

# WHITMAN'S "LEAVES OF GRASS."

ITS PUBLICATION SUSPENDED BY ORDER OF  
THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF MASSACHUSETTS.

PHILADELPHIA, May 21.—Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" seems to have been born under an unlucky planet. Attorney General Marston, of Massachusetts, has set his seal of condemnation upon the work and Osgood & Co., the Boston publishers, have thrown up the contract in obedience to the official command of the Attorney-General. The history of the book or the poet would fill a volume—how both attracted widespread public attention in 1860, Whitman's varied and interesting career during the war, his life in Washington, his discharge from a clerkship in the Interior Department by the Hon. James Harlan for being the author of the condemned volume; his subsequent trials and triumphs and the thousands of cruel criticisms and fulsome eulogies that have followed him ever since. Whitman's peremptory refusal to expurgate certain lines alleged to be obscene, is the cause of the action on the part of the Attorney-General and the consequent abandonment of the publication by Osgood & Co. It was in May, 1881, that the idea of bringing out a new and complete edition of "Leaves of Grass" was broached, the poet receiving an inquiry to that effect from the Boston publishers. He answered that he had contemplated such a step, but before entering into any negotiation he wanted it distinctly understood that not a line, word, or syllable of the old text was to be left out in case he concluded to publish, and he made this condition absolute before going any further. Osgood & Co. wrote back, asking for the manuscript, and it was forwarded. This was followed by an offer, and it was agreed that the author should receive a royalty of 20 cents on every two-dollar book sold. In September Mr. Whitman went to Boston and personally superintended the production of his work, which appeared in November. The sale of "Leaves of Grass" was fair, the author's royalty during the Winter and early Spring amounting to more than \$4,000. Several hundred copies went to London, and the work was variously commented upon in almost every country in the world.

On the 1st of March of the present year District Attorney Stevens, of Boston, acting under instructions from Attorney-General Marston, informed Osgood & Co. that he intended to institute a suit to compel them to stop the circulation of Whitman's volume, on the ground that it came under the head of obscene literature. A long list of passages and poems were specified, and the District Attorney intimated that if they were stricken out the publication might continue. On March 21 Osgood & Co. wrote to the author and acquainted him with these facts, and asked if the objectionable passages could be left out. The poet's reply was immediate and characteristic. He wrote: "The list, whole and several, is rejected by me and will not be thought of under any circumstances." Publication was then suspended. A week afterward the publishers wrote again, stating that if the author would only consent to cut out the poems entitled "To a Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits for Me," the official mind would be satisfied and the book could go on, but the author, feeling that he could not remove a part of the structure without endangering the whole, most emphatically declined even to consider the proposition. In consequence the Boston firm, who were averse to being drawn into any lawsuit, replied that they must give up publishing the book and were ready to turn over the plates to the author. This was done, Messrs. Osgood & Co. taking occasion to say: "We feel it right to say that it is not we who have fixed inflexible conditions under which this matter could be decided. Those conditions have been fixed by yourself." The best of feeling existed throughout between author and publishers, as the entire action came from Mr. Marston.

The "Good Gray Poet" was seen to-day at his home in Camden, and confirmed the report that Osgood & Co. had absolutely given up the book, and that his final settlement with them had been perfectly satisfactory. Further than that, however, he declined to say, except that the Attorney-General's action was only another buffet, but no more serious than any previous obstacle.

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