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WHY WE LOVE HORACE TRAUBEL

REMARKS DELIVERED AT THE WHITMAN CENTENNIAL
DINNER, NEW YORK CITY. MAY 31ST, 1919.

HELEN KELLER

Dear Comrades and Fellow-Admirers of Walt Whitman: I came here to listen, not to speak. But, since the Chairman has called upon me, being a woman, I avail myself of this opportunity to talk. There are so many here paying eloquent tributes to Walt Whitman, I want to say a word to the chiefest of his lovers, Horace Traubel.

To stand up here and talk about Horace Traubel is like proclaiming the charms and the desirability of one's sweetheart from the house-tops. The truth is, I love Horace Traubel. To discuss him in this public fashion is, therefore, somewhat embarrassing, especially as this is our first meeting. But since we are all "comrades and lovers," you will let me tell of my admiration and affection for one whom we all love.

There are two men in Horace Traubel. I suppose that is why we love him twice as well as we love other men. He is a mystic, and he is a realist. His heart is full of dreams and ardent sentiments, and yet he is a most profound observer of men and their actions. He has thought out a scheme of life for himself. His interpretation of the world we live in, while deeply poetical, is very practical and human. He loves the just and the unjust, the wicked and the good, the rich and the poor, because of the inclusiveness of his nature. These antitheses are revealed in his writings. He is angry with evil; he hates injustice and wickedness.

But he holds out his kind hand to sinners and draws them to him with cords of human love. There is but one thing he asks of men and women—that they shall love one another. His kindness and magnanimity are inexhaustible.

Indeed, there is something of the Savior about his interest in human beings, and his sympathy with their struggles. To him neither

the individual nor the crowd is vile. He finds in each man and in the mass beautiful, common, elemental qualities of humanity. It is upon these qualities that Horace Traubel rests his hopes for the future. For him love, valor, self-sacrifice and the free spirit exist, and they are the only vital facts of life. They constitute the important and essential part of his scheme of a better world. Yet he penetrates far into the structure of our social order, and comprehends what is wrong with it. It is here that the mystic and the realist clasp hands. He is the great Optimist, and his work is wholesome and encouraging. His dream is persuasive and inspiring.

That is why we love Horace Traubel.