

WALT WHITMAN, THE PROPHET-POET

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649346653

Walt Whitman, the Prophet-poet by Roland D. Sawyer

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ROLAND D. SAWYER

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BY
ROLAND D. SAWYER



BOSTON
THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY
1918

TO
CLARENCE DARROW
A FELLOW-TRAVELLER
ALONG WALT'S OPEN-ROAD

PREFACE

In that world in which I live and move and have my being, the chief source of formation, growth, influence and impression, has been my reading. There are many books and writings to which I am eternally indebted; works on history, literature, economics, theology, philosophy, which, at different periods of my life, I have taken up and studied, and they became milestones along my mental journey. But there are also books and writings of quite another character; works that we read not as sources of information or from which to frame our philosophy of life, but works that are inspirational and are to be read again and again. Such works are books of biography and autobiography, religious writings, and poetry. In this realm "The Gospel of Jesus," and "Leaves of Grass," are books that have out-distanced all others in their influence upon me, and are books which I want ever within reach.

In the early weeks of the year of 1907 my eyes were very bad; evenings I could read but little; sometimes it was a few pages, sometimes only a few lines, then I must close the book and brood, ponder, think over what I had read. For such form of reading the poets surpassed all others, and I soon found that Whitman surpassed the other poets; that from him I received the strongest stirrings of my emotions and thoughts.

Thereupon I turned to study this man Whitman; I had access to a fine private collection of Whitman matter, as well as the public libraries, and for several weeks I saturated myself with Whitman; what he had written, what had been written about him. That was six years ago, but Whitman does not lose his grip on me — he lasts, he wears — he touches life and feeling at so many places that I believe he will last and wear.

Much has been written about Whitman, and it has been well done; but it has oftentimes been in a too technical vein (as Symonds), or in such a form as would appeal only to enthusiasts (as

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Traubel), or in too expensive form (as Binns). Accordingly I have felt the need of a short, up-to-date, popular presentation of the poet, and his aims and philosophy: to fill that need I have written the following pages under the title of Walt Whitman, The Prophet Poet.

ROLAND D. SAWYER.

August, 1913

Ample Manse,

Off-the-beaten-path-a-bit.

Ware, Mass.

