TROWBRIDGE AND WHITMAN.

His Own Story Tells of Emerson's Influence on the "Good Gray Poet" —Contrasts in Washington.

John T. Trowbridge not only wrote a popular ballad of flying machines 40 years before man had learned to fly; he went not only into the homes and hearts of thousands of his countrymen as poet, novelist, essayist and dramatist; he also went into the homes and hearts of many of the most distinguished of his countrymen.

If you were to ask an educated European to name the greatest man contributed by America to the 19th century, he would probably name Lincoln. If you asked him for the next American name which will stand as belonging not to the United States alone, but to the world, he would probably hesitate between Emerson and Walt Whitman.

These names look odd together, but together they belong—why and how much so is related in Trowbridge's delightful autobiography, "My Own Story." He knew both men, and had from Whitman himself the story of how reading Emerson had helped him to "find himself."

It was in Boston in 1860 that Trowbridge first met Whitman; the latter was in Boston at a stereotype foundry, putting the third edition of "Leaves of Grass" through the press. Trowbridge comically says:

"The author of "Leaves of Grass" had loomed so large in my imagination as to seem almost superhuman; and I was filled with some such feeling of wonder and astonishment as if I had been invited to meet Socrates or King Solomon."

Tying to Find His Life Purpose.

The poet was not at all like the traditional pictures either of the sage or the King; perhaps more like what they actually were.

"We found a large, gray-haired and gray-bearded, plainly dressed man, reading proof sheets at a desk in a little dingy office. . . . From his own descriptions of himself, and from the swing and impetus of his lines, I had pictured him proud, alert, grandiose, defiant of the usages of society; and I found him the quietest of men.

"The conversation was all very quiet, pitched in a low key, and I went away somewhat disappointed that he did not say or do something extraordinary and admirable, one of the noticeable things about him being an absence of all effort to make a good impression."

It was characteristic of Whitman that he had with him a sick, discouraged lad, whom he had picked up at a boarding house, friendless and alone, and to whom he was trying to give some interest and purpose in life.

As they grew better acquainted, Whitman told Trowbridge about his early life; "going to work in a printing office at the age of 14; teaching school at 17 and 18; editing newspapers and making political speeches, on the Democratic side; leading an impulsive, irregular sort of life, and absorbing, as probably no other man ever did, the common aspects of Brooklyn and New York.

His friendships were mostly with the common people—pilots, drivers, mechanics; and his favorite diversions crossing the ferries, riding on the top of omnibuses and attending operas.

He liked to get off alone by the seashore, read Homer and Ossian with the salt air on his cheeks, and shout their winged words to the wind and waves. The book he knew best was the Bible, the prophetical parts of which stirred in him a vague desire to be the bard or prophet of his own time and country.

Emerson on a Lumber Pile.

"Then, at the right moment, he read Emerson."

He read Emerson—those thunder peals of intellectual liberty; the Essays on Self-Reliance, Nature, The Over-Soul, Spiritual Laws—this carpenter, 35 years old, sitting, at his noon hour, on a lumber pile, book in one hand and sandwich in the other.

These essays, which are a Magna Charta and a Declaration of Independance rolled into one and applied not alone to government but to every kind of thought and conduct, did the business for Whitman.

"He freely admitted," says Trowbridge, "that he could never have written his poems if he had not first 'come to himself' and that Emerson helped him to 'find himself'. I asked him if he thought he would have come to himself without that help. He said, 'Yes, but it would have taken longer.' And he used this characteristic expression: 'I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to a boil.'

"The sturdy carpenter in his working-day garb, seated on his pile of boards; a poet in that rude disguise, as yet but dimly conscious of his powers; in one hand that sandwich put up for him by his good mother, his other hand holding open the volume that revealed to him his greatness and his destiny—that is the picture which his simple narrative called up, that Sunday so long ago, and which has never faded from my memory."

Comrade to the Wounded.

Trowbridge and Whitman were again much together in Washington in the Winter of 1863-64, while Whitman was going through that remarkable chapter of his life as comrade and comforter to the wounded and dying in the war hospitals. Much of this time Trowbridge was a guest in the splendid town mansion of Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury in Lincoln's Cabinet.

"In the fine, large mansion, sumptuously furnished, cared for by sleek and silent colored servants, and thronged by distinguished guests, dwelt the great statesman; in the old tenement opposite, in a bare and desolate back room, up three flights of stairs, quite alone, lived the poet."

With delicious candor Trowbridge tells how, when he had had about all he could stand of the select company in the mansion, he used to sneak away and climb three flights to Walt's garret and drink the tea from Walt's tin kettle and to get the inspiration from the poet's vision.

In the other house he had a brilliant wrawing room in which to stretch his mind; here, in the garret with Walt was a universe in which to stretch his spirit

Once he tried to get Chase to give Whitman a Government job. The result was simple, natural and eloquent. Se Chase said he would like to so far as he, personally, was concerned; but he had heard that Whitman had written a book to which a good many people objected, and of course he had to consider the good repute of the department.