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WALT WHITMAN

POEM OF A FEW GREATNESSES

Great are the myths, I too delight in them,
Great are Adam and Eve, I too look back and accept them,
Great the risen and fallen nations, and their poets, women, sages, inventors, rulers, warriors, priests.
Great is liberty! Great is equality! I am their follower,
Helmsmen of nations, choose your craft! where you sail, I sail!
Yours is the muscle of life or death, yours is the perfect science, in you I have absolute faith.
Great is today, and beautiful,
It is good to live in this age, there never was any better.
Great are the plunges, throes, triumphs, falls of democracy,
Great the reformers, with their lapses and screams,
Great the daring and venture of sailors on new explorations.
Great are yourself and myself,
We are just as good and bad as the oldest and youngest or any,
What the best and worst did, we could do,
What they felt, do not we feel it in ourselves?
What they wished, do we not wish the same?
Great is youth, equally great is old age – great are the day and night,
Great is wealth, great is poverty, great is expression, great is silence.
Youth, large, lusty, loving – youth, full of grace, force, fascination,
Do you know that old age may come after you, with equal grace, force, fascination?
Day, full-blown and splendid – day of the immense sun, action, ambition, laughter,
The night follows close, with millions of suns, and sleep, and restoring darkness.
Wealth with the flush hand, fine clothes, hospitality,
But then the soul’s wealth, which is candor, knowledge, pride, enfolding love;
(Who goes for men and women showing poverty richer than wealth?)
Expression of speech! in what is written or said, forget not that silence is also expressive,
That anguish as hot as the hottest, and contempt as cold as the coldest, may be without words,
That the true adoration is likewise without words, and without

kneeling.
Great is the greatest nation! the nation of clusters of equal nations!
Great is the earth, and the way it became what it is,
Do you imagine it is stopped at this? the increase abandoned?
Understand then that it goes as far onward from this, as this is from the times when it lay in covering waters and gases.
Great is the quality of truth in man,
The quality of truth in man supports itself through all changes,
It is inevitably in the man – he and it are in love, and never leave each other.
The truth in man is no dictum, it is vital as eyesight,
If there be any soul, there is truth – if there be man or woman, there is truth – if there be physical or moral, there is truth,
If there be equilibrium or volition, there is truth – if there be things at all upon the earth, there is truth.
O truth of the earth! O truth of things! I am determined to press the whole way toward you,
Sound your voice! I scale mountains, or dive in the sea after you.
Great is language – it is the mightiest of the sciences,
It is the fulness, color, form, diversity of the earth, and of men and women, and of all qualities and processes,
It is greater than wealth – it is greater than buildings, ships, religions, paintings, music.
Great is the English speech – what speech is so great as the English?
Great is the English brood – what brood has so vast a destiny as the English?
It is the mother of the brood that must rule the earth with the new rule,
The new rule shall rule as the soul rules, and as the love, justice, equality in the soul, rule.
Great in the law – great are the old few landmarks of the law,
They are the same in all times, and shall not be disturbed.
Great are marriage, commerce, newspapers, books, free-trade, rail-roads, steamers, international mails, telegraphs, exchanges.
Great is justice!
Justice is not settled by legislators and laws – it is in the soul,
It cannot be varied by statutes, any more than love, pride, the attraction of gravity, can,
It is immutable – it does not depend on majorities – majorities or what not come at last before the same passionless and exact tribunal.
For justice are the grand natural lawyers and perfect judges, it is in

their souls,
It is well assorted, they have not studied for nothing, the great includes the less,
They rule on the highest grounds, they oversee all eras, states, administrations.
The perfect judge fears nothing, he could go front to front before God,
Before the perfect judge all shall stand back – life and death shall stand back – heaven and hell shall stand back.
Great is goodness!
I do not know what it is any more than I know what health is, but I know it is great.
Great is wickedness – I find I often admire it just as much as I admire goodness,
Do you call that a paradox? It certainly is a paradox.
The eternal equilibrium of things is great, and the eternal overthrow of things is great,
And there is another paradox.
Great is life, real and mystical, wherever and whoever,
Great is death – sure as life holds all parts together, death holds all parts together,
Death has just as much purport as life has,
Do you enjoy what life confers? you shall enjoy what death confers,
I do not understand the realities of death, but I know they are great,
I do not understand the least reality of life – how then can I understand the realities of death?