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WALT WHITMAN

POEM OF THE DAILY WORK OF THE WORKMEN AND WORKWOMEN OF THESE STATES

Come closer to me, push close, my lovers, and take the best I possess,
Yield closer and closer, and give me the best you possess.
This is unfinished business with me – How is it with you?
I was chilled with the cold types, cylinder, wet paper between us.
I pass so poorly with paper and types, I must pass with the contact of bodies and souls.
I do not thank you for liking me as I am, and liking the touch of me –
I know that it is good for you to do so.
Were all educations practical and ornamental well displayed out of me, what would it amount to?
Were I as the head teacher, charitable proprietor, wise statesman, what would it amount to?
Were I to you as the boss employing and paying you, would that satisfy you?
The learned, virtuous, benevolent, and the usual terms,
A man like me, and never the usual terms.
Neither a servant nor a master am I,
I take no sooner a large price than a small price – I will have my own, whoever enjoys me,
I will be even with you, and you shall be even with me.
If you are a workman or workwoman, I stand as nigh as the nighest that works in the same shop,
If you bestow gifts on your brother or dearest friend, I demand as good as your brother or dearest friend,
If your lover, husband, wife, is welcome by day or night, I must be personally as welcome,
If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake,
If you remember your foolish and outlawed deeds, do you think I cannot remember my own foolish and outlawed deeds?
plenty of them?
If you carouse at the table, I carouse at the opposite side of the table,
If you meet some stranger in the street, and love him or her, do I not often meet strangers in the street and love them?
If you see a good deal remarkable in me, I see just as much, perhaps more, in you.
Why what have you thought of yourself?
Is it you, then, that thought yourself less?
Is it you that thought the President greater than you? or the rich better

off than you? or the educated wiser than you?
Because you are greasy or pimpled, or that you was once drunk, or a thief, or diseased, or rheumatic, or a prostitute, or are so now,
or from frivolity or impotence, or that you are no scholar, and never saw your name in print, do you give in that you are any less immortal?
Souls of men and women! it is not you I call unseen, unheard, untouchable and untouching,
It is not you I go argue pro and con about, and to settle whether you are alive or no,
I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns – I see and hear you, and what you give and take,
What is there you cannot give and take?
I see not merely that you are polite or white-faced, married, single, citizens of old states, citizens of new states, eminent in some profession, a lady or gentleman in a parlor, or dressed in the jail uniform, or pulpit uniform,
Not only the free Utahan, Kansian, Arkansian – not only the free Cuban, not merely the slave, not Mexican native, Flatfoot, negro from Africa,
Iroquois eating the war-flesh, fish-tearer in his lair of rocks and sand,
Esquimaux in the dark cold snow-house, Chinese with his transverse eyes, Bedowee, wandering nomad, tabounschik at the head of his droves,
Grown, half-grown, and babe, of this country and every country, indoors and outdoors, I see – and all else is behind or through them.
The wife, and she is not one jot less than the husband!
The daughter, and she is just as good as the son!
The mother, and she is every bit as much as the father!
Offspring of those not rich, boys apprenticed to trades,
Young fellows working on farms, and old fellows working on farms,
The naive, the simple and hardy, he going to the polls to vote, he who has a good time, and he who has a bad time,
Mechanics, southerners, new arrivals, laborers sailors, mano'warsmen, merchantmen, coasters,
All these I see, but nigher and farther the same I see,
None shall escape me, and none shall wish to escape me.
I bring what you much need, yet always have,
Not money, amours, dress, eating, but as good,
I send no agent or medium, offer no representative of value, but offer the value itself.
There is something that comes home to one now and perpetually,
It is not what is printed, preached, discussed – it eludes discussion

and print,
It is not to be put in a book, it is not in this book,
It is for you, whoever you are – it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are from you,
It is hinted by nearest, commonest, readiest – it is not them, though it is endlessly provoked by them – what is there ready and near you now?
You may read in many languages, yet read nothing about it,
You may read the President's message, and read nothing about it there,
Nothing in the reports from the State department or Treasury department, or in the daily papers or the weekly papers,
Or in the census returns, assessors' returns, prices current, or any accounts of stock.
The sun and stars that float in the open air – the apple-shaped earth, and we upon it, surely the drift of them is something grand!
I do not know what it is, except that it is grand, and that it is happiness,
And that the enclosing purport of us here is not a speculation, or bon-mot, or reconnoissance,
And that it is not something which by luck may turn out well for us, and without luck must be a failure for us,
And not something which may yet be retracted in a certain contingency.
The light and shade, the curious sense of body and identity, the greed that with perfect complaisance devours all things, the endless pride and out-stretching of man, unspeakable joys and sorrows,
The wonder every one sees in every one else he sees, and the wonders that fill each minute of time forever, and each acre of surface and space forever,
Have you reckoned them for a trade or farm-work? or for the profits of a store? or to achieve yourself a position? or to fill a gentleman's leisure, or a lady's leisure?
Have you reckoned the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture?
Or men and women that they might be written of, and songs sung?
Or the attraction of gravity, and the great laws and harmonious combinations, and the fluids of the air, as subjects for the savans?
Or the brown land and the blue sea for maps and charts?
Or the stars to be put in constellations and named fancy names?
Or that the growth of seeds is for agricultural tables, or agriculture itself?
Old institutions, these arts, libraries, legends, collections, and the practice handed along in manufactures, will we rate them so

high?
Will we rate our cash and business high? I have no objection,
I rate them high as the highest, then a child born of a woman and man
I rate beyond all rate.
We thought our Union grand, and our Constitution grand,
I do not say they are not grand and good, for they are,
I am this day just as much in love with them as you,
Then I am eternally in love with you, and with all my fellows upon
the earth.
We consider bibles and religions divine – I do not say they are not
divine,
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,
It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than
they are shed out of you.
The sum of all known reverence I add up in you, whoever you are,
The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who
are here for him,
The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,
The Congress convenes every December for you,
Laws, courts, the forming of States, the charters of cities, the going
and coming of commerce and mails, are all for you.
All doctrines, all politics and civilization, exurge from you,
All sculpture and monuments, and anything inscribed anywhere, are
tallied in you,
The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records reach, is
in you this hour, and myths and tales the same,
If you were not breathing and walking here, where would they all be?
The most renowned poems would be ashes, orations and plays would
be vacuums.
All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it,
Did you think it was in the white or gray stone? or the lines of the
arches and cornices?
All music is what awakes from you, when you are reminded by the
instruments,
It is not the violins and the cornets – it is not the oboe nor the beating
drums, nor the score of the baritone singer singing his sweet
romanza, nor that of the men’s chorus, nor that of the
women’s chorus,
It is nearer and farther than they.
Will the whole come back then?
Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-glass? is there
nothing greater or more?
Does all sit there with you, and here with me?

The old, forever-new things – you foolish child! the closest, simplest things, this moment with you,
Your person, and every particle that relates to your person,
The pulses of your brain, waiting their chance and encouragement at every deed or sight,
Anything you do in public by day, and anything you do in secret between-days,
What is called right and what is called wrong, what you behold or touch, what causes your anger or wonder,
The ankle-chain of the slave, the bed of the bed-house, the cards of the gambler, the plates of the forger,
What is seen or learnt in the street, or intuitively learnt,
What is learnt in the public school, spelling, reading, writing, ciphering, the black-board, the teacher's diagrams,
The panes of the windows, all that appears through them, the going forth in the morning, the aimless spending of the day,
(What is it that you made money? what is it that you got what you wanted?)
The usual routine, the work-shop, factory, yard, office, store, desk,
The jaunt of hunting or fishing, the life of hunting or fishing,
Pasture-life, foddering, milking, herding, all the personnel and usages,
The plum-orchard, apple-orchard, gardening, seedlings, cuttings, flowers, vines,
Grains, manures, marl, clay, loam, the subsoil plough, the shovel, pick, rake, hoe, irrigation, draining,
The curry-comb, the horse-cloth, the halter, bridle, bits, the very wisps of straw,
The barn and barn-yard, the bins, mangers, mows, racks,
Manufactures, commerce, engineering, the building of cities, every trade carried on there, the implements of every trade,
The anvil, tongs, hammer, the axe and wedge, the square, mitre, jointer, smoothing-plane,
The plumbob, trowel, level, the wall-scaffold, the work of walls and ceilings, any mason-work,
The steam-engine, lever, crank, axle, piston, shaft, air-pump, boiler, beam, pulley, hinge, flange, band, bolt, throttle, governors, up and down rods,
The ship's compass, the sailor's tarpaulin, the stays and lanyards, the ground tackle for anchoring or mooring, the life-boat for wrecks,
The sloop's tiller, the pilot's wheel and bell, the yacht or fish-smack, the great gay-pennanted three-hundred-foot steamboat under full headway, with her proud fat breasts and her delicate swift-flashing paddles,

The trail, line, hooks, sinkers, the seine, hauling the seine,
The arsenal, small-arms, rifles, gunpowder, shot, caps, wadding,
ordnance for war, carriages;
Every-day objects, house-chairs, carpet, bed, counterpane of the bed,
him or her sleeping at night, wind blowing, indefinite
noises,
The snow-storm or rain-storm, the tow-trowsers, the lodge-hut in the
woods, the still-hunt,
City and country, fire-place, candle, gas-light, heater, aqueduct,
The message of the governor, mayor, chief of police – the dishes
of breakfast, dinner, supper,
The bunk-room, the fire-engine, the string-term, the car or truck
behind,
The paper I write on or you write on, every word we write, every
cross and twirl of the pen, and the curious way we write what
we think, yet very faintly,
The directory, the detector, the ledger, the books in ranks on the
book-shelves, the clock attached to the wall,
The ring on your finger, the lady’s wristlet, the scent-powder, the
druggist’s vials and jars, the draught of lager-beer,
The etui of surgical instruments, the etui of oculist’s or aurist’s
instruments, or dentist’s instruments,
The permutating lock that can be turned and locked as many different
ways as there are minutes in a year,
Glass-blowing, nail-making, salt-making, tin-roofing,
shingle-dressing, candle-making, lock-making and hanging,
Ship-carpentering, dock-building, fish-curing, ferrying,
stone-breaking, flagging of side-walks by flaggers,
The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the coal-kiln and
brick-kiln,
Coal-mines, all that is down there, the lamps in the darkness, echoes,
songs, what meditations, what vast native thoughts looking
through smutch’d faces,
Iron-works, forge-fires in the mountains or by river-banks, men
around feeling the melt with huge crowbars – lumps of ore,
the due combining of ore, limestone, coal – the blast-furnace
and the puddling-furnace, the loup-lump at the bottom of the
melt at last – the rolling-mill, the stumpy bars of pig-iron, the
strong clean-shaped T rail for rail-roads,
Oil-works, silk-works, white-lead-works, the sugar-house,
steam-saws, the great mills and factories,
Lead-mines, and all that is done in lead-mines, or with the lead
afterward,
Copper-mines, the sheets of copper, and what is formed out of the

sheets, and all the work in forming it,
Stone-cutting, shapely trimmings for facades, or window or door lintels – the mallet, the tooth-chisel, the jib to protect the thumb,
Oakum, the oakum-chisel, the caulking-iron – the kettle of boiling vault-cement, and the fire under the kettle,
The cotton-bale, the stevedore's hook, the saw and buck of the sawyer, the screen of the coal-screener, the mould of the moulder, the working-knife of the butcher, the ice-saw, and all the work with ice,
The four-double cylinder press, the hand-press, the frisket and tympan, the compositor's stick and rule, type-setting, making up the forms, all the work of newspaper counters, folders, carriers, news-men,
The implements for daguerreotyping – the tools of the rigger, grappler, sail-maker, block-maker,
Goods of gutta-percha, papier-mache, colors, brushes, brush-making, glazier's implements,
The veneer and glue-pot, the confectioner's ornaments, the decanter and glasses, the shears and flat-iron,
The awl and knee-strap, the pint measure and quart measure, the counter and stool, the writing-pen of quill or metal – the making of all sorts of edged tools,
The ladders and hanging ropes of the gymnasium, manly exercises, the game of base-ball, running, leaping, pitching quoits,
The designs for wall-papers, oil-cloths, carpets, the fancies for goods for women, the book-binder's stamps,
The brewery, brewing, the malt, the vats, everything that is done by brewers, also by wine-makers, also vinegar-makers,
Leather-dressing, coach-making, boiler-making, rope-twisting, distilling, sign-painting, lime-burning, coopering, cotton-picking, electroplating, stereotyping,
Stave-machines, planing-machines, reaping-machines, ploughing-machines, thrashing-machines, steam-wagons,
The cart of the carman, the omnibus, the ponderous dray,
The wires of the electric telegraph stretched on land, or laid at the bottom of the sea, and then the message in an instant from ten thousand miles off,
The snow-plough and two engines pushing it, the ride in the express-train of only one car, the swift go through a howling storm – the locomotive, and all that is done about a locomotive,
The bear-hunt or coon-hunt, the bonfire of shavings in the open lot in the city, the crowd of children watching,

The blows of the fighting-man, the upper-cut and one-two-three,
Pyrotechny, letting off colored fire-works at night, fancy figures and jets,
Shop-windows, coffins in the sexton’s ware-room, fruit on the fruit-stand – beef in the butcher’s stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the butcher in his killing-clothes,
The area of pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the scalder’s tub, gutting, the cutter’s cleaver, the packer’s maul, and the plenteous winter-work of pork-packing,
Flour-works, grinding of wheat, rye, maize, rice – the barrels and the half and quarter barrels, the loaded barges, the high piles on wharves and levees,
Bread and cakes in the bakery, the milliner’s ribbons, the dressmaker’s patterns, the tea-table, the home-made sweetmeats;
Coins and medals, the ancient bronze coin, bust, inscription, date, ring-money, the copper cent, the silver dime, the five-dime piece, the gold dollar, the fifty-dollar piece – Modern coins, and all the study and reminiscence of old coins,
Cheap literature, maps, charts, lithographs, daily and weekly newspapers,
The column of wants in the one-cent paper, the news by telegraph, amusements, operas, shows,
The business parts of a city, the trottoirs of a city when thousands of well-dressed people walk up and down,
The cotton, woolen, linen you wear, the money you make and spend,
Your room and bed-room, your piano-forte, the stove and cook-pans,
The house you live in, the rent, the other tenants, the deposite in the savings-bank, the trade at the grocery,
The pay on Saturday night, the going home, and the purchases;
In them the heft of the heaviest – in them far more than you estimated, and far less also,
In them, not yourself – you and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,
In them your themes, hints, provokers – if not, the whole earth has no themes, hints, provokers, and never had.
I do not affirm what you see beyond is futile – I do not advise you to stop,
I do not say leadings you thought great are not great,
But I say that none lead to greater, sadder, happier, than those lead to.
Will you seek afar off? you surely come back at last,
In things best known to you, finding the best, or as good as the best,
In folks nearest to you finding also the sweetest, strongest,

lovingest,
Happiness not in another place, but this place – not for another hour, but this hour,
Man in the first you see or touch, always in your friend, brother, nighest neighbor – Woman in your mother, lover, wife,
The popular tastes and occupations taking precedence in poems or anywhere,
You workwomen and workmen of These States having your own divine and strong life – looking the President always sternly in the face, unbending, nonchalant, understanding that he is to be kept by you to short and sharp account of himself,
And all else thus far giving place to men and women.
When the psalm sings instead of the singer,
When the script preaches instead of the preacher,
When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved the supporting-desk,
When I can touch the body of books, by night or by day, and when they touch my body back again,
When the sacred vessels, or the bits of the eucharist, or the lath and plast, procreate as effectually as the young silver-smiths or bakers, or the masons in their over-alls,
When a university course convinces like a slumbering woman and child convince,
When the minted gold in the vault smiles like the night-watchman’s daughter,
When warrantee deeds loafe in chairs opposite, and are my friendly companions,
I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do of men and women.