

ART IN AMERICA

in-itself," and declares that truth in fitting language. Whitman's language is occasionally not fitting; it is filthy; it has no link with eternal truth such as is given by beauty of expression, by style, which manifests the internal harmony of the universe.

We should not tolerate such language even in a newspaper, even in a modern 'drawing-room whose conversation is confined to enlightened comment upon the works of Professor Von Krafft-Ebing; but we must praise it, must we, "because Whitman saw the great vision of the Universal Unity"? Every artist sees this vision; every truly religious person sees this vision; many of them have deemed it most fitting to express this vision by symbolising it as Sex; but not one has made the indecent gesture. In India many millions worship the Shivalingam; it is represented over and over again in every temple in every material and every size; but there is never anything to shock or to disgust. It is not a question of morality—Whitman's morals are in all respects admirably clean—but of decency; and Whitman's indecencies—I have not quoted the worst—seem to me as pointless and inane as those of a crew of drunken sailors in a Limehouse bar. Even in the cleaner poems, the "Song of Myself," the "Song of the Open Road," one gets this conviction of the domination of mind by matter which is to me the supreme horror. That and the monstrous egoism of the man, the bombast and crudity alike of thought and utterance, leave me with the feeling that I did well indeed to close my Whitman after a conscientious perusal, never to open it again, at least with the idea of obtaining anything of worth.

I think that the real ground of his reputation lies in the very uncouthness of his form, and in the fact that one said: "Here is an American voice in tune with the most advanced voices of Europe." Max Nordau, too, in classing him with the great men whom his spite prompted him to spit upon from an altitude about a million miles beneath their boots, gave him an altogether false importance.

In Art a man's views count for nothing. It is a curious paradox that a man can only write if he is so white-hot over something that his work pours through him, not from him; and yet it is not of the least importance what that something is.