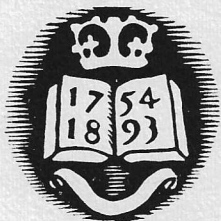


THE HALF-BREED

and other stories by
WALT WHITMAN
Now first collected by
Thomas Ollive Mabbott
Woodcuts by
Allen Lewis

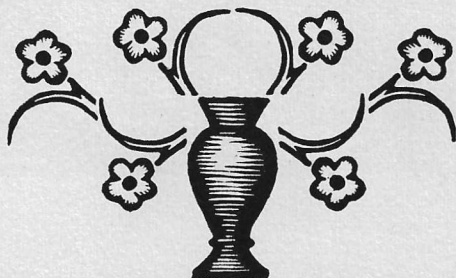


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INTRODUCTION



THE present volume contains a short novel and four sketches from the pen of Walt Whitman preserved hitherto only in the files of rare periodicals, and now first collected in book form. While these narratives belong to the period of the poet's apprenticeship—that long apprenticeship in newspaper and magazine work that went before the production of *Leaves of Grass*—and are therefore of secondary importance from a purely literary stand-point; yet so large a body of imaginative prose is of great value to the biographer, and to all who wish to study the growth of Whitman's genius and power. ☞ Four of the narratives were first published in *The Aristidean*, a monthly magazine edited by Thomas Dunn English (author of the famous song *Ben Bolt*) in New York in 1845. A search through most of the accessible biographies of Whitman does not show that anything is definitely recorded of his acquaintance with English; but since we know that Walt at one time wrote for a New York daily paper named *The Aurora*, and that English was for a while in 1844 its editor, we may suppose that the two had met by that year. Pretty surely there was some friendship between them, for when *The Aurora* was defunct, and English projected a monthly magazine, he was able to procure from Whitman two articles

for the first number, one of them the second longest story Walt ever wrote. And two more articles were forthcoming during the brief existence of *The Aristidean*. There is a mixture of tragedy and comedy in its history. Modeled 'with a difference' upon *The American Review*, a Whig journal, which began a successful career under the editorship of George H. Colton in January 1845, *The Aristidean* was intended to appeal to Democratic readers, as a high-grade, or 'five dollar a year' monthly magazine. But while the Whig magazine, which in its second number published Poe's *Raven*, was immediately popular, there was already a well-established 'three dollar' monthly, *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, occupying the field English hoped to capture. The name *Aristidean*, hard to pronounce, and obscure in meaning, was almost as forbidding as Milton's *Tetrachordon*, and did not increase circulation. The story was brief enough. Poe tells it humorously in his article *Thomas Dunn Brown*, (as he calls English) in *The Literati*. He says English 'edited for several months, with the aid of numerous collaborators, a magazine . . . This work although professedly a 'monthly' was issued at irregular intervals, and was unfortunate . . . in not attaining at any period more than about fifty subscribers . . . [He] had, for the motto on his magazine cover, the words of Richelieu,—*Men call me cruel; I am not:—I am Just*. Here the monosyllables 'an ass' should have been appended.' ❧ Poe, writing thus reminiscently, indulged some obvious malice, for he had quarreled violently with English, but his estimate of the number of subscribers was perhaps not far from correct.

for the magazine is now one of the rarest of all literary periodicals. Because they believed, rightly, that Poe was a contributor to *The Aristidean*, several scholars searched diligently for it, but only three numbers in the Library of Congress, and a single issue in a private collection could be located. But recently a complete file, bearing a presentation inscription from English to General George P. Morris, author of *Woodman, spare that tree*, was found among the books purchased by the late George D. Smith, and has been acquired by a private collector. The discovery of the complete volume was very important, since the articles were not signed when the magazines were issued; but only in the index, printed with the last number, were there initials attached to contributions—initials in turn expanded on a page which English called *A Card*, expressing his thanks to his collaborators, which follows the Index, by means of which alone the contributions of Whitman were immediately to be identified. ❧ Most important of these contributions is the very long tale called in the magazine *Arrow-Tip*. If it was written with a purpose (the magazine was editorially opposed to capital punishment) Whitman touched but lightly on that purpose. But it is very valuable as showing how much Whitman had learned about writing a long narrative since he composed the chaotic *Franklin Evans*. It gives too, another proof of his fondness for Indian subjects, and indeed is the most important story in which he has put into practice his theory that the Indians and pioneers were very appropriately to be treated in the 'true and legitimate romance of America'. In Caleb the schoolmaster I believe we have a self-portrait of

the poet in his days as teacher of a country school. English printed the following note about the story:—
 'We must apologise to our readers for the length of the tale—*Arrow-Tip*—but we could not bear to cut it in two; and it was too good to be excluded.' ❧ *Arrow-Tip* Whitman reprinted as a serial when he was editing the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, where it ran through the issues of June 1-6, 8 and 9, 1846, under the title '*The Half-Breed; a Tale of the Western Frontier*'; By a Brooklynite, after being announced in the issue of May 30th as follows:—'AN ORIGINAL NOVELETTE. We shall on Monday commence the publication, on our first page, of an Original Novelette, a *Tale of Indian Life*, which we feel warranted in saying the readers of this journal will find of interest. The French and German daily press appropriate a regular department to reading of this kind, under the head of *Feuilletons*; and we think that that large class, of whom we hope we may say, our readers, the ladies and the young, must hereafter see that their taste is not forgotten in our editorial labors. Our object is, also, to make the department in question as *original* as possible, in the highest sense—presenting, mostly sketches, tales, etc. etc. on American subjects, particularly those relating to Long Island, and the neighboring section of the United States.' ❧ On June 1st Whitman had on his editorial page the following note:—'Reader! look on the FIRST PAGE of this number of the *EAGLE*, for the first part of an interesting Original Novel, '*The Half-Breed*' etc. ❧ It may be added that all this, coupled with the style of the story, led Professor Emory Halloway of Adelphi College to suspect the authorship of *The Half-*

Breed, but in the absence of direct proof he wisely omitted it from his two volumes of *Uncollected Poetry and Prose* of Walt Whitman, which, like the volumes of Walt's contributions to the *Eagle* called *The Gathering of the Forces* edited by Cleveland Rodgers and John Black, were of course issued long before the discovery of the writings now collected.

❧ Despite the length of *Arrow-Tip*, Whitman had another tale entitled *Shirval* in the March issue of *The Aristidean*; one of those Biblical sketches in prose which were so popular in the days of the *Annals*. It is highly significant as revealing the writer's deep reverence for Our Lord, at this time as well as later; for, though Whitman did little save give a background, or setting, to the story of the raising of the widow's son from the dead at Nain, that reverence is apparent enough. To show just how much Whitman did with the story, we may quote at once the King James version of *St. Luke*, vii, 11-16. ❧ 'And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. ❧ Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. ❧ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. ❧ And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. ❧ And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. ❧ And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That

God hath visited his people'. ❧ In giving an Eastern atmosphere Walt seems to have taken some pains, and the names of the characters are, I am informed, more or less properly Semitic, though apparently not peculiarly appropriate or significant. The poet's good taste in varying the words of Christ scarcely at all, is manifest; and the foreshadowing of parts of the *Song of Myself* in the opening paragraph worth pointing out. ❧ The story of *Richard Parker's Widow* is avowedly a mere retelling of what has been told elsewhere, but it has been called 'admirable' by Poe. In his choice of subject Whitman showed that he was at the time a typical American journalist, ready to seize on what would probably please his readers. ❧ The mutiny at the Nore in 1797 stirred England deeply. Its leader had qualities to rouse the popular imagination, and a considerable body of literature has grown up about him. Several pamphlets appeared at the time of his trial—*An Impartial and Authentic Account of the Life of Richard Parker*, by a Schoolfellow, London, 1797; and two different accounts of his *Trial*, one published at London, and reprinted at Boston, another first printed at Manchester, all in the same year. Chapbooks, and at least one broadside on the Death of Parker appeared. The mutineer is the hero of a 'nautical drama' by William Douglas Jerrold, called *The Mutiny at the Nore*, first played at the Pavilion Theatre in 1830. T. Prest as late as 1851 in London published an historical novel called *Richard Parker*. There is much about the mutineer in W. J. Neale's *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore*—the modern historian might refer to the accounts in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

and Conrad Gill's special study, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797*, published at Manchester in 1913—or the essay in Raymond William Postgate's *Out of the Past; some revolutionary sketches*, issued in 1922. ❧ But Whitman's source, which he follows very closely, is the article in Camden Pelham's *Chronicles of Crime; or, The New Newgate Calendar* (London, 1841). The American article, after the first paragraphs give the setting, does little save paraphrase this account—Whitman tells nothing that Pelham does not, and where Pelham is at variance with the early pamphlets, Walt is in agreement with Pelham. Of course this is in a sense acknowledged in Whitman's article, but in the notes a few illustrative passages are cited in this connection. Although it might be difficult to prove that Walt did not make a voyage to England when a very young man, it seems safe to assume in the absence of any other reference to the voyage, the poet merely strove to increase the verisimilitude of his narrative by telling it in the first person. ❧ There are several portraits of Parker—an engraving in the third volume of an 1811 *Newgate Calendar* (which does not contain much account of Parker's wife), is much like that which is frontispiece to Neale's volume above mentioned, and the fine woodcut by J. F. Harrabin in Postgate's book. The most curious portrait of Parker is that engraved from a 'Sketch taken as he lay in his Coffin at the Hoop & Horse Shoe Queens Street little Tower Hill' which adorns the *Impartial and Authentic Account*. ❧ Under the heading *Some Fact Romances* there appeared in the last issue of English's magazine, five short articles with a very brief general introduction.

Most of this material Walt used again in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and since it has thence been collected already I am here reprinting only the Introduction and the new items. The most valuable is the shortest, perhaps, since it helps us to understand better a poem like *You felons on trial in courts*. Whitman shows no approval of the young thief's crime, but he did visit the friendless man in prison. ❧ After the discovery of *The Aristidean*, search of a New York weekly magazine called *The Rover*, edited by Seba Smith (the original 'Major Jack Downing') revealed a signed but uncollected Whitman contribution called *My Boys and Girls* in the issue of April 20, 1844. It is a rather formless article but there are portraits in it of three of Whitman's brothers who bore the names of Presidents—and the pictures of other early friends and relatives of the poet, not yet all identified, are yet of great interest to the future biographers of Whitman. The gentle wish that concludes *My Boys and Girls* was in a sense to be fulfilled—the reader may like to recall that Moncure D. Conway said after gazing upon Whitman in death, that his was 'the face of an aged, loving child'. ❧ My text of *The Half-Breed* is from photostats of the columns of the *Brooklyn Eagle* made by the kind permission of Mr. H. F. Gunnison, president of the Eagle Company, and through the courtesy of Mr. Cleveland Rodgers. The variants of *The Aristidean* are recorded among the notes. The changes are so slight I believe that Whitman used the pages of the magazine with corrections as copy for the *Eagle* printers. It is notable that some of the changes are plainly for the purpose of greater simplicity or directness, and the elimination of the

conventional literary phrases Walt came so heartily to dislike. *Shirval*, *Richard Parker's Widow*, and *Some Fact Romances*, are from photostats of the privately owned complete file of *The Aristidean*; *My Boys and Girls* from the file of *The Rover* in the New York Historical Society. No intentional changes have been made even in spelling and punctuation, save for the correction of a few obvious misprints, which are recorded, like the variant readings. A few notes, at the end, give the authorities for my statements, and treat of various points not conveniently to be dealt with in this introduction. ❧ In conclusion I wish to thank sincerely those who have aided me in preparing this book—especially Mr. Herbert F. Gunnison and Mr. Cleveland Rodgers for permission to use the files of the *Eagle*. Also for many favors I am grateful to Prof. William P. Trent, Prof. A. H. Nason, Prof. Emory Holloway, Miss Mary A. Wyman, Miss Ruth S. Granniss, Mr. H. L. Mencken, Mr. Ralph Marcus, Mr. Nelson Nichols of the New York Public Library, and the authorities of the Library of Congress, the Brooklyn Public Library, the Long Island Historical Society, the New York Historical Society, the British Museum, and of the Columbia University Library, and the Columbia University Press.

T. O. M.