

BLENDING OF ORIENT AND OCCIDENT IN WHITMAN

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I wonder if we are not all struck with the contemporane-ousness of Walt Whitman's thought? I find his *Leaves of Grass* to be not only abreast of the biggest things known in our civilization but abreast of that often neglected area of Eastern speculation and life which is needed to give the spiritual world its symmetry and completeness. And Whitman seems to have divined the East without special study of it. He knew its literature, in a way, in its fragments and parts, but he had none of that intimate knowledge of it which makes the scholar and student or the specialist. How did he reach to visions, conclusions, so intricate, in a sense so far away, and so easily and without shock adjust them in his system? His, somehow, appears to have been the right of original discovery. He was revealed to as truly as teachers or seers anywhere, no doubt. And he was prepared to receive all messages and to know where to place them when received. I have been a reader of Oriental literature and have realized with what it must enrich us in the future of our civilization. The East needs us and we need the East. Therefore, when I found in Whitman that East and West had met and coalesced I comprehended the profundity of his work as I had never even in my warm-est admiration before. Such knowledge of the general life, taking in qualities from all sides, must precede comrade-

ship where that is most richly endowed. All through Whitman's writing, his prose as well as his verse, there is present the atmosphere of this unity. Indeed, I have wondered often if he is not almost more Oriental than Occidental, so evident is his mystic feeling, and so clear is his assertion of the nonphysical significance of being. But he is not more Eastern than Western, in the last analysis, for the reason that he has more outline than the East and more atmosphere than the West—and where boundaries are, or begin and end, I would not declare. I know that Whitman has given expression to life in so many of its aspects, that it would be hard to put down a finger at any one place and assert that there was his maximum point of emphasis. But certainly this blending of East and West, in its thought as well as in its sympathetic humanity, if not the aspect, is one aspect of highest importance.