ALT WHITMAN said of Edward Carpenter, the English prophet-poet of democracy: “Carpenter is a man of means on whom his estate sits lightly; is intensely interested in the radical problems; is of a religious nature—not formally so, but in atmosphere.”

To this brief but luminous description of his friend and disciple, Whitman added this prophecy: “He will yet cut a figure in his own country. He is now just about climbing the hill; when he gets up to the top people will see and acknowledge him.”

In the eighteen years which have elapsed since its utterance, Whitman’s prophecy has been abundantly fulfilled. While none of his works has ever been noted among the “best sellers of the month,” or even in the lists of books most in demand at the public libraries, a numerous and ever-growing body of earnest and thoughtful readers scattered throughout the English-speaking world look to Edward Carpenter for intellectual and moral leadership. Just as a certain type of the young men of England a generation ago looked to Carlyle and Ruskin for inspiration, their successors to-day look to Edward Carpenter. Among the members of the new Labor Party in the British House of Commons, for example, and their colleagues in the various local governing bodies, men who have risen to the needs of their class for leadership, the older members, almost without exception, were inspired in varying degree by Mazzini, Carlyle and Ruskin. The younger men seem to have followed the leadership of Whitman and Carpenter in like manner. Glorious names are these of the great apostles of modern democracy, and it is perhaps a rash thing to say that one name, like Ben Adhem’s, leads all the rest. It is truer perhaps that

“All service is the same with God—
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last nor first.”

Nevertheless, there are, it seems to me, certain qualities in Carpenter’s work and leadership which will give him that preeminence in
COTTAGE WHERE EDWARD CARPENTER LIVES AS FARMER AND SHOEMAKER

THE "HUT" IN WHICH "TOWARDS DEMOCRACY" WAS WRITTEN
CARPENTER'S GOSPEL OF FRIENDSHIP

the illustrious band in the roll-call of ultimate history. To a religious fervor as intense as Mazzini's he unites a practical, every-day philosophy of common sense; not less passionate than Carlyle, he is more confident of the future; lacking none of Ruskin's eloquence, he is simpler, saner and better poised; not less simple or daring than Whitman, he is more definite and coherent. So, at least, I weigh the influences of the five great leaders in my own life. And there is no better test than personal experience, inadequate though it may be.

HERE is little of either tragedy or romance, as these are commonly conceived, in the life-story of Edward Carpenter. Outwardly at least his life has been very simple and singularly free from sensational experiences. Born, in 1844, at Brighton, to wealth and luxury, he was educated at Cambridge, winning distinction as a mathematician and becoming a Fellow of his college. Destined for an ecclesiastical career, in 1868 he "took Holy Orders," as the stupid and vain ecclesiastical phrase goes, and the following year became a curate under the famous Christian Socialist leader, Frederick Denison Maurice. Those who are familiar with the history of the movement which Maurice, Kingsley and Ludlow founded and inspired will not accuse me of traversing the bounds of legitimate literary study if I suggest that Maurice's influence was probably an important factor in the evolution of his young curate, inspiring him with a hatred of the shams and cold formalisms of the Church, its aloofness from the actual life of the people, and the absence of a strong, inspiring spiritual note from its gospel of other-world rewards and punishments. Though none of his many interpreters seems to have done so, I have always felt that the inspiration of Maurice had not a little to do with Carpenter's decision to leave the ministry of the Church.

However that may be—and it is perhaps not very important—an unquestionably greater influence was Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," with which he became acquainted in 1868. By actual experience in its service, he found the life of the Church dull, barren and effete. He went back to Cambridge and lectured there for five years, until the atmosphere became unbearable, as that of the Church had proved to him. He felt that he "must leave or be suffocated."

There is a letter of his to Whitman, written in 1874, in the last days of his Cambridge residence, which I would like to quote entire,
but it is too long. In it he rails against British respectability: “Money eats into it, to the core. The Church is effete. At school the sin which can not be forgiven is a false quantity. The men are blindly material; even—to the most intellectual—art and the desire for something like religion are only known as an emotional sense of pain.” All very pessimistic and dolorous this, but there is a note of faith and cheer: “Yet the women will save us. I wish I could tell you what is being done by them—everywhere—in private and in public. The artisans, too, are shaping themselves. While society is capering and grimacing over their heads, they are slowly coming to know their minds; and exactly as they come to know their minds they come to the sense of power to fulfil them; and sweet will the day be when the toys are wrested from the hands of children and they, too, have to become men.”

He goes on in this letter to speak of the relief of being able “to turn from the languid inanity of the well-fed to the clean, hard lines of the workman’s face,” and, by way of illustration, adds: “Yesterday there came (to mend my door) a young workman with the old divine light in his eyes—even I call it old, though I am not thirty—and perhaps, more than all, he has made me write to you.” Then follows a confession of faith by the reverent disciple to his Master, and this personal note: “As to myself, I was in order; but I have given that up—utterly. It was no good. Nor does the University do; there is nothing vital in it. Now I am going away to lecture to workingmen and women in the North. They at least desire to lay hold of something with a real grasp. And I can give something of mathematics and science. It may be of no use, but I shall see.”

THIS letter foreshadows the writer’s greatest work, and contains the germ of much of his teaching. There is the conviction, already strong, of the sterility of society life; the enthusiastic and reverent recognition of woman’s spiritual force, and, above all, admiration for the fundamental wholesomeness and honesty of the simple lives of those who earn their own living. Carpenter has not prated glibly of the “dignity of toil,” after the fashion of the modern dilettante, while ignoring the stern facts of its tragedy and brutalization. Perhaps no living writer has more faithfully and courageously depicted this aspect of the workers’ lives, or more vehemently denounced it. He has insisted upon the wrongfulness of
idle lives and the wholesomeness and dignity of the simple, self-sustaining life of labor. This picture of a stoker recalls the one of the carpenter in the Whitman letter:

“Was this, then, the sum of life?
“A grinning gibbering organisation of negations—a polite trap and circle of endlessly complaisant faces bowing you back from all reality!
“Was it that men should give all their precious time and energy to the plaiting of silken thongs and fetters innumerable—
“To bind themselves prisoners—to condemn themselves to pick oakum of the strands of real life forever?
“Was it mere delusion and bottomless nightmare? really at last the much talked-of and speculated-about existence in two dimensions only?

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“Well, as it happened just then—and as we stopped at a small way-side station—my eyes from their swoon-sleep opening encountered the grimy and oil-besmeared figure of a stoker.
“Close at my elbow on the foot-plate of his engine he was standing, devouring bread and cheese.
“And the firelight fell on him brightly as for a moment his eyes rested on mine.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

“That was all. But it was enough.
“The youthful face, yet so experienced and calm, was enough; the quiet look, the straight untroubled unseeking eyes, resting upon me—giving me without any ado the thing I needed.
“(Indeed because they sought nothing and made no claim for themselves, therefore it was that they gave me all.)

* * * * * * * * * * * *

“It is not a little thing, you—wherever you are—following the plough, or clinging with your feet to the wet rigging, or nursing your babe through the long day when your husband is absent, or preparing supper for his return—or you on the foot-plate of your engine—
“Who stand meditating there against Necessity, wringing favors and a little respite for your fellows, translating the laws for them, making a channel for the forces—
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“In whom through faithful use, through long patient exercise the channels have become clean—
“(Clean and free the channels of your soul—though your body be smirched and oily—)
“It is not a little thing that by such a life your face should become as a lantern of strength to men; that wherever you go they should rise up stronger to the battle, and go forth with good courage.
“Nay, it is very great.” (Towards Democracy, pp. 140-143.)

THE lecturing to workingmen and women of which the letter to Whitman speaks so dubiously, refers to the University Extension movement, with which Carpenter occupied himself for the next seven years, lecturing in all the great industrial centers upon scientific subjects and music. It is somewhat strange that no mention is made of the latter, for music has always been a source of great delight to him, as may be gathered from the essays in Angels’ Wings, in which he shows his devotion to and understanding of Beethoven. He edited Chants of Labour for the Socialist movement, and one of the sweetest and most inspiring pieces in the collection is the song “England Arisen,” written and composed by himself. There are few Socialist gatherings in England at which this beautiful hymn is not heard. Grieg, perhaps the greatest living composer, and, with the exception of Wagner, the most democratic since Beethoven, is one of his intimate friends and a warm admirer of his work.

During his connection with the University Extension movement Carpenter found time, in 1877, to visit Walt Whitman at his home. The impressions of this and a later visit, made in 1884, are contained in two papers now published in his recent volume, “Days with Walt Whitman,” which are remarkable for their insight into Whitman’s life and character. A friend who attended many of Carpenter’s University Extension lectures, says of them: “They were the typical polished, eloquent and lucid lectures of our English university men with a strong ethical flavor, a prophetic note of future greatness as an ethical leader.” Judged by ordinary standards, as a lecturer, Carpenter was successful enough, but he was not satisfied. “It may be of no use,” he had written to Whitman in 1874, and after seven years’ trial, years fraught with vital mental and spiritual development, he resigned his post to enter upon the great work of his life.
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WITH his strong disgust for the parasitic life of the well-to-do classes, and his equally strong admiration for wholesomeness and simplicity of living, it is easy to understand the reasons which led Carpenter at this juncture to seek the simple environment of a laborer’s home while he devoted himself to his great, long-pondering task. Sharing a humble laborer’s cottage, he built himself a wooden hut in the garden, and in this hut or in the fields and woods, in all sorts of weather, his greatest work—Towards Democracy—was written, the first edition appearing in 1883. The spirit in which this great book was written may best be judged from Carpenter’s word concerning it: “I wanted to write some sort of book which should address itself very closely to any one who cared to read it—establish, so to speak, an intimate personal relation between myself and the reader; and during successive years I made several attempts to realize the idea. . . . None of my attempts satisfied me, however, and after a time I began to think the quest was an unreasonable one.”

Towards Democracy is written mainly in the free-verse form of Whitman, with occasional rhymed lyrical poems of great beauty and strength. Strangely enough, Carpenter finds that when he writes indoors his poems shape themselves naturally in the latter form, the simpler Whitmanesque form coming as naturally out of doors. Personally, while glorying as fully as the most ardent Whitmanite in the free rhymed and rhythmless chants, I have always regretted that the poet should allow himself so rarely to adopt the softer, sweeter medium. Naturally, Towards Democracy invites comparison with its great prototype, Leaves of Grass. By many it has been criticized as a weak imitation of Whitman’s work, even such a friendly critic as J. Addington Symonds making an invidious comparison of the two books in this spirit.

It is, perhaps, not a vital matter, this question of originality. Yet, it seems to me, they must wholly fail to understand Carpenter, who regard him as an echo, more or less feeble, of Whitman. Granted that there is perhaps not a line in Towards Democracy which Whitman would not heartily indorse; that Carpenter accepts every word of Whitman’s message; granted, too, that Whitman’s book served him as a model and made the fulfilment of his great dream possible, there yet remains enough of individuality in Carpenter’s work to establish his claim to attention as an original thinker. A very great difference
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marks the two works, the difference between the simple naïveté of the child and the clear vision of the scholar and man of the world. In Whitman’s work we have the incoherences and contradictions of the child who blurts forth with delightful freedom every transient thought and impression. In Carpenter’s work, on the other hand, we have the clear, logical thought of a trained thinker, a man of science whose thoughts group themselves naturally and habitually into system and ordered progression. Lovers of the American poet may and do quarrel about his sympathies and beliefs. I have heard two speakers at a Whitman Fellowship meeting, both of whom knew the poet well, engage in a lively controversy, one claiming that Whitman was a radical Socialist; while the other, with equal assurance, claimed that he was essentially a conservative. “What have I to do with institutions? I am neither for nor against institutions,” cries Whitman in one mood, while in another he declares himself to be the builder of “the institution of the dear love of comrades.” With Carpenter no such difficulty arises. Trained teacher and scientist, his thought is direct, ordered and concentrated. No one can mistake his position: he is a Socialist of an all-too-rare type, sane, practical and spiritual.

IN THE same year in which his great work appeared in its first form—for in the half-dozen editions which have appeared it has been greatly extended, being, like Leaves of Grass, a growth—Carpenter acquired a piece of land, about seven acres, upon which he built a small house. Here, with a couple of workmen friends, he set about market-gardening. He enjoys manual labor, particularly farm-work, caring for horses, carting stones and manure, using shovel and pickaxe, hoe and scythe, just like any ordinary laborer. In 1886, moved by his yearning for greater simplicity in dress, he began to make sandals for himself and friends from a pattern-pair received from India, and this industry has grown into a considerable business, being now carried on by his friend, Mr. Adams, of Holmesfield, near Sheffield. Part of each year is still spent here to be in closer touch with the workers in the city. Writing, lecturing occasionally, and working regularly, he exemplifies in his life the simplicity he advocates in his writings. A tall, somewhat slightly built man, with grayish hair and beard, ruddy and bright-eyed, he is an altogether pleasing personality. The strong element of simple humor which characterizes
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his work is evidenced by a merry twinkle of the eye and a subtle smile. Carpenter's Socialism is, as already intimated, characterized by a sanity and spiritual sweetness that is uncommon. There is nothing half-hearted or namby-pamby about it, nothing of compromise or uncertainty. Perhaps without having read Marx, his views concerning the evolution of society are quite Marxian. Something akin to the "materialistic conception of history," as it is called, is fundamental to his philosophy of history as outlined in Civilization: Its Cause and Cure, a collection of prose-essays on philosophical and scientific subjects, published in 1889. When the modern Socialist movement took root in England, pioneered by such men as Mr. H. M. Hyndman, Mr. Herbert Burrows, and others, Carpenter naturally identified himself with it. I recall that Justice, the organ of the Social Democratic Federation, and the oldest Socialist paper in the English-speaking world, was started with his money in 1884. For years Carpenter lectured to small crowds in dingy halls and upon street corners in the cities of the North of England, and in 1886 identified himself with the Sheffield Socialist Society—a branch of William Morris's famous Socialist League—and the establishment of a coffee-shop, a sort of cheap restaurant, as a center of propaganda. I remember hearing a discussion between two Socialist workmen in Glasgow some years ago in which one asked the other, "What is Carpenter's position?" and the other replied, with rare perception, "Oh, just brotherly love, clean water and no fuss!"

The books already named do not by any means represent the total product of Carpenter's literary labors. Omitting fugitive articles and pamphlets, the following is, I believe, a fairly complete bibliography of his published writings up to the present: Towards Democracy, in four parts, 1883-1902; England's Ideal, a series of essays on social subjects, 1887; Civilization: Its Cause and Cure, a collection of scientific and philosophical papers, 1889; From Adam's Peak to Elephanta, a book dealing with his travels in India and Ceylon in 1890-1891 and published in 1892; Angels' Wings, a volume of essays on art and music in their relation to life; Love's Coming of Age, a profound and singularly sweet study of the sex problem, with a privately printed pamphlet, supplementary to it, entitled Homogenic Love; The Story of Eros and Psyche, with a translation
of the first book of Homer’s “Iliad”; Ioläus; An Anthology of Friendship, being a collection of stories, legends, folk-lore, poetry and philosophy upon the subject of friendship gathered from the literatures of all lands and ages; Prisons, Police and Punishment, a study of the causes of crime and the treatment of criminals, published in 1905; An Unknown People, a pamphlet on intermediate types of men and women; The Art of Creation, an attempt to explain the creative process in the light of modern thought in terms of a reconciliation of science and religion, 1905; finally, this year he has given us Days with Walt Whitman, an illuminating study of our great American poet. These works, together with the collection of Socialist songs already mentioned, and many articles and pamphlets of minor importance, constitute a remarkable literary achievement.

With such a formidable list of writings, dealing with subjects of tremendous importance, it is not easy to summarize their contents in the brief compass of a single paper.

“DEMOCRACY,” in the sense in which Carpenter uses the term, is synonymous with brotherhood and unity, and so defined, the title of his great work is an affirmation of belief in the ultimate realization of the ideal community of sympathy and interest which has been the quest of uncounted ages. Our so-called “civilization” does not appeal to him. Its complexity, its bustle and strife, its hideous social contrasts, are to him symptoms of disease. He would greatly prefer the simple communism of the barbaric age, before the idea of property divided mankind into classes of masters and slaves, to the present system, but for the fact that he regards the present as a temporary stage in social development to a higher communism. The present social system, or no-system, is “a kind of disease which the various races of mankind have to pass through, as children pass through measles or whooping-cough.” Carpenter’s description of civilization, a long catalogue of evils, seems very pessimistic at first, but when it is understood that he regards it as a stage in the development of society from the crude, instinctive communism of barbarism to a conscious communism upon an infinitely higher plane, that “out of the muck and litter of a decaying world” a new, resplendent life rises in the poet’s vision, it is seen that Carpenter is essentially an optimist, a dweller in the sunlight of eternal faith.
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The ownership of property becoming a mania has poisoned the springs of life and brought with it servitude, hate and warfare. The complexity of life resulting from the crushing burden of things owned or craved for, which are not essential to wholesome living, enslaves men to their possessions and destroys their capacity for what Browning calls “the wild joys of living.” It follows, therefore, that the remedy for this disease of civilization, the way to attain unity and brotherhood, that wholeness of the body social which he would have us seek, is simplicity of living and abundant friendship. A world of simple, wholesome pleasure, radiant with comradeship, is the social idea which Carpenter believes in with intense faith.

For society and for the individual, then, the simplification of life becomes a matter of vital significance. Simplicity in food—Carpenter himself is a vegetarian—dress, manners, homes and their surroundings are essential to intellectual and bodily strength, to anything like a general spirit of comradeship, and, not less important, clean and wholesome sex-relationship. His message might be expressed in terms of exhortation somewhat as follows: “Simplify your lives that you may be sound and strong in mind and body. Simplify your lives that you may obtain peace! Simplify your lives that you may be pure! Simplify your lives that your mothers and sisters may be redeemed from drudgery to become your comrades! Simplify your lives that you may be free and that you may know at last the joy of right living!” Such, in brief, is the sane, wholesome and intensely practical gospel which Carpenter believes and to the propagation of which he has consecrated his splendid culture and genius.

NO SKETCH of the life and work of this great thinker and seer, however brief, can satisfy his friends if it fails to mention his attitude toward contemporary science. As already noted, he is a man of science himself, qualified to teach science in one of the greatest universities of the world. His attitude toward contemporary science is that of a confirmed skeptic, and there is hardly a theory of modern science which he completely accepts. A believer in evolution, he is a disciple of Lamarck rather than of Darwin. He does not, can not, believe that the evolution of man has been dominated by accidental characteristics possessed by his non-human ancestors. Rather he believes it to have been due to the unfolding of higher forms latent
within. He adopts Whitman’s term, “exfoliation,” to describe this view of evolution that “there is a force at work throughout creation, ever urging each type onward into new and newer forms.” This force is desire. Carpenter carries the idea of the biologists that “function precedes organization” onward and supplements it by adding that “desire precedes function.” Inward change, or desire, comes first, action follows and necessitates organization.

This theory of exfoliation applies equally to society. In a fine prose-poem, “After Long Ages,” he sets forth his philosophy of history. He pictures man, individual and social man, in the long, slow process of development:

“Toilsome and long is the journey; shell after shell, envelope after envelope, he discards,
Over the mountains, over the frowning barriers, undaunted, unwrapping all that detains him—
All, all conventions left aside, all limitations passed, all shackles dropped—the husks and sheaths of ages falling off—
At length the wanderer returns to heaven.”

Thus, Carpenter the Socialist holds substantially the same relation to the Socialist philosophy of Marx as Carpenter the scientist holds to the scientific theory of Darwin. Back of the great economic forces which make social and political revolutions necessary, he sees desire, prevision, dim but ever-growing consciousness. Great economic forces may make the perfect social state possible and inevitable, and he believes they will, but only because men feel its need. This feeling, desire, consciousness—call it what you will—is the vital fact of human progress.

After what has been said in the foregoing pages, it is not perhaps necessary for me to warn the reader against regarding this rough outline as the whole of Carpenter’s teaching. All that I have aimed to do is to reveal something of the great thinker’s personality, and to indicate the salient features of his sweet, sane gospel of friendship and simplicity, in the hope that some souls drifting upon the seas of social unrest and unfaith may find inspiration in the life of the man and safe anchorage in his teaching.