing Jack Long: Or Shot in the Eye, by Charles Wilkins Webb, on September 21, 1846, Whitman said, "'Jack Long' we have read, and know it to be a good story, and of the right sort for an American writer to write." The novel purported to be a true story of the Texas border and so the assumption is that Whitman wanted American authors to write about American scenes and American subjects. Of another American novel—The Unfortunate Maid: Embracing the Life and Adventures of Bob Norberry, by Captain P. O'Shaughnessy, reviewed June 28, 1847—he said: "A well-written, dashy, warm-hearted book, with not a good title—which will bar the perusal of it from many readers, who would surely be pleased with the interest of its pages, the patriotism and truth running through it, and the correct—
ness to nature of its portraiture." This review suggests that among the characteristics proper to American fiction was realism qualified by a spirit of patriotism. On September 27, 1847, a review of William L. Stone's Tales and Sketches presented Whitman's concept of a "thoroughly American" story: "We like these stories first because they are thoroughly American in their subjects, characters and illustrations, and sentiments; secondly because the style is clear and of a purer English than that of most of the British tale-writers themselves."

Stone's tales depicted colonial life in New England and were generously infused with Indian lore and life. As such, the stories were a legitimate part of American native literature, and their good style convinced Whitman that the American author might write as expertly and pleasingly as the more esteemed British author.13

Whitman had nothing at all to say in his reviews about a native American poetry. He was a conformist in his remarks upon verse; and, with one or two exceptions, the popular poets of the time, whether American or European, received only praise in the Eagle. Of the twenty-two poetical works reviewed by Whitman, only three received unfavorable comment, and all three were by American poets (Charles Fenno Hoffman, David Reeve Arnell, and Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney).14 At no time did

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13 On November 22, 1847, Whitman said of Daniel Thompson's Locke Amsden: "It is the equal in every respect . . . to works that are much vaunted, being written by foreign authors."

14 The basis of Whitman's dislike of these poets is not very clear, since he praised other poets whose styles were quite similar to those of the former.
Whitman laud a poet for picturing the American scene or for expressing American sentiments. In a long review of a collected edition of Longfellow's poems, the only reference to the poet's nationality occurred in the statement that the country did not sufficiently appreciate the poet, who was "an honor and a glory . . . to the American name." Never in the columns of the Eagle did Whitman call out for a poet to celebrate the "en-masse" with a "barbaric yawp."

In the matter of travel books, Whitman spoke out for the desirability of American writers describing the American scene. He said of Mrs. E. F. Ellet's Rambles About the Country, which he noticed on February 1, 1847: ""It involves several graphic descriptions of American natural scenery, and incidents of American life. We welcome everything that truly treats of our own land--and we therefore welcome this." Samuel Parker's Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains, reviewed on December 12, 1846, suggested to Whitman "that American curiosity might quite as well turn its attention to Indian traits, as to Egyptian and

15 Whitman came close to expressing such a sentiment only once when on July 9, 1847, he printed Alfred B. Street's "The Gray Forest Eagle." "A Magnificent Poem, by a Young American," he proclaimed in bold type--then added prefatory: "We have often read with pleasure the descriptive poems of that son of nature, in her western guise, Alfred B. Street . . . The vein of Mr. Street's poetry is a rich and original one--and we can only wish that he would delve into it oftener." Whitman shared the common taste here, for Street's nature poems were greatly admired in his time.

16 GF, II, 297-298. Twenty-four issues of the Eagle during Whitman's editorship carried poems by Longfellow--a record not surpassed, or even approached, by any other poet.
Several other travel books led Whitman to comment on the American Indian as a distinctly American literary material. For example, he said of the anonymous *Altowan; or Incidents of Life and Adventure in the Rocky Mountains* on September 26, 1846, that "every book which truly contributes, as this does, to an authentic knowledge of the life, manners, and peculiarities of the Great Aboriginal Race now passing slowly but surely away, is a precious thing in American literature."

In addition to books, Whitman reviewed some thirty different periodicals in the *Eagle* from month to month, and it is here that one finds Whitman more often articulate on the subject of a national literature. Too frequently there was little substance in American periodical writings, which caused Whitman to complain of the *Columbian Magazine* on November 20, 1846: "We persist in thinking that a third-rate appetite is far too much bent to in these monthly magazines."

But he was at times pleased with both the prints and the printed matter of the periodicals, finding them of a "national character." Remark ing on August 21, 1847, on the tendency of *Graham's American Monthly* to embellish itself with engravings of royalty and nobility, he asked, "Is there no fitting theme of a more national character?" And he noted that the current *Columbian Review* had "a spirited engraving of a 'wigwam in the forest.'"

17 In a review of, but not in reference to, the *Christian Parlor Magazine*, March 8, 1847, Whitman expressed "impatience at the flippancy of the 'popular' monthly magazines—with their fashion plates, and their sentimental love stories."
He was always pleased with engravings of American natural scenery, American historical events, and American notables. He expressed his complete agreement in a review on January 8, 1847, with the editors of North American Illustrated who suggested that their American prints "may do quite as well for American parlors as Swiss views, or Oriental flummeries."

Though Whitman sometimes accused the Columbian Review of catering to "third-rate appetite," he applauded it on August 20, 1846, because it "gives us 'semi-occasionally,' a dash of Americanism--an American picture, and a truly American narrative or romance." Who the authors were of these "truly American" narratives and romances Whitman did not say; but two of them probably were Mrs. Lydia Maria Child, the abolitionist poet and writer of fiction, and Mrs. Caroline Matilda Stanbury Kirkland, sentimentalist of the Michigan frontier. In a review of the Union Magazine which appeared in the Eagle for June 30, 1847, Whitman said: "At all events we could wish nothing better than the writings of Mrs. Kirkland herself, and Mrs. Child--writing to our mind among the best, freshest, and most charming specimens of American literature." It was not, of course, only the American geographical and social scene that Whitman wanted displayed in American periodical literature, but also American democratic ideals. Displeased by the Whiggish, hence depreciatory, inferences in an account of a battle in the Mexican War written by Rev. J. T. Headley in the American Review, Whitman declared in the Eagle for August 26, 1846: "Democracy is closely identified with a well-
developed literature—and it has always been the highest pride of the
best writers to advance the claims of liberal doctrine in government."
The Democratic Review, he added, had "so noble a scope."

Yet Whitman was not always insistent upon the exposition of
American character and ideals in periodicals. His most frequent super­
lativees were applied to Littell's Living Age, a weekly eclectic magazine
of Continental reprints, chiefly British, published in Boston. Whitman
qualified his praise of this journal—which he called "this princely
publication," "this royal publication," and a "triton among minnows"—
only once when he confessed, on October 12, 1847, that it had "just a
smattering of an aristocratic tinge." Whitman's essential lack of
literary chauvinism is shown by the fact that though the Living Age
admittedly had an anti-democratic coloring, he could say of it, on July
22, 1847, that "it affords the noblest reading of any of its class in
our language."

In the scattered comments in the Eagle, it is possible to glimpse
some unorganized elements of an emerging theory of national literature:
genuinely native writings should deal with American persons and insti­
tutions in American settings; and they should be characterized by a
spirit of patriotism, a pride in democratic government, and a freedom
from excessive admiration of the Old World. That Whitman's concept of
an American national literature was not yet clearly formed was evidenced
by the relative scarcity of his comments on that subject, by the fact
that he implied rather than stated the qualities of such a literature,
and by the vague and generalizing nature of his editorial pronouncements on that topic. These qualities necessary to a distinctive national literature were those which other critics, such as the author of "Nationality in Literature" in the Democratic Review, were insisting upon. Whitman supported this reform movement in literature, as it may be called, as he had supported other reform movements which appealed to him. And perhaps it was his "latent toleration for the people who choose the reactionary course" that preserved him, as it had in other cases, from fanaticism—in this case, literary chauvinism.

Whitman inaugurated a literary department in the Eagle (occupying from one to three columns on the first page, which formerly had been entirely taken up by advertisements) and on June 1, 1846, it became a regular feature of the paper. The Eagle for May 30, 1846, announcing the establishment of the literary miscellany as a daily feature, revealed that on June 1, it would "commence the publication . . . of an Original Novelette, a Tale of Indian Life, which we feel warranted in saying the readers of this journal will find of interest."18 After assuring the ladies and the young that their tastes would not be slighted in the new department, the Eagle continued: "Our object is, also, to make the department in question as original as possible, in the highest sense—

18. The novelette was "The Half-Breed; A Tale of the Western Frontier. By a Brooklynite." The Brooklynite was Whitman. For other of Whitman's tales published in the Eagle, see Allen's Solitary Singer, p. 552, note 43. He omits three: "Wild Frank's Return" (May 8, 1846), "Little Jane" (December 7, 1846), and "Death in the Schoolroom" (December 24, 1847).
presenting, mostly, sketches, tales, &c., &c., on American subjects, particularly those relating to Long Island, and the neighboring section of the United States." From this it would appear that Whitman planned to give substantial support to the cause of native literature; if so, he failed to a large extent. He printed a few tales of Hawthorne, Poe, and Irving, and poems of Longfellow, Holmes, Bryant, Lowell, and Whittier; but these were overwhelmed numerically by the poems, tales, sketches, and didactic essays of the sentimental American moralizers and their anonymous imitators who enjoyed the public favor in the 1840's and later. The volume of "original" American contributions to the literary miscellany was still more curtailed by the frequent selections culled from the literature of Europe. The local contributions—mostly poems which were usually unsigned—to the literary miscellany did little to advance the development of a native literature, since they were generally cast in the mold of Mrs. Sigourney's and Mrs. Child's works.

19 "Old Esther Dudley" (July 28-29, 1846) and "The Shaker Bridal" (October 8, 1846).

20 "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (October 9-10, 1846).

21 "The Broken Heart" (October 11, 1847) and "Pelayo and the Merchant's Daughter" (October 26, 1847).

22 See UPP, I, 130, for a list of the authors, American and foreign, from whom Whitman quoted in the Eagle. Among the American writers, Holloway failed to include Hannah Gould and Mrs. Ellet.

23 Ibid. European contributors omitted were Fanny Kemble, Hans Anderson, Burns, Sterne, and G. P. R. James.

24 Rev. T. B. Thayer, the Universalist minister, was one of the star performers of the Brooklyn literati. Introducing a short poetical essay
As in his book-reviews, the didactic element was the most important in Whitman's literary section. The motive that impelled Whitman in most of the selections that he made for page one of the *Eagle* was clearly stated on March 17, 1847, in his remarks on a tale then running in the paper—"The Father in the Snow," translated from the German of W. Alexis by Mrs. St. Simon and taken from *The Christian Parlor Magazine*.

Surely no one can read the story now in course of publication on our first page, without deriving an infusion of pure religious sentiment of higher disinterestedness, and more manly courage! The plot is well worked of itself; but the moral reaches far beyond the plot. Parents should read this story to their children; young men should read it, and ponder on it; it teaches the highest virtue of the soul—the opposite of the weak, discontented, vacillating, uncheerful spirit, which prevails so widely among nearly all classes... The whole interest of the tale centres round the character of the Pastor; a sublime character! sublime in its simplicity! It will do everyone good to peruse such a tale.

On a few occasions, Whitman succumbed to pure sentimentality (and critical idiocy), as when, on August 4, 1846, he prefaced "Ah, how beautiful is this!—Ed. E." to an unsigned "Ode to a Girl," whose final and perhaps best stanza went as follows: "And the cold sweat pours down, and all of me / Trembling seize. I paler be / Than grass, and, scarce removed from death, / Seem without breath." But much more often the poems on the first page, and the sketches as well, fulfilled in their contents the moralistic tone promised by such titles as "To a Dying Infant," "On the Death of a Virtuous Young Girl," "The Child's Grave," "We Miss Thee by Thayer on "Autumn" in the *Eagle* for November 11, 1846, Whitman spoke of him as "One of our tastiest Brooklyn writers—a frequent, (but not half frequent enough,) correspondent of our own."
Stories by Hawthorne, poems by Bryant, "Incidents &c. Among the Indians," by a Mr. Eeels, and first-hand accounts of combat in the Mexican War, and other contemporary writings truer to the American scene and the American spirit fought a losing battle on page one of the Eagle with the effusions of the Sigourney-Child school. It was inevitable. Whitman was pre-eminently the pedagogue, and for him to be an effective one through his paper's literary miscellany, he had no choice but to print plainly didactic literary work that appealed to the taste of his readers (and to his own taste, to a perceptible degree). He was not yet a reformer of American literature; for he was but vaguely conscious, at the most, of the mission that was to absorb his life.

2. The Stage.

It has been remarked that Whitman's "editorials in the Eagle on the contemporary stage reveal some of the same forces that motivated his criticisms of poetry and prose: a desire that the drama should exercise a moral function; an impatience with New York critics; and a program for American managers." An important element in this last motivating

25J. J. Rubin, "Whitman as a Drama Critic," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXVIII (February, 1912), 45. This article summarizes the dispute the Eagle had in the late summer and early fall of 1846 with several of the New York papers over the relative merits of American and British actors and plays, and over the uncritical (to Whitman) drama reviews in the latter papers.

For the more important of Whitman's comments on the stage, see OF, II, 309-314.
force was the wish to see, as part of the development of a national literature, the emergence of "original" American dramatists. The stage, like literature, was for Whitman an art which both entertained and edified; as a critic, he was concerned with its doing these things well while at the same time it expressed the national character.

One of Whitman's editorials on the theatre asked, "How Shall the American Stage Be Resuscitated?" His answer to this question was: "English managers, English actors, and English plays, (we say it in no spirit of national antipathy, a feeling of hate) must be allowed to die away among us, as usurpers of our stage." The Park, as Whitman often told his readers, was his favorite theatre; yet it was "but a third-rate imitation of the best London theatres," giving its patrons "the cast off dramas, and the unengaged players of Great Britain." Whitman had a program whereby the American stage could be revivified: some bold American manager should abolish the English starring system, engage American talent, and give his patrons dramas suited to American sentiments and institutions. Such a revolution in the American theatre would meet with public approval: "With all our servility, to foreign fashions, there is at the heart of the intelligent masses there, a lurking propensity

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26 GF, II, 314-318. For another editorial on this subject, see UPP, I, 156-158.
27 GF, II, 311.
28 Ibid., 313-314.
toward what is original, and has a stamped American character of its own. 29

In Whitman's opinion, there were several American actors who were better than the best of England's dramatic stars. Charlotte Cushman, he believed, was without an English peer; 30 and James Anderson, though not the fulfillment of Whitman's "idea of a really great actor," was better even than Macready. 31 Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kean (she was the former Ellen Tree) arrived in America in August of 1846, for an engagement at the Park Theatre. From the first, the Eagle criticized their acting abilities. The New York press, which had mostly praise for the Keans, sneered at Whitman's comments, and in doing so, unleashed a barrage from the Eagle against the soundness and sincerity of the dramatic criticism of the New York papers. "The N. Y. Gazette thinks it 'funny' and the News thinks it 'ridiculous' that we look on the Keans as no better than several of our own stock performers," remarked Whitman in September. "Independent opinions, uninfluenced by the tawdry glitter of foreign fame . . . may, doubtless do, seem ridiculous and funny enough to our city neighbors. Such as we have expressed about the Keans are our honest opinions, however; and that's more than a man will get from the New York

29Ibid., 316.

30Ibid., 325-327. Whitman particularly liked her ability to completely identify herself with the character she represented. This, to him, was the secret of great acting.

31Rubin, "Whitman as a Drama Critic," l46.
papers in a month of Sundays. The drama criticism in the New York papers was valueless—it was nothing but "puffs" which were "paid for either in money to the publisher, or treats, suppers, or gifts to the critics." Furthermore, the New York critics imitated the convention- alities of the British and praised or damned actors and plays as the British praised or damned them; and unfortunately many of those who attended plays truckled to both the New York critics and British opinion. Whitman was correct in saying his opinions were his own. His comments in the Eagle on the plays he saw were fresh, usually valid, and expressive of a genuine appreciation of the stage.

Despite the great dramatic actors of the 1840's, the stage, particularly so far as the legitimate drama was concerned, was badly attended in that period. In part this unhappy condition of the theatre was due to a widespread moral prejudice against both the stage and those who acted on it. Though the Eagle admitted certain undesirable features about the theatre, it at no time accused actors of anything worse than thoughtlessness of the morrow. In the Eagle for November 27, 1847, Whitman reported the death of Mrs. Herring, who for many years had been a member of the Bowery's company; and, drawn into reminiscences of "the old Bowery

\[32\] Ibid., 48.

\[33\] GF, II, 319. Whitman found proof of this system of criticism when the Herald printed a "long cut and dried puff . . . of the Keans' acting in a play which accidentally didn't come off!" Ibid., 341.

company of fifteen years ago," he noted how many of that group were now old and poor. It was an unfortunate habit of actors, he remarked, to neglect to save. "Generous and thoughtless," they spent their money as they earned it. "As a fact with hardly an exception, it will be found that they have most of the kindly and good-hearted qualities that embellish character," Whitman asserted. "And this must be remembered, while their employment is scouted by the over scrupulous. Let the world treat the faults of these people gently! and have a kind thought, at least, for them, when departed!" As for the New York theatres, certain of them -- the Bowery, the Chatham, and the Olympic -- were guilty of vulgarity, coarseness, and bad taste "really beyond all toleration." The "misable burlesques of the histrionic art" which appeared on the boards of these theatres perverted the moral purpose of the stage: to promote philanthropy; to destroy despotism; to "hold up to scorn bigotry, fashionable affectations, avarice, and all unmanly follies"; to warn youth away from wickedness; and to improve relations in domestic life. The presentations of well-regulated theatres such as the Broadway and the Park promoted these moral aims, and one came away from them a better person.

35 GF, II, 310. Whitman excepted the Park, "because the audiences there are always intelligent, and there is a dash of superiority thrown over the performances."

See Minnigerode, loc. cit., for an account of the burlesques, acrobatic acts, and spectacles put on at the Bowery, Chatham, and Olympic.

36 GF, II, 314-315.
Whitman believed the stage, as an institution, to be a good influence upon public morals, and one of the last pieces he wrote in the *Eagle* was a defense of the theatre. "While divines, who will not visit the theatre, and therefore cannot be supposed to know, truly, much about it . . . are inveighing against the art," he told his readers on January 6, 1848, "while, we say, it is considered 'religious,' among a few, to condemn the theatre, it may not be amiss to stop awhile and think whether there be not something in such statements as the following from the *Harbinger.*" The *Harbinger* had declared that tired business men and toil-worn laborers were saved from the vicious bar-room and "rum-hole" by seeking relaxation in the pit of a theatre. Indeed, said the *Harbinger*, if it were possible for every adult and child in the community to visit the theatre two or three times a week, "it would work an instant and prodigious moral advancement." Whitman, naturally, heartily agreed with the *Harbinger*, citing the plays of Shakespeare as indubitably suited for virtuous relaxation. Many modern dramatists, too, such as Bulwer (whom Whitman stamped, here, as a genius), provided mental refreshment of a wholesome sort. Doubtlessly evil got into the theatre just as it did in the streets and the churches, Whitman admitted, but only "the excessively verdant" imagined that there was more evil there than elsewhere. The theatre needed reforming, true enough, but the reform was the sort that would free it from subservience to British conventions and ideas. "Let the virtuous have done with these attempts upon the theatre," Whitman demanded. "Dramatic performances will always exist, in every civilized community—and should exist."

Miss Louise Pound pointed out many years ago that in *Leaves of Grass* Whitman "does not use the verb to write" speaking of the poetical act. He says sing, warble, carol, trill, or chant." She attributed this characteristic of Whitman's diction to the influence of singers, especially operatic singers, in the poet's "incubation period," a period including his two years as editor of the *Eagle*. Since Miss Pound's article, numerous studies have been made of the influence of operatic technique upon Whitman's poetics, and they have tended to show that there was a substantial amount of truth in the pronouncement made to J. T. Trowbridge by Whitman in 1860: "'But for the opera,' he declared that day on Prospect Hill, 'I could never have written *Leaves of Grass*." Though the opera may be called Whitman's chief musical passion, he also enjoyed, in varying degrees, other kinds of music in his *Eagle* period: band concerts, vocal and instrumental recitals, oratorios, and popular vocal concerts. And, as one would expect, he was moved from time to time to say something about "national" music.

Judging from the remarks of the *Eagle*, instrumental music had less

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appeal for its editor than did vocal music. The relatively few comments in the paper on instrumental music showed a preference for simplicity in both melody and execution and for the music of a brass band over that of a single instrument. Speaking in the *Eagle* for April 15, 1847, of William Granger's ubiquitous Brooklyn Brass Band, Whitman declared, "Of all that may be said of music—that inspiriting cheerer of the festive scene, and lightener of the cares of life—it is too often forgotten . . . that a fine brass band is capable of giving some of the sweetest developments of the divine art." Most of the band music that Whitman heard was played at civic festivals, semi-public balls, and the midnight street serenades so common on Brooklyn's balmier nights; and he often described such music as "some of the most delightful music ever listened to." He left a record in the *Eagle* for January 7, 1848, of a formal band concert he attended at the New York Tabernacle given by the "Steyermarkische company." The elegant musicians of the band had "none of the clap-trap of 'great artists'—no affectation—a youthful leader, who does not have his 'grand entrees,' nor flourish his wand with his back to the audience . . ." Of all the pieces played that night—and Whitman enjoyed them all—he liked best "The Marseillaise," which sounded "like the united voices of myriads" and filled "every chamber of the air." Though Whitman wrote some appreciative reviews of string and pianoforte recitals, his enjoyment of those instruments was moderate and he frequently felt that musicians

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40*GF, II, 352, 354.
who played them were inclined to execute pieces too sophisticated for the average American audience. Commenting on December 3, 1817, on a concert given at the Brooklyn Institute, Whitman stated: "Indeed it is only through simple, sprightly and unpretentious music that the hearts of a miscellaneous audience can be touched. For this reason the introductory piece by Saroni on the violoncello and Duggan on the pianoforte, though full of real musical expression, and performed with skill, went off heavily and unsatisfactorily to the audience." Whitman reported favorably on Sivori's and Herz's concert in the Eagle for October 11, 1817; but his enjoyment of that night's music was seemingly mixed, for he asked his readers, "Why do concert givers always gratify their own tastes alone, in selecting a programme? Many, no doubt, wished for the soothing influence of some sweet old English song, ever classical, and better than volumes of head aching trills."

Whitman found the simple music that he and the American "miscellaneous audience" preferred, in the songs of such native vocal groups (some of them mixed quartets) as the Hutchinsons, the Cheneys, and the Harmonions. He was not yet the aficionado of the opera when he wrote the following, under the heading of "Music For the 'Natural Ear,'" in the Eagle for April 3, 1846:

After all--after hearing the trills, the agonized squalls, the lackadaisical drawlings, the sharp ear-piercing shrieks, the gurgling death-rattles, the painful leaps from the fear fullest eminences to a depth so profound that we for a while hardly expect the tongue to scramble up again--after sitting in the full blaze of the pit of the Italian opera at Palmo's and nigh "the Borghese," and "the Pico," time and time again--after the cracked voice of Templeton, the most consummate
of humbugs, the tiger-like piano execution of De Meyer, and all the long train of Italian artificiality—we turn, (we are quite ashamed to admit it) with a vivider relish than ever to that kind of music which seems intended for "the natural man"—Whether it be that our palate rejects, in its homeliness, the niceties of spiced cookery, or that the simple wholesome is better in music, as it is in diet—at all events, give us good heart-song before the "fashionable article," any day!

On the night before, continued Whitman, he had attended the concert given by the Hutchinson Family—three brothers and their female cousin—whose "true music really surpasses almost any of the vaunted artificial performers from abroad." He had been most pleased by their rendition of Longfellow's "Excelsior," "that strange deep poetry." It was music of this sort that he had in mind in a later editorial on the reciprocal

Whitman's nationalism was not the narrow sort that kept him from praising English singers who were deserving of praise (see GF, II, 351-352), but he disparaged Templeton whenever he mentioned him. In the Eagle for June 19, 1846, he reported that he had been sent tickets for Templeton's concert that night in Brooklyn. He had, he said, nothing but contempt for Templeton's claims as a "first rate vocalist, or to the position of a gentleman." He was surprised that the public could swallow "superannuated third-rate artists from the Old World" simply because they were puffed by newspapers. "Templeton's voice," asserted Whitman, "is inferior to many a man's singing in our Brooklyn church choirs. . . . When he returns to England, no doubt, he will splirt his vulgar venom at our country, like all his tribe before him." Whitman attended Templeton's concert (as he reported the next day) and saw no signs of disapproval among the small audience. In fact, there was "considerable vociferous applause." Whitman's sole comment on the singing was that Templeton committed a "cool piece of impudence" by omitting, in his rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the third verse, which asperges the bravery of the British. For the next two or three months, Whitman delighted in noting that Templeton's New England tour was a financial failure, and he frequently reverted to his omission of the third stanza of the national hymn. "Templeton is a humbug," was his opinion of the dollar-seeking English singer, as shown by the consensus of the Eagle's reports.
influences of a nation's spirit and its music, when he wrote that "no human power can thoroughly suppress the spirit which lives in national lyrics, and sounds in the favorite melodies sung by high and low." Whitman's most complete statement on the subject of national music appeared in an editorial—"Music That Is Music"—in the Eagle for December 4, 1846. Here Whitman distinguished between "heart music" and "art music." The latter was the "unreal" sort of melody that featured in the concerts of the violinist Sivori, the pianist De Meyer, and other European artists. The former was that which one heard at the concerts of the Hutchinsons and other groups of American vocalists; and it appealed to the American heart because of its "elegant simplicity," its intelligibility, and its "sensible sweetness" as contrasted with "the stale, second hand, foreign method, with its flourishes, its ridiculous sentimentality, its anti-republican spirit, and its sycophantic tainting [of] the young taste of the nation!" Yet two months later, the young editor who had turned in relief from "Italian artificiality" to the republican "heart music" of the Hutchinsons was to recommend the Italian opera as a welcome influence on American music.

Whitman's first critical review of an opera appeared in the

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12OF, II, 346.

13Ibid., 346-349. The sentiments of this piece had been expressed earlier by Whitman in an article he had written for Poe's Broadway Journal, November 29, 1845. See UPP, I, 104-106.

14Faner (Whitman & Opera, p. 7) states that Whitman's first critical review of an opera appeared in the Eagle for March 23, 1847. Actually,
Eagle for January 16, 1847, when he reported on the performances of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* by the new Italian company at Palmo's Opera House in New York. Everyone, he said, including the chorus, did well; and the execution of Barili (who played Lucia) was "admirable," reminding "the listener of an exquisitely played flute, at once dazzling and soothing . . ." The opening sentences of Whitman's second operatic review, February 13, showed none of the prejudice against Italian opera that he had expressed in the preceding year: "More as tending, by comparison and familiarity, to elevate the standard of music in this country --than as anything to bow down to, or servilely imitate--the *Italian opera* deserves a good degree of encouragement among us." Whitman hoped that the new company at Palmo's would become a permanent fixture there. 

He had attended, on the night before, their performance of Coppola's *Nina Pazza per Amore*. In his opinion, the opera lacked marked "originality or beauty," but it was "written in a light and sparkling style, and one might liken its introduction to the first inhalment of a good glass of champagne." And the performance of Rosina Pico seemed to have chased from Whitman's mind all thoughts of Italian artificiality, for he said that her concluding songs were so "exquisite in quality and execution . . . that perhaps even Robie Burns, in his eccentric humor, would not have objected to those sweet and wild 'Italian trills' as concluding strains to 'old Dundee.'" On March 6, Whitman reviewed the

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three operatic reviews were printed in the *Eagle* before that date. However, Faner was dependent for his sources on *The Gathering of the Forces* and *Unpublished Poetry and Prose*, neither of which mentions the earlier reviews.
new company's performance in Verdi's I Lombardi. He found the music somewhat heavy in style, but he was enthusiastic about the individual performers (including a soloist on the violin) and advised "all who appreciate the inspiration of true music, to go and hear some of the finest chorus-singing, instrumentation, and arias, ever produced in this part of the country."

In the months that followed, Whitman seems to have attended the opera frequently. Companies were appearing at the Broadway, the Park, and Castle Garden as well as at Palmo's, some of them giving, with Whitman's approval, English versions of the more popular Italian operas. Whitman's notices of these performances were invariably favorable—even when the singers were miscast— and usually enthusiastic. The operatic revival in New York in 1847 had worked a sea change on the editor of the Eagle: the journalist who in 1846 had described the opera as the scene of agonized squalls was not the same Whitman who, on December 13, 1847, at the beginning of a brief announcement of two operatic troupes opening that week at the Park and Broadway theatres, put the exclamation "GOOD!"

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\[\text{\textsuperscript{45}}\text{OF, II, 349-351.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{46}}\text{Whitman occasionally heard a type of singing more related to operatic arias than to the popular songs of the Hutchinsons—the oratorio. Several oratorios that he attended were mentioned in the Eagle, but only two received extended comment. His estimate of Mendelssohn's Elijah (OF, II, 353-354), which he heard in the fall of 1847, was that it was "too elaborately scientific for the popular ear." Faner (op. cit., p. 40-41) accuses Whitman of inconsistency in this review (for he had} \]
4. The Ballet.

The *Eagle* for December 24, 1847, in a paragraph containing some "Pleasant News for the Lovers of the Ballet," remarked that the public liked an patronized musical and ballet performances more than the legitimate stage. It was pleasant news, then, for the readers of the *Eagle*, that Signora Ciocca, Signor Morra, and Miss Nallin were to commence an engagement at the Broadway. Perhaps Whitman had seen Signora Ciocca before, since he stated that in many ways she was superior to any dancer, except Fanny Ellsler, who had appeared on the American stage. It is apparent from the *Eagle* that Whitman enjoyed musical performances much more than the ballet. His remarks on the ballet were rare and usually perfunctory, sometimes expressive more of wonder at the physical stamina of the dancers than at their grace. But he lost his heart to one ballet company—the band of little girls who composed the Viennoise Children.

Whitman first noticed this group, which was appearing at the Park, on December 14, 1846. "The beautiful little creatures" reminded him of

praised the same composer's oratorio, *St. Paul*, in the *Brooklyn Star*) and of "following the 'popular' line primarily for journalistic purposes." It seems, however, not impossible that the oratorio simply did not appeal to Whitman. In a portion of the review not quoted in *Gathering of the Forces*, Whitman expressed pleasure in the performances of several of the singers. Too, it should be remembered that for several months he had been enjoying operas that had their share of scientific elaborateness. A less heavy work was Felicien David's *The Desert*, which Whitman heard twice in April 1846. On April 7, he said that rarely had his "inward sense" been so gratified "with the tinglings of beauty." On April 16, having gone to hear it again, he described *The Desert* as having: "something divine about it, wildly and indescribably beautiful." The oratorio was repeated several times in the next few months, both in New York and in Brooklyn, and Whitman continued to praise it.
"living roses" and of "butterflies." "These little Dutch girls," he said, "have the largest sort of red cheeks—forms like big apples—and their black eyes and fat little legs vibrate together, as the band plays those inspiriting German dance-airs! They all look healthy . . ."

Whitman's description of the number he liked best suggests, though he seemed to deny it, that a degree of sensuality was involved in the appeal the children had for him.

The dance where half of these engaging creatures are dressed in tight male dresses, is particularly amusing and pleasing. The roguishness of the boy-girls, (the two largest good-looking fellows, though, are very sober indeed,) and the elasticity of their motions, make a spectacle which the youth of the players only redeems from Sybarite voluptuousness! It is a very tolerable 'poetry of motion' however—and the prudish need not be afraid of witnessing it.

The Viennese Children were not "handsome-faced, (which we Americans think more of than the modern, far more than the ancient Europeans)" but they were "well formed, healthy-featured girls." Whitman wondered where they came from, and at the same time wondered what their futures would be. "O, that some special angel might have them in his harmless care!"

Apparently Whitman went to see the little dancers several times in the week that followed, for on December 22, he said of them, "How charming they are! How they grow upon the love, too, every successive evening!" When the children returned to New York in the fall of the following year, Whitman hastened to remind his readers that "those most charming little creatures" were back again at the Park. The strong appeal the Viennese Children had for the young editor of the Eagle
evidently arose from their attractive healthiness. He might fear for their moral future, but he need feel no apprehensions for their health as he had on one occasion for a group of child musicians. Whitman had remarked, in reviewing Dr. Dixon's *Woman, and Her Diseases*, how rare it was to see "a well developed, healthy naturally beautiful woman." On another occasion he had said "how seldom we see a perfectly healthy child, or youth!" Perhaps the little "well formed, healthy-featured girls" of the Viennoise troupe embodied for Whitman the wholesome well-being he wanted for American children. Perhaps, too, he saw in them the promise of future perfect mothers.

5. Architecture.

Whitman had little to say about architecture and would probably have had even less to say about it had it not been that the rapid growth of Brooklyn in the late 1840s brought with it an increased construction of newsworthy buildings. Most of his architectural opinions were on religious edifices, but business buildings on occasion elicited a few comments. His remarks in the *Eagle* for October 20, 1846, on the new Brooklyn Savings Bank illustrate his fundamental forth.
taste in both sacred and profane architecture. "The massive, chaste character of the pile, its simplicity,—and the sufficient adornment without flummery, of the windows and door pieces," he said, "conduce to make it of such a nature that the eye can always rest upon it with pleasure." Whitman's taste in religious architecture, as was briefly noted in an earlier chapter, was prevailingly the same—inclined to the plain and simple. The First Reformed Dutch Church embodied this chaste beauty. "Off south of the new city hall . . . stands one of the best specimens of architecture, one of the best looking churches, in Brooklyn!" Whitman declared on February 9, 1847. "Its clear white walls, its chaste style, the absence in it of all tawdriness and deception, have often attracted our notice, while perambulating the demesnes that there lie." Whitman disliked the over-luxurious ornamentation of Grace Church in New York and objected to an over-decorated tawdriness in the interior of the Broadway Theatre, but he was not so narrow in taste that he could not like a more ornate style than that of the First Reformed Dutch Church.

In the 1840's, the American Gothic, as it was later called, was beginning to displace the neoclassical style of architecture, particularly

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48 In the Eagle for November 26, 1847, Whitman remarked that this theatre was architecturally perfect in its interior except for one thing. "We allude to the tawdry figures (some kind of 'cross' knights, we are told,) which stand on one foot against the front of the second tier, and are bound round the shoulders in colored stuff, and hold out the chandeliers!" he said. "They hugely mar the prettiness of the rest of the house, and we advise their being forthwith taken out and buried decently."
in the North. Its increasing vogue was evidenced in Brooklyn by its influence on church architecture in that city. On October 20, 1846, Whitman expressed the opinion that the Church of the Holy Trinity, then under construction, would rival New York's Trinity Church in handsomeness. "The style of the Brooklyn Trinity, is a very rich and florid Gothic," he added. "The sombre color of the stone prevents it, at the same time, from losing that solemn, 'dim religious' cast, which no church should be without, if possible." When the Church of the Holy Trinity was completed in the following spring, Whitman's approval of its architecture seemed to be more than an expression of civic loyalty.

The *Eagle* for April 19, 1847, asserted that the church

as it appears from the outside, is among the very few fabrics where the eye of taste can behold a most profuse and florid display of ornament, the walls being apparently almost hidden by extraneous additions—and all reduced by the rigidest harmony and architectural truth. The excessive carving, and the innumerable turret-like points, all come in as happy aids to general effect—and that involves what we shall call richness, mellowness, and ripeness. . . .

The sombre walls of Trinity Church, hidden by florid but ordered ornament, were a complete contrast to the "clear white walls" of the Dutch Reformed Church; but Whitman's taste was broad enough to enjoy their dissimilar styles. He was, after all, a young man who took great pleasure not only in the simple songs of the Hutchinson Family but in the rich but disciplined arias of the Italian opera as well.


Shortly after Whitman became editor of the *Eagle*, he wrote a piece
on "Polishing the 'Common People,'" in which he suggested ways for "the spreading of a sort of democratical artistic atmosphere, among the inhabitants of our republic . . ." The American people were ahead of the rest of the world in intelligence and education, yet they gave too little encouragement to and had too little appreciation of the fine arts. "Let every family," he advised, "have some flowers, some choice prints, and some sculpture casts."

The Eagle's chief contribution to the fostering of interest in the fine arts was its comments on the engravings in the current periodicals. This contribution was slight, for not only were Whitman's remarks usually confined to simply stating the subjects of the prints but he also did not think highly of most magazine art. "With their everlasting frontispieces of round-cheeked and wasp-waisted women, come the monthly magazines again," said Whitman, opening a review of periodicals on September 23, 1847. This was "the old style namby-pamby" which he objected to in the prints in the Union Magazine on September 28. On December 14, 1847, speaking of the January issue of Godey's Lady's Book, he praised the magazine's good reading matter but deplored its "usual sort of commonplace pictures." He added, "Magazine pictures, by the by, have long been the dishwater of art." However, some periodical prints received Whitman's approval, since, as was seen in an earlier chapter, pictures dealing with American subjects were allied with writings on

Freedman, Whitman Looks at the Schools, pp. 97-99.
the same topics in the **Eagle's** minor campaign for a native literature. A few of the engravings that Whitman labelled in the **Eagle** as "neat," "pretty fair," or, rarely, "capital," were on subjects other than American, such as "Anne Boleyn with Archbishop Cranmer the Night before Her Execution" and "Christiana and Mercy in the Valley of the Shadow of Death." But the majority of the prints he approved of had such titles as "The Soldier of Brandywine," "View of the Adirondack Mountains," "Death of the Red Deer," "The Charge of Captain May at the Battle of Resaca de la Palma," "General Taylor," "Dance by the Mandan Women," and "Herds of Bison and Elks." However, Whitman's strongest expression of recommendation—"A work of Beauty!"—was reserved not for scenes appealing to national pride but for the colored prints of flowers which appeared in **Illustrated Botany**, a monthly he constantly praised. Reviewing the current issue of this periodical on August 20, 1846, he stated that the study of botany was "well calculated to develop a refinement, and a sense of beauty." And it could do even more: "To take up the simplest flower—examine it, its leaves, seeds, curious formations and beautiful colors—how well may the intelligent mind be impressed thereby, with the wisdom and vastness of God! For there is that in the make of a flower which involves those qualities." This probably was a conventional assertion of the advocates of botanical study, but it acquires a degree of significance when one recalls that Whitman later wrote in **Leaves of Grass** that "I believe a leaf of grass is no less
than the journey-work of the stars."  

Whitman had little to say in the *Eagle* about painting, although a few years later he was, with a somewhat authoritative attitude, to deliver two speeches on art and artists before the Brooklyn Art Union.  

He was naturally interested in George Catlin's paintings of American Indians and he joined those who were urging the federal government to purchase that large collection depicting tribes from Florida to the Yellowstone. "A great deal is said by American writers and orators," he said on July 9, 1846, in his first article on Catlin, "about the duty and mission of America, to the *future.*" Yet Americans were hesitant in investing money in behalf of that future mission, part of which was "to preserve the Memory of the Red Men, the North American 'Indians,' as they are miscalled." In a second article, he urged the government to act promptly lest "we shall never again have the opportunity of restoring to our country these paintings and memorials, so emphatically American, and of such decided importance to Art and to our national History."

Whitman had access to paintings at the gallery of the National Academy of Design in New York and at the Brooklyn Institute's annual exhibition of paintings. He appears, if one judges by the *Eagle*, to

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50 "Song of Myself," section 31, line 1.
51 UPP, I, 236-238, 241-247.
52 GF, II, 361-362.
have rarely visited either display, and his references to them consisted largely of expressions of the wish that works of art might be exhibited free so that the common folk would be encouraged to refine their taste and character. Almost nothing can be determined about Whitman's taste in painting from his remarks on the pictures he saw. Only Thomas Doughty, co-founder with Thomas Cole of the Hudson River School, and whom Whitman called "the prince of landscapists," was much praised by Whitman. In the *Eagle* for November 18, 1847, after naming some of the artists represented in the Brooklyn Institute's exhibition, he stated that he saw there "three splendid pictures by the best of American painters"—Doughty. The most beautiful of the three was "A Scene on the Tioga." It is possible, though, that Whitman preferred portraits to landscapes, for the painting that interested him most at this exhibition was a portrait of Frederika Bremer, the Swedish authoress who was so popular with the Americans and with Whitman. It seemed to him to be a perfect representation of Miss Bremer's "amiable moral and intellectual qualities." At the twenty-second annual exhibition of the paintings of the National Academy of Design, which he reported on April 14, 1847, though Whitman was pleased by several pictures, he seemed most impressed by "our own Frothingham's fine effigy of Rev. T. B. Thayer—a speaking portrait."5^4

53 Ibid., 360-361, 363-365.

54 On November 15, 1847, Whitman reported that Frothingham's portrait of Rev. Thayer had been excellently engraved and was on sale at T. D. Smith's bookstore. He objected to one improvement—the addition of spectacles. "The subject of the 'presentment' does wear spectacles, at times, it is true," admitted Whitman, "but the picture was more artistical and simply beautiful without them. The mental expression of our friend's face is copied faithfully in both painting and engraving."
It may have been, however, that Whitman—who was later to be fond of being photographed—preferred the daguerrotype to the painted portrait. He referred appreciatively on several occasions to the daguerrotype parlors of Brady and Plumbe in New York, and his comments on the pictures he saw there were much more enthusiastic than his remarks on the paintings shown at the Academy of Design or the Brooklyn Institute. In a brief paragraph which was "no 'puff,' either, but a sincere 'narrative of truth,'" in the Eagle for September 16, 1846, Whitman said of Plumbe's daguerrotypes that it was "hardly possible to conceive any higher perfection of art, in the way of transferring the representation of that subtle thing, human expression, to the tenacious grip of a picture which is never to fade!" In a longer and more detailed description of Plumbe's gallery, Whitman seems to have implied that the daguerrotype was a superior art form to oil painting. "You will see more life there," he said, "more variety, more human nature, more artistic beauty, (for what created thing can surpass that masterpiece of physical perfection, the human face?) than in any spot we know of." The daguerrotype portraits had a "strange fascination" for him. They were "realities."

Sculpture apparently had much less appeal for the editor of the Eagle than did engravings, oil paintings, and daguerrotypes. Besides some statuary done by Brooklynite Henry Kirke Brown, only one other

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55 GF, II, 113-117.

56 Whitman remarked on two bas reliefs and an Adonis by Brown which he saw at the Art Union in New York; his comments on these pieces were brief and insignificant. See UPP, I, 112-113.
piece of sculpture was commented on in the *Eagle*—Hiram Powers' celebrated "Greek Slave," which he could scarcely have avoided mentioning. This allegorical representation of Greece in Turkish fetters was an instant sensation when it was first exhibited in America in 1847; and the opinion promulgated by a committee of Cincinnati clergymen that its nudity was "moral" was accepted by the general public. On September 3, 1847, the *Eagle* carried an advertisement which announced that "POWERS' STATUE of the Greek Slave is now open for exhibition at the National Academy of Design, from 9 o'clock A. M. until 10 o'clock P. M. Admittance 25 cts. Season Tickets 50 cts." On September 22, the *Eagle* reported that up to that date Powers' share of the proceeds of the exhibition was two thousand dollars. The popularity of the exhibition was recorded by an ex-mayor of New York in his diary in an entry dated September 13, 1847: "A beautiful piece of statuary, the work of Hiram Powers, the celebrated American sculptor at Rome, is now being exhibited at the National Academy, and attracts crowds of visitors from morning to night. ... I certainly never saw anything more lovely." Was Whitman among the crowd of visitors to the National Academy's exhibition of the "Greek Slave"? The single comment in the *Eagle* on the statue—except for the statement on the proceeds from its showing—suggests in an ambiguous fashion, that he was. Whitman wrote on December 7, 1847:

A BEAUTIFUL SIGHT.—We have scarcely witnessed a more pleasing sight than the visit of the young ladies belonging to the Brooklyn female seminary to the exhibition of Powers' statue of the Greek Slave, in New York. On Saturday, some fifty or seventy-five charming young ladies, between the ages of sixteen and twenty, proceeded in a body to the national academy of design on Broadway, headed by one of the principals, and remained nearly two hours, completely enraptured with the beauties of this celebrated statue. We know of few higher compliments that can be paid to our countryman, Mr. Powers, than this.

If Whitman did view Powers' statue on that or any other day, he was strangely silent. One wonders if he could not have at least pointed out that the admittedly beautiful figure of the Greek Slave had never been deformed by tight lacing. It may have been that the white marble statue failed to move him esthetically because it was less realistic than oil painting or the daguerrototype and too cold, colorless, and inhuman when compared to such living beings as the "well formed, healthy-featured girls" of the Viennoise company. After all, the arts that most delighted the young editor of the Eagle were those in which living beings moved, and spoke, and sang—the ballet, the drama, and the opera. And the milieu that pleased him most was the humanity-crowded streets of Brooklyn and New York.
CONCLUSION

One must respect Walter Whitman, editor of The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. The opinions he expressed in his newspaper and the style in which he couched them were conventional. But he is entitled to respect as a journalist who enjoyed his profession, took it seriously, and devoted it to an earnest purpose. Though Whitman thought the average American editor was burdened with too many duties--he himself was editor, reporter, reviewer, assisted only by his scissors and pen--he found, as he told his readers, "many pleasures and gratifications in the position of an editor" to compensate for its toils. The general tone of his articles and paragraphs in the Eagle conveys his enjoyment in observing and commenting on the varied and stimulating world about him. He wrote with equal relish of national destiny, street lights, philanthropy, ferry boats, the Atlantic Dock and Basin, cockney journalists, democracy, Coney Island, Italian opera, and dirty streets. His contact with his world was broad. He interviewed such personages as P. T. Barnum and the delegates of the Laborers' Benevolent Association, he attended such diverse functions as steamboat christening parties and exhibitions of the blind, and he received copies of new books from publishers and theatre passes from impresarios. These were not the usual privileges of a journeyman printer or country schoolteacher; and it was to be expected that the healthy, intellectually curious young editor in his twenties would find them interesting and stimulating. To "really
feel a desire to talk on many subjects, to all the people of Brooklyn," as Whitman declared he did, was the result of his absorption in his diverse and provocative environment.

Whitman's writings in the Eagle have been characterized by "desultory or impromptu," adjectives which imply a substantial degree of professional unconcern. A few of his pieces certainly were composed hastily and indifferently; Whitman was human and he was sometimes pressed for time or simply was not in the mood. But the body of his Eagle articles shows evidence that thought, inquiry, and conviction entered into its composition. One often feels the impulse to depreciate these writings because of Whitman's relaxed, sometimes formless, style (it should be remembered that he believed an editor's articles "should ever smack of being uttered on the spur of the moment, like political oratory"), and because of his occasional ingenuousness and superficiality and his conventionality. Yet the sincerity of his editorial opinions on such matters as the Wilmot Proviso, the tariff, capital punishment, bathing, Alderman Fowler, and swill milk can scarcely be denied—they are not perfunctory. Too, Whitman was conscious of the primary responsibility of the newspaper editor to influence his public in the direction. As a result, he not only thought that what he said in the Eagle was worth saying, but he also made sure that what he said was not mistakenly confused with what someone else said. Communications and extracted articles that appeared in the Eagle were not always entirely acceptable to its editor, and so he reminded his readers that "Our own sentiments are always in the editorial articles proper."
The primary responsibility of the newspaper editor, stated specifically, was to school the people. As did many of his idealistic contemporaries, Whitman believed that social reform could be advanced by educating the American public, particularly through the ubiquitous newspaper. "People are to be schooled, in opposition perhaps to their long established way of thought," he proclaimed, and the persistent strain of didacticism in the Eagle is evidence of Whitman's professional earnestness. His editorials, reviews, literary extracts, and commentary, it is true, supported the conventional moralities and the more respectable reforms; but he was no mere conformist to the approved points of view. His distrust of the legislation of morals led him to denounce local-option liquor licensing at a time when, as he admitted, the voting public of Brooklyn favored it. And, though his party and his employer opposed it, he stubbornly supported the Wilmot Proviso.

A further reason for respecting Walter Whitman of the Eagle is suggested by his advocacy of Wilmot's proviso; for, as was asserted in an earlier chapter of this study, it proved him to be a man of principle. Actually, however, Whitman's faithfulness to principle is better, though not as spectacularly, illustrated by his steadfast adherence in the Eagle to what he called an "immutable truth"—the best society is that which has the greatest freedom from regulations and restrictions imposed by either legislative bodies or interested groups. This principle formed the basis of his attitude toward the federal and state governments, labor unions, prohibition, tariff, currency, religious sectarianism,
abolition, medicine, and the arts. An admirer of Tom Paine and a pro-
fessed follower of Jefferson, Whitman made excessive legislation and
uncritical conformity to precedent his most persistent objects of attack
in the Eagle. It was his conviction that persuasion and education, not
statutes or dogmas or appeals to tradition, were the only valid methods
by which to control the actions of men in matters other than those con-
cerning the preservation of life, liberty, and property. The individual
was not free to injure his neighbor; but he was free to work, worship,
think, drink, and write as he pleased. Whitman's belief that it was
inherent in the nature of man and society to develop best when least
restrained and regulated was a familiar tenet of the romantic creed.
Though his application of this touchstone to the topics he discussed in
his paper was not at all unique, it provided him with a critical approach
to the social, political, economic, and, to a degree, the artistic
phenomena of the 1840's which was consistent and which imposed a certain
unity on the varied commentary in the Eagle.

Writing in November of 1847 after the Democrats had been defeated
in the state elections, Whitman criticized his party for its lack of
radicalism and asserted that it was inevitable that liberal doctrines
would gradually prevail. That to Whitman "liberal doctrines" were those
which advocated the lessening of external restrictions on the individual
and his activities is evident from what he added: "And it is to this
progressive spirit that we look for the ultimate attainment of the per-
fectest possible form of government— that will be where there is the
least possible government . . ." In the Eagle, Whitman explicitly con­demned the tariff, internal improvements, labor unions, temperance and morals legislation, abolition, the enactment of multitudinous statutes by legislators, and the opposition to the sub-treasury as contradictory to that "perfectest possible form of government" espoused by the "sainted Jefferson and Jackson."

By extension of the principle of the maximum practicable laissez faire in political, economic, and social affairs, such matters as religion, health, education, literature, and the stage were sometimes judged in the Eagle by the same criterion. To Whitman, the intolerance and disputatiousness of religious doctrinaires indicated their wish to impose their beliefs on others. The reluctance of physicians to prescribe treatments not learned in the schools and not hallowed by precedent was a restraint upon the "progressive spirit." Whitman blamed the narrow curriculum and the addiction to corporal discipline in the schools upon an unprogressive pedagogic narrowness that excused its restraint of the child's individuality on the grounds of precedent. His desire for American writings was that they should develop their native traits without interference from those who would legislate literary standards upon the model of English literary tradition. Similarly, he objected to the imposition on the American theatre of precedents created by the English theatre.

At first glance, Whitman's eagerness for congress to enact the Wilmot Proviso seems contradictory to the "immutable truth" that guided
his opinion on so many questions. But in the editorial referred to above, he stated that one of the prerequisites for the achievement of "the perfectest possible form of government" was that "the plague spot of slavery, with all its taint to freemen's principles and prosperity, shall be allowed to spread no further . . ." Obviously, slavery was a greater restraint upon the individual and his actions than was a law which prevented the slaveholder from spreading his peculiar institution to areas still free of it. The Wilmot Proviso was legislation essential to the atrophying of an institution patently and inexcusably at odds with the fundamental axiom of American democracy—"impartial" liberty, as Whitman labelled it. It was clear to Whitman that slavery was an anomaly in any section of the republic, and it would not have been surprising had he supported abolition in the *Eagle*. That he did not may have been due partly to party loyalty (yet he strongly supported the Wilmot Proviso), or to his reluctance, as he asserted, to see the principle of state rights tampered with. Another reason may have been his dislike of the immoderate fanaticism which characterized most of those actively connected with the abolition movement. Whitman's eventual espousal of abolition may be attributed to the fact that the Wilmot Proviso made that movement more respectable. At least the proviso, if one judges by the single extant copy of *The Freeman*, led him to align himself with the abolitionists, though it is doubtful that he actually became a member of any of their societies. If, as he once told Horace Traubel, he was in his early life "very bigoted" in his anti-slavery stand, it must have
been while he edited The Freeman; for his later comments on slavery, as in the Brooklyn Daily Times, were moderate in their condemnation of that institution and somewhat satirical of overly-earnest abolitionists.

Whitman, writing in the Eagle of the necessity for the Democratic-Republicans to endorse the Wilmot Proviso, said, "Conservatism, in all its aspects, must leave the field—and the democracy must unite on its boldest and noblest and most radical doctrines." The Whitman revealed in the Eagle was not, however, a radical. Indeed, he seems a conservative compared with such journalists as his Whig contemporary, Greeley of the Tribune, though the latter favored a protective tariff and opposed the Sub-Treasury Bill. Unlike Greeley, Whitman did not promote Fourierism and other utopian philosophies, nor did he advocate labor unions and cooperatives. Whitman was preserved from radicalism by two qualities, one of which was his constitutional antipathy to fanaticism. His dislike of fanatics was evidenced by his remarks in the Eagle on the abolitionists—an "angry-voiced and silly set." Whitman himself showed no symptoms of fanaticism in the Eagle (except perhaps slightly in his pleas for the abolishment of capital punishment, and in that matter his argument was based on more realistic views than those of the abolitionists and, had it been acted upon, would have had no disrupting effect upon society). Though he was ardent in his support of the Wilmot Proviso, he refused to join the extremists who demanded the withdrawal of American troops from Mexico in an effort to force its passage in Congress. He wanted a distinctively national literature and deplored the effect of
European, particularly British, writings upon American literary productions (and republican virtues); yet his many comments upon books, a large proportion of them European in origin, almost entirely neglected the matter of developing a native literature and were, in regard to foreign works, almost wholly favorable. By conviction Whitman was a free-trader, but he was "not so wild," he said, as to believe that free trade was an automatic and universal panacea; and he was satisfied to settle for the Walker Tariff. Although Whitman regarded peace and universal brotherhood as desirable aims, he did not, as did the members of the American Peace Society and the League of Universal Brotherhood, denounce the Mexican War as unjust, unnecessary, and unholy. He was an advocate of dietary reform, but he did not fall victim to such radical dietary fads as that preached by Aloysius Graham. For a while he condemned the Italian opera as a harmful influence on American music and thought it inferior to the concerts given by native vocal groups; but in the end he delighted in it and believed it would have a beneficial effect on the development of American music. And although he emphatically deplored the ascendancy of the English drama over the American, he wrote with the highest praise of two such dissimilar English playwrights as Shakespeare and Bulwer.

A second quality which saved Whitman from radicalism was his skepticism of perfectionist theories, of utopian philosophies. A slight hint of this skepticism appeared in his occasional ironical jibes at perfectionists when he noted in the Eagle that the police
court had had a decline in business. His comments on Robert Owen's return to the United States in 1846 were, however, positive expressions of his opinion of perfectionism. Owen's plans for "remodelling the world on an unalloyed basis of purity and perfection" were "utterly chimerical." Since God had ordained evil, it was scarcely likely that Mr. Owen, or any other man, could completely eradicate it. And so it was that Whitman—unlike Greeley, Godwin of the Evening Post, and other New York journalists—did not become a Fourierist or some other sort of associationist. Possibly for the same reason, he did not join any societies devoted to reform—not even an anti-hanging society.

Of course, in addition to Whitman's antipathy toward fanaticism and his skeptical attitude toward perfectionist theories, a third factor which probably preserved him from radicalism was his fundamental belief that the best government was that which legislated least. Indeed, he wanted to see prison reform, anti-hanging, and the Wilmot Proviso made facts by legislative acts. But he had said, "You cannot legislate men into virtue!" Prison reform, anti-hanging, and the proviso were, really, objective, even abstract, virtues. Something like temperance, on the contrary, was purely subjective— it was a matter in which every individual was concerned. One chose to drink intoxicants, or one did not. Man, said Whitman, "in his moral and mental capacity . . . is the sovereign of his individual self." The fanatic who sought through prohibitory laws to force his reluctant fellow citizen into temperate habits was demanding that the latter abdicate the sovereignty of "his individual self." It is
difficult for a man to become a radical in most things if he believes that men cannot be legislated into virtue; ordinarily at least he cannot become a dangerous radical. If legislative coercion is ruled out in the matter of reforms that affect citizens in their private capacities, then only persuasion and education remain as modes whereby to effect those reforms. And these sane and temperate methods, gradual in their results and respectful of the individual's moral and mental sovereignty over himself, were those employed by Whitman in his task of educating the subscribers of the Eagle to accept desirable reforms.

While Whitman was educating his readers, he was educating himself; the nature of his work made this inevitable. In the opening paragraph of a book-review column headed "Sign Posts of the Times," December 28, 1846, Whitman commented on the unusually large number of new books being issued by American publishers. "Fresh batches are announced every day," he said, "and as it is necessary for all editors, and readers too, who would keep pace with these sign-posts of the times—for such are new books—our good Eagle will proceed to discuss the merits of the latter ones." Undoubtedly, as a result of being sent review copies of current publications, Whitman read more widely (and less selectively) during his two years on the Eagle than he would have done otherwise. Not only did this indiscriminate reading introduce Whitman to writers whose philosophies were new to him,¹ and perhaps contribute to that superficial

¹Since some of Whitman's book-reviews were first reprinted in GF and UPP, it has become increasingly commonplace for scholars to stress
catholicity of intellectual interests that characterized the later literary man, but it is also probable that it had a chastening effect upon his predilection for the overly sentimental. The literary, though not perhaps the didactic, value of such excessively sentimental writers as Mrs. Sigourney and Mrs. Child must have suffered in comparison with the better authors whom Whitman encountered as he kept pace with the sign posts of the times. For example, the artless and conventional taste that impelled Whitman to write, "O, God above! what a thrill darts through one's heart, (bringing the thing home) at the climax of the following little story!—Ed. E.," before a very sentimental little anecdote which appeared in the Eagle for August 14, 1846, should have been disciplined by the anti-sentimentality of Sartor Resartus, which he reviewed two months later. Indeed, Whitman's response to the four works of Carlyle which he reviewed in the Eagle—a response which began by condemning Carlyle's style and ended by finding it "strangely agreeable"—shows that, in one case at least, he was educating himself as much as he was educating his readers. And, of course, his attendance at plays, concerts, operas, art exhibitions, and lectures extended the scope of his self-education still further.

The education of Walter Whitman was not confined, however, to the

the importance of his reviews of works of Carlyle, Sand, and Goethe as evidence that those writers may have had some influence upon the ideas eventually expressed in Leaves of Grass.

2GF, II, 290-293.
field of the arts. His professional duties, particularly those of a reporter, taught him "realities." His experience as a spokesman for his party, as well as an active and fairly prominent member of the local party organization, effectively showed him—as it would seem from the circumstances under which he departed from the Eagle—that loyalty to party was not always consistent with loyalty to principles. The proceedings of the Common Council were graphic illustrations of the incompetence, corruption, and stupidity that formed the counterpoint to ability, incorruptibility, and intelligence in that best of all possible governments—the American democracy. The refusal of the drinkers and bartenders of Brooklyn to abide by the license law provided Whitman with concrete proof of the validity of his contention that morality could not be legislated. His habit of attending, when he did attend, the services of diverse sects of Christians where he heard conflicting and often intolerant dogmas convinced him of the necessity of a reform toward a simpler and more tolerant and universal doctrine whereby religion could become practical and dynamic. The sordidness that Whitman saw in the police courts and in the slum areas of Brooklyn and New York, the crimes he reported himself or clipped from exchange papers, the poverty and sickness that haunted the Irish immigrants, the wards of the insane asylum and the halls of the blind school, the brutal treatment of horses, the sickening interior of a swill dairy, the sorrow of bereaved parents—these and other sights the perambulating editor of the Eagle had of the dark and evil side of life prepared him to accept evil in Leaves of Grass.
as the axiomatic antipode of good in the phenomenal world. That he had already accepted evil as inescapable was shown by his question in the *Eagle*, "Ah, Mr. Owen! when God ordained that evil shall exist, do you think that you can banish it altogether?" If one accepts evil as ordained, then one is required, for his own peace of mind, to find an explanation for it. And while there is no hint in the *Eagle* that its editor had arrived at the theory of compensation or polarity, as he did later in the *Leaves*, as a rationalization of the existence of evil, it is interesting to observe that Whitman wrote in his little notebook dated 1847, "I am the poet of sin, / For I do not believe in sin."^3

As was noted in the introduction to this study, it has been argued that Whitman's writings in the *Eagle* make no contribution to "any account of the development of Whitman's genius," because the prosody of *Leaves of Grass* cannot be predicted from those writings. And further, and for the same reason, it has been declared that the similarities in the ideas found in the *Eagle* and in those found in the *Leaves* are of no significance in the study of the antecedents of the latter. A more common and more rational opinion, however, has been that Whitman's criticism of his era in the *Eagle* "is of mediocre literary quality . . . but in his democratic sympathies, his partisan enthusiasms, and his political ambitions we can now see in retrospect the emerging mind and character of the future author of *LEAVES OF GRASS* and *Democratic Vistas*.^4 Surely the Whitman who

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^3UPP, II, 71.

in the **Eagle** spoke for the superiority of American democracy over the political systems and creeds of the Old World and for the spread of republican ideals to politically oppressed nations was the same Whitman who in *Leaves of Grass*, looking "for a clue to the history of the past for myself, and for these chants," found it in "Democracy," and saluted the world in America's name, foreseeing the day when its nations would come forward to her side. And the Jeffersonian philosophy of the editor survived in the *laissez faire* doctrine and individualism expressed by the poet in his verse: the "immutable truth" that was an important motif in Whitman's journalistic prose was also an important motif and was still immutable in his poetic *Leaves*. The poet's "great city" is a place where the government, to quote the **Eagle**, "is the mere agent, not the principal," and where legislation respects the rights of the individual:

Where the men and women think lightly of the laws,  
Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases,  
Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons,  
Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority,  
Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and President, Mayor, Governor, and what not, are agents for pay,  
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves,  
There the great city stands.  

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5 "I Was Looking a Long While."

6 "Song of the Broad-Axe," lines 119-134.
Also in the *Eagle* may be glimpsed the ill-defined, half-formed but generative "embryons" of the later poet's theory of American national literature. "Is it uniform with my country?" he asked in the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*; and Whitman's scattered comments in the *Eagle* on a native literature had implied the same fundamental query.

It has been said that Whitman's concern in the *Eagle* over the unfortunate condition of workingwomen, his admiration of Queen Victoria, and his appreciation of books, such as Frederika Bremer's, with a "maternal point of view" must be considered "as another phase of his emerging mother-religion, later to produce some of his major literary themes and symbols." There were frequent indications in the *Eagle* of Whitman's emotional understanding of and sympathy with motherhood; and what makes this aspect of the young editor's emotional character especially conspicuous is the fact that he almost completely ignored the existence of affectionate ties between father and child. It will be recalled, for example, that Whitman, in describing the sorrow of a father whose small son had been drowned, asserted, "But his grief was nothing compared with the mother's"; and the remainder of the account was a tribute to the "immortal beauty" of mother-love. Elsewhere in the *Eagle* he remarked that the "crowning glory" of human existence was "motherly love." The mother-worship motif in the *Leaves* is commonly explained by citing Whitman's close relationship with his mother and the stern, unaffectionate disposition of his father. Whatever the reason, the psychological groundwork

for his later poetic celebration of motherhood seems to have been firmly
established by 1846. Fatherhood received scant praise or sympathy in
either the Leaves or the Eagle.

Various aspects of the "perfect mother" of the Leaves were fore­
shadowed in the Eagle beside that of motherly love. The perfect mother
of the poet is also the physically perfect woman—healthy, well-formed,
and free of false delicacy. Whitman's protests in the Eagle against
tight lacing and his recommendations of Mrs. Gove's and Dr. Dixon's books
on women's diseases and physiology were, after a fashion, anticipatory
of his concept of the perfect woman. The ideal woman of the Leaves is
also man's perfect companion--his equal. Some elements of this levelling
of the sexes may be seen vaguely in an embryonic state in the Eagle.
Whitman disliked the idea of American girls working as servants; he
approved of women holding property after marriage; and he defended their
right to intellectual equality with men. But Whitman's attitude toward
women was to a large extent the conventional one of the sentimental era
in which he lived. Women were entitled to intellectual freedom, but,
he confessed, he liked to see "in all the developments of thought and
action, in a woman, an infusion of mildness and of that spirit which
"falleth as the gentle dew from heaven."
And when he spoke of the
nature of woman as being always "beautifully pure, affectionate, and true,"
even to a brute of a husband, he was simply repeating the sentimental
novel's idealized picture of wifely self-abnegation.

When Whitman wrote in the Eagle of the things he saw and heard
from his editorial window at the foot of Fulton Street, or as he sauntered the crowded streets of Brooklyn and New York, or sailed on the Fulton Ferry, or rode Messrs. Husted and Kendall's omnibusses on excursions, he was not consciously compiling material for the poems he was to write in later years. Unconsciously, however, the sights and sounds that Whitman recorded in his Brooklyn daily paper were being stored in his memory until they reappeared in *Leaves of Grass*. This unconscious collection of sensory impressions began, of course, before the *Eagle* period and continued afterwards; but the files of the *Eagle* for the two years of Whitman's editorship provide the fullest and most vivid record available of the raw material from which an essential part of *Leaves of Grass* was later fashioned. Many of the catalogues so characteristic of the *Leaves* may be easily duplicated by simply listing not only the references in the *Eagle* to the sights and sounds of Long Island, Brooklyn, and New York, but those as well to the many things Whitman read of in exchange newspapers, periodicals, and review copies of current books. Particular motifs of *Leaves of Grass* sometimes found unconscious, almost prophetic, expression in the *Eagle*. Coney Island particularly stimulated Whitman to expressions of that sort. One is immediately reminded of passages in the *Leaves* when he reads in the *Eagle*, in an account of a clambake at Coney Island: "The beautiful, pure, sparkling seawater! one yearns to you . . . with an affection as grasping as your own waves"; or, in the record of another excursion to the same place: "There, too, were the white plumes of many a mighty ripple--era it threw its long
shallow scoot high up the shore... How can human eyes gaze on the truest emblem of Eternity, without an awe and thrill?" This is far from the poems of the Leaves, but the modern reader, with the omniscience given him by his later location in time, can see in it a faint omen of them.

Little, if any, of the social, political, and economic phenomena of the critical years of the 1840's that Whitman commented upon in The Brooklyn Daily Eagle failed to find its place in Leaves of Grass, especially in the first three editions. But it is not likely that the young editor was aware (if he was, he could only have been confusedly so at the best) that the things he wrote about in his paper were the raw material for poems far different from the conventional sentimental verse he complacently printed in his first-page miscellany. Walter Whitman went about his daily work as an editor and reporter, enjoying his task of schooling the citizens of Brooklyn (and himself) in conventional language on conventional topics, little suspecting that in a few years he would shock and amuse many of those respectable Brooklynites by suddenly revealing himself to their incredulous eyes as "Walt Whitman, a kosmos"—"he who would assume a place to teach or to be a poet here in the States."
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VITA

Thomas Lowber Brasher was born at Roswell, New Mexico, on December 16, 1912. He received his public-school education at Big Spring, Haskell, and Abilene, Texas, graduating from Abilene High School in 1930. During the next four years he attended Texas A. & M., Texas University, and Hardin-Simmons University, withdrawing from the last school in the spring of 1934 without a degree. From 1934 until 1942, he was a relatively successful businessman. In 1942, he volunteered for the Air Corps and eventually spent two years in the Pacific as an officer in Air Intelligence. After his discharge from the service in 1946, he re-entered the business world; but, in the late winter of 1949, he re-enrolled at Hardin-Simmons University, receiving his B. A. in 1949 and his M. A. in 1951. Brasher—who was an instructor in history at Hardin-Simmons from 1949 until 1951, and an instructor in English at the same institution from 1951 until 1952—received a teaching assistanship in English at Louisiana State University in 1952. In 1953, he was made a part-time instructor in English at Louisiana State University, which will award him the Ph. D. degree on June 2, 1956.

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EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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