

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

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## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

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### WALT WHITMAN AND JAMES HARLAN.

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When James Harlan was appointed Secretary of the Interior in 1865, Walt Whitman held a clerkship in that Department. This was before the "good gray poet" had come into any considerable fame. It was at a time, too, when many people—perhaps ninety-nine out of every hundred—deemed certain of his poems immoral and some of them indecent. Mr. Harlan's attention was called to the matter, the result of which was the removal of Whitman from his clerkship. At the time, however, this event attracted little attention; so little, in fact, that at this day very few people who have come down from that generation will remember it at all. Really, it transpired as quietly as would the removal, for cause, of a \$1,600 clerk by a cabinet officer today. Comparatively few people at that time entertained any admiration for the writings of Walt Whitman. Mr. Harlan, however mistakenly, shared the popular estimate of the man and his works. Even E. C. Stedman, the poet, spoke of Whitman's writings as "too anatomical and malodorous." Later on, however, as his works grew into wider appreciation, edition after edition was printed, the volumes for the most part we believe, being sold by the poet himself. Publishers were not anxious to identify themselves with him. One of these editions was issued with the announcement that Whitman's autograph would appear upon each title-page. It was the good fortune of the writer of this paragraph to purchase a copy from the author himself. We believe that Whitman never made any public complaint concerning his removal from the Interior Department, but

some of his partisans have continued to denounce this act as a terrible outrage and to visit much censure upon the head of James Harlan. In the foreword of some of the editions of Whitman's writings which have been published since his death, this circumstance has been magnified in importance and denounced in very bitter terms. During the present year an *edition de luxe* of Whitman's writings has been issued by the well-known house of G. P. Putnam's Sons, of New York City. It is in every respect, so far as the manufacture of the ten volumes is concerned, a superb edition—one of which booklovers who are fortunate enough to possess it, will always be proud. It is marred, however, by what we consider a very serious defect, and that is a repetition and expansion of all the nonsensical bitterness which has been so unjustly visited upon Mr. Harlan. We copy the following from the introduction:

Harlan . . . . was told that Whitman was the author of an indecent book. To satisfy himself of the truth of this charge he one evening surreptitiously abstracted Whitman's copy of the *Leaves [of Grass]* from a drawer in his desk, and just as secretly returned it before Whitman next day reported for duty. Harlan was convinced that his information was correct, and Whitman was forthwith discharged.

None who knew Senator Harlan will credit the statement that he was capable of performing any official act "surreptitiously" or "secretively". He was always outspoken in his opinions, prompt and decided in action, and the supposition that he would act in that way will not be entertained by those who knew him well in Iowa. He served the people of this State as Superintendent of Public Instruction, and represented Iowa sixteen years in the United States Senate. Shortly before his death by the hand of an assassin President Lincoln called him from the U. S. Senate Chamber to the secretaryship of the Interior Department, where he also remained for some time. He served three years as presiding judge of the court of commissioners on the Alabama claims during the administration of President Andrew Johnson. He not only enjoyed the unbroken confidence of Presi-

dents Abraham Lincoln and U. S. Grant, but of Charles Sumner, Roscoe Conkling, George F. Edmonds, James W. Grimes, William Pitt Fessenden, Thomas B. Reed, and other great leaders of those historic times. His removal of Walt Whitman was simply a quiet, ordinary event, as appointments and removals were every day affairs before the days of "civil service" laws and rules. It is simply "indecent", betokening no great amount of courage, thus to assail the memory of such a man after his death. However, we scarcely expect this sort of thing to cease. Repeated editions of Whitman's works will be called for in the future, and we presume that those who exploit themselves as his especial admirers, and the protectors of his fame, will continue these savage assaults upon Mr. Harlan with increasing acerbity, regardless of any protests by those who knew him from his first appearance in public life until the day of his death. Possibly those who repeat this nonsense are of the opinion that it adds to their own consequence to pose as the defenders of Walt Whitman, who was too great to need defense from anybody.

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#### THE DEATH OF PHILIP M. CRAPO.

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The death of this statesman and philanthropist occurred at his home in the city of Burlington on Sunday night, September 20, 1903. He had been traveling in Colorado, where he contracted a severe cold, resulting in an attack of pneumonia, which suddenly ended his life at the age of 59 years.

In this untimely death not the city alone where he had his home, but the entire State has suffered an overwhelming and irreparable loss. Eminently successful in business, he was devoting his fortune and the maturity of his life to the public good. His career had been filled with the proudest

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