Cambridge, Mass.
Apr. 14, 1902

My dear Carpenter,

I send these letters about W. W.’s relation with Whitman, including the two lost from Remmert, these enlightening little fragments which produced on him the effect of “hysterical” as usual. I have had typewritten copies of these last as the most valuable, I will send you the others when you send back the originals, if you care for them. Ethel Parton is a fine strong clean headed woman; the daughter of Parton’s first marriage; and Parton was one of the most thoroughly truthful and honest men I ever knew, though very liable to be imposed upon by his own heroes in historical matters; this being especially true of Gen. butter, who turned him round his fingers. Cordially yours,

T. W. Higginson
Belmont, Mass.
March 18, '95.

Dear Col. Higginson:

I have just received a letter from R. M. Bucke, Walt Whitman, most intimate friend. He says positively we should refuse to believe any such story as that of Parton's. He says he (Bucke) forced $200 on Whitman as a gift (or small fraction of return for what W's works had done for him, made over his whole life, amused it as they have mine.) Bucke always, he says, refused to receive back the money, but a year before W. W. died he insisted on returning the money and did.

There is an inherent improbability, he reminds me (as I knew before) In W's needing money in 1858 & 59. He was the proudest and most independent man on earth (even when a cripple he never asked a human being for a cent: little Whitman tried and others did it though.) In 58-9 he was building houses and had plenty of money and was in perfect health. His brother Jeff had a good position and so did George we believe.

I think Parton was humbugged by a go between or who pretended to borrow for Walt Whitman. Walt W. has always suffered from slander and Worthington the snaky publisher of N. Y. has stolen from him for years by using his plates. I have written to Mrs. Spofford to ask if she remembers whether Parton told her that W. W. came to him in person to borrow money. I can't believe it. It is incredible under the circumstances.

Parton's refusing to answer me, as a friend of his friend Mrs. Spofford, looks bad. It was 6 mos before W. W. died I wrote him.

Sincerely yours,

W. S. Kennedy.
Miss Ethel Parton,

Dear Friend:

I thank you sincerely (& Mrs. P.) for the full and explicit letter. I can only say that Whitman's conduct in the transaction appears to have been of the meanest, - devilish in fact. Old Walt undoubtedly had in him grave faults; I have never doubted it, as you will find in my book (to be had of David McKay 1110 Market St. Phila.). He would lie occasionally and was foxy. His irregular life in youth was blamable. I do not condemn these faults. I only say his great virtues balanced them.

Exterminating circumstances.

I think you are biased in your view as to the bad part of Whitman. He had edited several papers, had written largely for the Democratic Review etc. and had many literary plans at the time what was the year? I understand it was just before the breaking out of the war (? This is important, for after 1861 up to 1880 Walt W. had no money to speak of. What he did have he gave away to others (of his salary in Washington) and it seems curious he did not repay Parton then, unless he felt that Parton had deeply insulted him by his lawyer etc. Afterwards I suppose he tried to justify himself on the argument that he had devoted his life to the soldiers and to humanity, and that as Mr. P. did not ask for the money after the first disappointment he did not want it, - was willing to let it go as his contribution to the soldiers and to the cause of religious reform Whitman devoted his life to. I do not excuse the non-payment of the debt, but only wish to have both sides and be as charitable as I can. I frankly say that I see no need of further

In 1859 W. W. was building houses and selling them: what did he want of money?
proof that Walt Whitm. borrowed the money. But I have written to Oliver Dyer hoping to get details as to the alleged bad faith: that is what worries me, tho' I do not know why it should, as I admit Whitm's occasional duplicity. I never set him up as a saint but it is too bad our ideals in this world receive such set-backs always, isn't it?

Dr. R. M. Bucke, Whitm's most intimate friend, wrote me that Whitm. insisted on paying him $200 which Bucke had pressed upon him as a gift (Dr. Bucke is one of the noblest men in Canada, head of the State Asylum in London, Ontario, and my friend. It was to Him and John and me that many of the letters I published in my Whitm. were jointly addressed)

This Parton case seems very mysterious; don't seem to jibe with the Bucke case nor with Walt's life-long charity and kindness to others. However, I must believe it to be true. Walt Wh.'s brother George now of Burlington, N. Jersey wrote us that he never heard of any such loan and believed it to be not a fact. But his testimony is of course of no value.

I guess we shall have to swallow this pill, and as you say let it go as an element of the man's character in our constitutions of minds. A man of great virtues and a man of great sins! I should give much to hear Whitm's side of the transaction, - what his inability to pay, good faith etc. were, in his belief.

Very sincerely and gratefully,

W. S. Kennedy."
Mr. Kennedy -

Dear Sir,

I have just received from you a brief letter so extraordinary that I have read it over three times before being able to persuade myself that it is indeed from the same pen which wrote so reasonably and courteously before. It is not possible to convince me that a man defrauded cancels his right to his money by recourse to law; or that such a course is "hounding"; or that any "murky splendors" in the delinquent's character can either justify the original fraud or convert the victim's natural resentment into a counterbalancing offense. And I think that you will find that the majority of honest people, even literary ones, will be equally difficult to bring to your peculiar point of view, should you ever try to impress it upon them. So pray understand that Mrs. Parton and I rest assured of the entire propriety of Mr. Parton's conduct, and have no wish to modify any "admissions" which we have made concerning it.

When you add that we bring nothing new, and that Whitman's own admission of moral lapses "cuts the ground from under our feet," you seem to forget in your excitement that confession may perhaps be palliation, but it is also confirmatory evidence; and that - pardon the extreme frankness, but you have made your own point of view very plain that I may surely make mine equally so - I do not care whether what we bring is new or old, exculpatory or dammatory, so long as it is the truth. Whitman is to me simply a formless literary monster, and a poor sort of human being, and I am not in the least concerned for his reputation in either capacity.
He is, besides, one of those whom Time commonly treats well: his dozen pages, or half dozen, of genius will probably survive, while the many more of egotism, sensual savagery and other "barbaric yawp" will be mercifully forgotten.

Since replying to the first letter of Mr. Harned, an executor of Walt Whitman's, whom I referred to you, I have done nothing further in the Whitman affair until today, when, in accordance with the advice of our friends, I have sent all the letters pertaining to it — with the exception of your first note of inquiry — to Colonel Higginson, with a request to deal with them as he thinks best. If he wishes to see the letters I have already sent you, I trust you will allow him to do so, I suppose, but do not know, that you have heard from Mr. Dyer and Mr. Harned, and that it is the latter to whom you refer when you speak of "Philadelphia hedgers and shufflers". He has indeed tried to brush aside the story in a curiously off-hand way, and with so bullying a tone that I was driven to wonder if he thought that, being women, we could be frightened into silence. It is because of your wish to deal at least truthfully with the facts that I again write to you, when otherwise, differing as widely as we do, I should not have thought it best to do so. You speak of forcing the payment of the money to Mrs. Parton. Surely, Mr. Harned is not the man to pay an outlawed debt, which he wishes to deny ever existed; and surely it must be evident to you that Mrs. Parton has not had any such possibility in view. You opened this inquiry; we have responded, but have sought rather to evade than to court publicity; repayment has not hitherto been mentioned; and I beg to assure you formally on her behalf that it has never been thought of, will not be asked,
and is not expected. To us, it is quite immaterial whether the
Whitmanite "temple" is reared, as you would rear it, upon a curious
moral view of accepted facts, or as Mr. Harned would, upon the
concealment of such facts as would be ugly in the common eye. Our
sole desire has been to place the true version of a biographical
incident which we knew at the service of those interested to learn
it; the responsibility of dealing with it afterwards we shall not
assume - unless, indeed, any such unwarranted attack upon Mr.
Parton's course as you have allowed yourself to make in a hasty
letter were repeated in cool print. Then we should have to de-
 fend him, or choose a champion from among his friends to do it for
us. There would be no lack. Most persons do not regard legal
process against one who has obtained money fraudulently, and the
making public of the name of the offender, as an unjustifiable
attack upon a noble character; and we should have no fear for the
result.

Very truly yours,

Ethel Parton."
"March 19, 1897.

I am flaming out with thunders and lightnings of wrath against the Philadelphia dreggers and shufflers. If that money is not paid to Mrs. Parton I have told them I withdraw from the whole fellowship. Your own admissions show me that James Parton cancelled his right to the money by his injury to Whitman's character in hounding him with the law and in spreading the story all about town. Whitman may have lied, but I think he was justified in not paying Parton. But his executors have no quarrel with Mrs. Parton, and that money must be paid or I will bring down their silly temple into ruins about their ears. Whitman stands in all his murky splendor sin-tarnished and grand, above us all. I abate no jot of my respect of him; but a true picture must go down about him. That is the gist of the whole thing; for his gospel is a personal one. In Crossing Brooklyn Ferry and elsewhere he admits all that you have said against him, and cuts the ground from under your feet. You bring nothing new except a concrete instance of the lapses he admits.

W. S. Kennedy.

Thanks for your letters."
March 20, 1897, Newburyport, Mass.

Dear Colonel Higginson,

I do not want to shirk any disagreeable task that is properly mine, and especially I do not wish to shirk at your expense. But in this Walt Whitman affair Mr. Harned writes so brutally and Mr. Kennedy so hysterically that they have finally exhausted my patience; and I will correspond no further with either of them. So, at the suggestions of my uncle, Col. Clifford Thomson, of East Orange, where I have been staying — I enclose the papers in the case to you, to do as you please with, and beg leave to refer to you any more wild Whitmanites who may charge down upon my poor aunt's peace of mind. She hates a fight, and is quite unable in her delicate state of health, to engage in one; and she does not find it exactly restful to assist me in fighting for her. May I therefore ask this of you, without being thought to presume upon your kindness?

I send you Mr. Kennedy's two last letters (the first was a polite request for information) and both Mr. Harned's epistles. The last of his was so utterly deficient in every gentlemanly quality that I did not reply to it. Mr. Kennedy's though certainly rude enough, was apparently dashed off in such a distracted state of mind, that, in view of his apparent wish to be fair, I have answered it — and I enclose a copy of my answer. When I was writing my other letters to Mr. Kennedy, I was in the midst of the utmost domestic confusion — my sister sick, my aunt tired out, myself hurrying preparations for a promised visit — and I did not, as I suppose I ought, preserve copies copies of them,
2.

though I have rough draughts. But Mr. Kennedy is, I believe, a friend of yours, and he will no doubt send them to you if you deem it necessary to see them. My letter to Mr. Harned was of the same character as those to Mr. Kennedy, though briefer; and I referred him to Mr. Kennedy for further information. I was then in East Orange, away from my aunt, and both very busy and very tired.

I gave Mr. Kennedy the address of Oliver Dyer, Warren, R. I. (only I then told him merely care of the N. Y. Ledger, as I did not know more definitely) and I suppose he has communicated with him. Mr. Dyer, was, Mrs. Parton thought, the person to whom Mr. Parton (at his request) entrusted the legal management of the Whitman matter. I shall write by this mail a note inquiring of Mr. Dyer if he has recently related the story to either Mr. Harned or Mr. Kennedy, however, as I ought to know definitely. Should there be any mistake or hitch there (Mr. Dyer is now very aged) there is at least one other person we could reach who knew of the circumstances at the time; but from the manner of Mr. Kennedy's yellow note, I should judge that Mr. Dyer had given him the story.

Mrs. Parton and I certainly did not care to seek publicity in this matter; but neither, now do we care to avoid it, if in your opinion it is best it should see daylight. We will leave it all to your discretion; and I am quite willing to have any use you please made of anything I have already written. I have probably said things that are unwise, but I have been scrupulously careful never to exceed the truth regarding matters of facts. Only, if the transaction comes out publicly, please, please, let it be plain, that angry as Mr. Parton was at the time he was de-
frauded, and consumptuously as he judged Whitman's character always, he did not cherish a grudge even against him, and in his later years often kept silence when he could have punished him with a word. He had a good native capacity for righteous wrath — but it was not in him to be other than gentle in act toward an old man and an invalid, much as he was wont to laugh at his elevation to be a good gray idol.

With regard to the money question — it was Mrs. Parton's first impulse to declare that she would not accept it if it were offered, lest her motives might be misconstrued. But I have persuaded her that, as it was no movement of hers that started the coil, that could scarcely be: and she now says that, if it were rendered, she would take it; as it is my opinion she ought to do. So doing, it seems to me, would confirm her position rather than weaken it. But, until you mentioned the money to her at Amesbury, it had never occurred to her that there could be question of repayment; and she certainly does not expect ever to be paid, nor would she life a finger toward inviting or requesting payment.

I am heartily sorry to trouble you with such a formidable packet; and I trust your experience and ability will enable you to cope with the two Whitman's gentlemen (who appear now to be at daggers drawn with each other) more easily and advantageously than I feel myself able to do — if this fight is to go on, indeed.

With the most cordial regards of Mrs. Parton and Myself, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Ethel Parton.

Mrs. Parton says that Mr. Dyer is, or was, of a decidedly aggressive disposition; and that it is quite likely some remarks
of his have exasperated Mr. Kennedy to talk of "hounding" as he does. Mr. Parton was perfectly willing, and desirous, that Whitman, whom he reckoned at the time a dangerous dead-beat, should feel the hands of his misdeeds; but it was Mr. Dyer, then a lawyer, who asked his leave to push the case, not he who proposed it to Mr. Dyer. Though after all it matters little, I suppose.

Dear Miss Parton,

I am very willing to take charge of the papers you send and to use my judgment about them or any others you send me; and that judgment will probably be to let the matter rest as far as possible. Of course the debt is and Mr. Harned must know that we know it. I did not know that Mr. Parton had attempted legal proceedings and this also introduces a more complex element into the matter, and as there is nothing to be done, I think we should rest on the

I sail for Europe Apr. 23d to be gone all summer and do not wish any added entanglement, though of course I ought not to shirk any duty.

Of Mr. Harned I never before heard; it was Mr. , another executor, who wrote to me in a courteous letter of inquiry; and it was I who suggested to him to reimburse your aunt. His transferring the task of correspondence to this bullying Mr. Harned , though perhaps the rest of the executors might have behaved no better. Mr. Kennedy I have known and met occasionally since his college days; he is a man of gifts and attainments, employed on the Boston Transcript but always somewhat "hysterical", as you say, this being doubtless enhanced by the Whitman influence. It seems difficult for any man to be strongly under that influence without disturbing the balance of his mind. Please tell your mother how much I regret to have had any part in causing her any discomfort.

Cordially yours,

T. W. Higginson."