

practical workaday world. At the age of eleven he went to work as an office boy, first for two prominent lawyers, James B. Clark and his son Edward,<sup>54</sup> members of St. Ann's church. If Walt was not already attending Sunday school at St. Ann's, they would certainly have encouraged him to do so, but it is possible that they first noticed the large, serious boy at their church and offered him employment because he aroused their sympathy and interest.

Leaving school did not mean the end of Walt's education; that, in fact, had scarcely begun, and would continue more rapidly in office, print shop, newspaper office, and before many years in his own schoolroom. He was especially lucky in his first position, for the Clarks took a personal interest in him. They gave him a desk and window nook to himself, and Edward Clark helped him with his handwriting and composition. Even more important, the younger lawyer gave him a subscription to a circulating library, and now much of the time he lived in the world of romance. He read Walter Scott's novels one after another in rapid succession, and then his poetry, the first poetry that had interested him. In old age Whitman also remembered with pleasure the trips his lawyer employers had sent him on with messages for Aaron Burr, who lived across the Hudson in New Jersey. "Burr was very gentle—persuasive. He had a way of giving me a bit of fruit on these visits—an apple or a pear. I can see him clearly, still—his stateliness, gray hair, courtesy, consideration."<sup>55</sup>

After leaving the Clarks, Walt was employed in a doctor's office, but exactly when or how long cannot be determined. The fact that in old age he remembered so vividly his experiences in the law office but failed to mention the name of the doctor for whom he worked is an indication that his second employment either was of short duration or was uncongenial or both. But he was fortunate again in his third employment, during the summer of 1831, which was in the printing office of Samuel E. Clements, editor of the Long Island *Patriot*. There he became interested in journalism, which in turn aroused literary ambitions. Walt's father subscribed to the *Patriot* and shared the editor's political views, a fact which may have influenced him in apprenticing his son to Clements.<sup>56</sup>

The *Patriot*, like its older rival, the Long Island *Star*, edited by Alden Spooner, was a small four-page weekly. Each newspaper was written and edited almost entirely by one man, and both were violently partisan. The *Star* was Whig, and supported the business and manufacturing interests of Brooklyn and the nation, though Alden Spooner was often independent on local issues. The *Patriot* was only ten years old, having been

founded in 1821 by Tammany politicians, to whom it was completely subservient. It attempted to appeal to the growing population of mechanics and artisans in Brooklyn, the majority of whom adhered to the "Bucktail" <sup>57</sup> faction of the Democratic party. One of its slogans was "the right of the people to rule in every case."

The first editor of the *Patriot*, George L. Birch, had been given a juicier political plum in 1829, the inspectorship of customs, and in the summer of 1830 he had resigned the post office and the newspaper to Clements, whom Walt regarded as a "good fellow" personally, but eccentric, "A great, lank, lean . . . hawk-nosed Quaker and Southerner (he often boasted of his Southern blood)." <sup>58</sup> But Clements did not last long as editor because his indiscretions created so much rancor and opposition that the politicians who had secured his appointment saw fit to get rid of him in November, 1831, less than six months after Walt had become his apprentice. In one of his more fantastic escapades Clements and the sculptor Henry Kirke Brown disinterred the body of Elias Hicks, soon after his burial in Jericho, in order to make a plaster cast of his face and head. <sup>59</sup> After making the moulds the two men quarreled, and either by accident or by intention the casts were destroyed. The friends and relatives of Hicks instituted legal proceedings, and Clements fled to New Jersey, where he was soon editing a Whig paper.

One might well doubt the beneficial influence of such a man on a twelve-year-old apprentice. But Clements appears to have been indiscreet rather than unscrupulous. And one indication that he was particularly sympathetic and kind at least to one of his apprentices was that Walt was permitted to contribute "sentimental bits" to the *Patriot*. <sup>60</sup> The items were certainly unimportant, and cannot now be identified, but this was the first appearance of Walt Whitman's writings in print, his first faint beginning of authorship—at the remarkably early age of twelve.

Moreover, it was not the editor but the foreman printer who made the most lasting impression on Walt. <sup>61</sup> This man was William Hartshorne, who had come to Brooklyn from Philadelphia toward the close of the eighteenth century. Unlike Clements, he was small, almost fragile in appearance—though he lived eighty-four years—and in temperament quiet, unassuming. He was not a politician and had been employed only for his skill. Until his death in 1859 Whitman often saw him strolling on Fulton Street, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, carrying a cane, and chewing his quid of tobacco. Whitman's own character was almost certainly influenced by

his admiration, as boy and man, for the cheerful, sagacious old printer in the broad-brimmed hat, with the eighteenth century manners.

It was Hartshorne who gave Walt his first instruction in typesetting, and the poet never forgot his novice sensations of holding the composing stick, locating the letters in the case of type, and "the first experience in 'pi.'" This printing office was a lively and exhilarating place for the apprentice. Years afterward Whitman recalled that there he first met the young writer and later political "boss" Henry Murphy, and he wondered if Murphy, now ambassador to The Hague, remembered the "carrying on" in the printing office, the cigar smoking, the animated political discussions, and the arguments over some article contributed to the "Pat." Despite the boyish capers that Whitman doubtless participated in, it would seem that at twelve he had some interests beyond his years.

Walt and several other apprentices boarded with Hartshorne's granddaughter, though the Whitmans lived only ten or twelve blocks from the printing office of the "Pat" on Fulton Street, near Nassau. Hartshorne himself had lived in Philadelphia during the Revolution, and Walt "listened with a boy's ardent soul and eager ears" to his reminiscences of Washington, Jefferson, and other heroes of the early years of the Republic. On Sunday the apprentices accompanied Hartshorne to "a great old rough, fortress-looking stone church, on Joralemon Street,"<sup>62</sup> at that time still surrounded by broad fields and country roads. This was the Dutch Reformed Church, the oldest in Brooklyn, with a tradition extending back two centuries, before the British occupied New York. Though the building seemed so old and "fortress-looking" to Walt, it was actually less than twenty-five years old, having been erected in 1807.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps its gloomy, ugly, and formidable exterior made it seem older—and the appearance was not out of keeping with the Calvinistic theology still preached there, which Walt never mentioned, perhaps because he was impervious to it, as his later poem "A Child's Amaze" suggests:

Silent and amazed even when a little boy,  
I remember I heard the preacher every Sunday put God in his statements,  
As contending against some being or influence.

The Dutch Reformed Church drew a large part of its membership from the surrounding farms, as it had done for six generations, and thus linked town and country.<sup>64</sup> The Dutch farmers, butchers, and small merchants