

Charge to a Walt

[Following his initiation into the Walt Whitman Club, President William Beardshear of Iowa State University was asked to prepare a "charge" for the next candidates, weaving as much of Whitman's phraseology into it as possible. Beardshear did a superb job, but unfortunately, when the manuscript fell inadvertently, through Walt Laylander, into Elbert Hubbard's hands, the latter printed it in *The Philistine*. Beardshear was charged with plagiarism by a few of his enemies in Iowa, but the whole matter was cleared up after a brief period of embarrassment to President Beardshear. The Editor]

He who aspires to be a Brother Walt must know the earth as his mother, the light as his father, the wind as his friend, the water as his kinsman, the sky as his brother, the animal and the plant as kindred spirits. He must understand that you are I, and I am you, and what has happened that you and I am I, and that I and you are you.

He must magnify and apply himself, lithografing Kronus, Zeus his son, & Hercules his grandson, buying drafts of Osiris, Isis, Belus, Brahma, Buddha; placing Manito in his portfolio, Allah on a leaf, securing the crucifix engraved and not forgetting Odin & the hideous-faced Mexitli, and every idol and image—taking them all for what they are worth to feel the puzzle of puzzles that we call Being. He must be afoot with his vision until it fails him, then loaf and invite his soul. He must undrape and sing of himself. What is a man anyhow? What am I? What are you?

Consider why you extract strength from the beef you eat, and whether you can dare wear your hat indoors or outdoors as you please. With your foothold tenoned & mortist in granite, you will need to pry thru the strata,

analyse to a hair and counsel with doctors, until you find no sweeter fat than that that sticks to your own bones. You will need to understand that the converging objects of the universe are written to you in perpetual flow, and your mission is to get the meaning of their writing. You must understand that it is as great to be a woman as to be a man, and that there is nothing greater than the mother of men. However big you are in office or your own wisdom, you must quit your ducking and comprehend that size is only development. In your soul you must swear that you will weigh the White House in the balance of a personal worth & that you will never deny the man-drudge of the cellar. That you will seize the descending man and say as a brother to him—

Oh despairer, here is my neck.

By the Almighty, you shall not go down!

Hang your whole weight on me!

You are not asked to give lectures nor a little charity, but to give yourself. You are to be a learner with the simplest, a teacher of the thoughtfulest, a novice beginning and the experient in myriads of seasons; to sympathize with every rank and religion; to be farmer, mechanic, artist, gentleman, seller, Quaker, express-driver, hod-carrier, foreman, prisoner, fancy man, rowdy, lawyer, fysician and priest. Your sphere is to incarnate the Southerner as soon as the Northerner, the Yankee, Canadian, Newfoundler, Hoosier, Badger, Buckeye, Hawkeye, the comrade of California, the free Northwesterners, (loving their big proportions), the comrade of all who shake hands and welcome to meat and drink and freely, fully, truly, to put yourself on record as from America sent. You must know that it is not only good to gain the day, but that it is good to fall, and that the spirit of lost battles at the bottom is the same as those won. You must be proud of no greater level than that by which you build your own house. You are forever

to hurrah for positive science and a long life to exact demonstration. For lexicographer, chemist, mariner, geologist, astronomer, mathematician, you must bring third-month twigs mixed with cedar and branches of lilacs, and enter by them the royal area of your own dwelling. You will need to unscrew the locks on your doors, the doors themselves from their jambs; mindful that whoever degrades another, degrades himself; that you are divine inside and out; that the body is the condition of civilization, the royal channelway & great highway of travel between the unseen and the seen, between God and the soul, and that the integral man is as delicate around his bowels as around the head and the heart.

It is your privilege to behold the daybreak and to find the morning-glory at your window, giving you greater satisfaction than the metaphysics of books. As a Brother Walt, you are a kosmos, not only a son of Manhattan, but a citizen of the Universe. The minute that comes to you from the past decillions is no better than now, and the sublime wonder under all of these Universes is always and always how there can be a mean man or an infidel. All things are yours, the new and the antique, the Greek and the Germanic systems, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, the stated lore of Plato, greater than Socrates sought and stated the Christ divine—fylosofies all, churches all, tenets all, yet underneath all, the dear love of man for his comrade. Yours is the joy of a belief that a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars, that a running blackberry would adorn the parlors of Heaven, and that a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels. In the night-time it is yours to hear among the still little bells of your ear the distinctive voices echoing to the plaudits of your name at the Capitol during the day, and not to be happy for that; to hear the "Well done" of worthy plans accomplished, and still not be happy for that;

to reflect that I am I, you are you, nature is nature, God is God, and that I, a comrade, am coming to you with the scents of the wild woods and the pond-sides, with the breaking of the dawn.

Two comrades are a multitude. They know that whoever walks a furlong without sympathy, walks to his own funeral dressed in a shroud. Tho they may be pocketless of dimes, they may purchase the pick of the earth. A glance of their eyes, as a bean in its pod, confounds the learning of all times, and with a trade or employment, they may become a hub for the wheeled universe and heroes ranking above the warring gods of granite covered centuries.

They do not say things for a dollar or to fill up the time while waiting for a boat. They are fond of a sweetheart, and relish a steak. They are first rate to ride, to fight, to hit the bull's eye, to sail a skiff, to sing a song and play on the banjo; preferring scars and the beard and the faces pitted with small pox over all latherers, and those well tanned to those that keep out of the sun. They are the clocks of themselves. They are not contained between their hats and their boots, and know how it stings to be slighted. To them the city invisible and invincible to the attacks of the whole earth, is the new city of Friends.

It is the mission of a Brother Walt to plant companionship thick as trees along the Rivers of America, and along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the prairies, and to make inseparable cities by the life-long love of comrades. Our tokens are a sprig of lilac with a branch of pine, a bunch of wild orange, and calamus root, fresh scented of the pond-side. It is time to explain myself—let us stand up. Shoulder your duds, dear son, and I will mine and let us hasten forth. Wonderful cities and free nations we shall fetch as we go. If you tire, give me both burdens and rest the chuff of your hand on my hip. . . .

WILLIAM M. BEARDSHEAR