

1893

# A Biographical Sketch of John Greenleaf Whittier from The Early Poems of John Greenleaf Whittier

N. H. Dole

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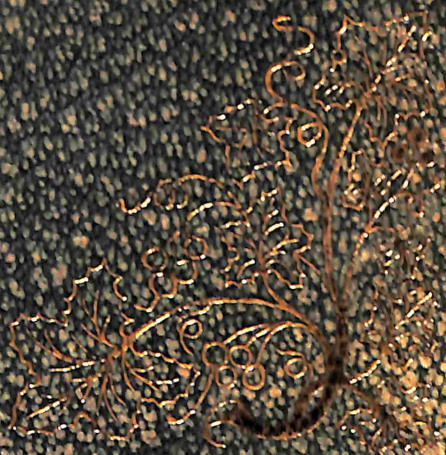
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Whittier



Leslie

1870



*John McNamee of Whittier*



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# THE EARLY POEMS

OF

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

*WITH*

*BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*

BY

N. H. DOLE

NEW YORK  
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

## JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

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### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

CIRCUMSTANCES determine the poet; inheritance determines who the poet shall be. It somehow seems to be a marvellous thing that a thrifty, plain Quaker stock should come to such a flowering as was seen in John Greenleaf Whittier. That iridescent colors should play over the Quaker drab! That from the insignificant chrysalis should emerge the brilliant butterfly! From Keltic origin one might expect any surprises. Boyle O'Reilly, who had also something of the prophetic spirit, who also threw himself generously into conflict with powers that did their best to crush him and make a martyr of him, is explained by the fact that he was Keltic. "But one scarcely expects a singer from the ranks of sober Friends." That is an anomaly; and to explain the phenomenon one must look into Whittier's ancestry.

Four steps bring us back to the days of the Puritans. Whittier's father, John, born in 1760, was the tenth child of Joseph, born in 1716, the ninth and youngest son of Joseph, born in 1669, who was in turn the tenth and youngest child of Thomas, who was born in Southampton, England,

in 1620, and sailed for America in the good ship "Confidence" a little more than two and a half centuries ago. Thomas Whittier was no common man. He settled on the Merrimack River, first in Salisbury, then in old Newbury, then in Haverhill, where he built the house in which his famous descendant was born. He is said to have brought the first hive of bees to Haverhill. In those days Indians frequently scalped and murdered defenceless families of white settlers; but Thomas Whittier made them his friends and disdained to protect his house with flint-lock or stockade.

Thomas Whittier's son, Joseph, married the daughter of the Quaker, Joseph Peasley, and thus the strain which in those days was regarded as a disgrace, but which in time became a mark of distinction, was grafted upon the Whittier stock. The poet's grandfather married Sarah Greenleaf, a descendant of a French exile, whose name, instead of being perverted like the *Lummydeux* (L'Homme-dieux) and the *Desizzles* (Des Isles), was simply translated into English. What part this Gallic blood played in Whittier's mental make-up, it would be no less difficult than interesting to determine.

Whittier's mother, Abigail Hussey, was descended from the Rev. Stephen Bachelor or Batchelder of Hampton, N.H., a man who was famed for his "splendid eye." This feature, which is generally associated with genius, seemed to have been inherited by Whittier, and Daniel Webster, and William Pitt Fessenden, and Caleb Cushing. Dark, expressive, penetrating eyes, full of soul and flashing with sudden lightning glances, were character-

istic of the "Bachelier eye," common to so many families in New Hampshire.

Whittier's father married at the age of forty-four and had only four children, Mary, John Greenleaf, who was born September 17, 1807, Matthew Franklin, and Elizabeth Hussey.

The old Whittier farmhouse, with its huge central chimney, faces the south; the front lower rooms are square, with fifteen-inch oaken beams supporting the low ceilings. The poet was born in the west front room, the two small-paned windows of which look down to a little brook, which in those early days, says Whittier, "foamed, rippled, and laughed" behind its natural fringe of bushes. Across the way was the big unpainted barn. The scenery was the typical landscape of New England—a smooth, grassy knoll (known as Job's Hill), woodland composed of oaks, walnuts, pines, firs, and spruces, with sumachs, which in the autumn, and in the spring as well, are gorgeous with many colors. Whittier, however, was color blind, and all that splendid display counted as naught to him.

Behind the house was the orchard, and behind the orchard a clump of oaks, near which the Whittier graveyard used to be.

In 1798 the farm was rated as worth \$200. The year before the poet was born his father bought one of three shares in it for \$600 of borrowed money, and the debt was not cleared for a quarter of a century. Money was scarce in those days. And yet John Whittier was honored by his townspeople, was frequently in the public service, and entertained men of note at his humble fireside.

When Whittier was seven years old, he went to

school. His first teacher, who was his lifelong friend, was Joshua Coffin of old Newbury.

Still sits the school-house by the road,  
A ragged beggar sunning ;  
Around it still the sumachs grow,  
And blackberry vines are running.

Within, the master's desk is seen,  
Deep scarred by raps official ;  
The warping floor, the battered seats,  
The jack-knife's carved initial.

The charcoal frescos on its wall ;  
The door's worn sill betraying  
The feet that, creeping slow to school,  
Went storming out to playing.

It stood about half a mile from Whittier's home, but the fount of knowledge flowed during only about three months in the year.

At home the library was scanty. Only twenty books or so, mostly journals and memoirs of pious Quakers, furnished the boy home reading. He would walk miles to borrow a volume of biography or travel. Naturally, the precepts of the Bible, which was daily read, became a part of his mental and moral fibre. His poems are full of references to Bible events and characters. "In my boyhood," he says, "in our lonely farmhouse, we had scanty sources of information, few books, and only a small weekly newspaper. Our only annual was the Almanac. Under such circumstances story-telling was a necessary resource in the long winter evenings."

When Nature sets about to make a poet, she has her own college. These apparent deprivations are



enrichments. They concentrate genius. The few hours of regular schooling were counterbalanced with lessons from Dame Nature herself.

Knowledge never learned of schools,  
Of the wild bee's morning chase,  
Of the wild-flower's time and place,  
Flight of fowl and habitude  
Of the tenants of the wood ;  
How the tortoise bears his shell,  
How the woodchuck digs his cell,  
How the ground-mole sinks his well ;  
How the robin feeds her young,  
How the oriole's nest is hung ;  
Where the whitest lilies blow,  
Where the freshest berries grow,  
Where the ground-nut trails its vine,  
Where the wood-grape's clusters shine ;  
Of the black wasp's cunning way,  
Mason of his walls of clay,  
And the architectural plans  
Of gray hornet artisans ;  
For eschewing books and tasks,  
Nature answers all he asks !  
Hand in hand with her he walks,  
Face to face with her he talks.

He goes on autobiographically :—

I was rich in flowers and trees,  
Humming-birds and honey-bees ;  
For my sport the squirrel played,  
Plied the snouted mole his spade ;  
For my taste the blackberry cone  
Purpled over hedge and stone ;  
Laught the brook for my delight  
Through the day and through the night,  
Whispering at the garden wall,  
Talkt with me from fall to fall ;

Mine the sand-rimmed pickerel pond,  
Mine the walnut slopes beyond,  
Mine, on bending orchard trees,  
Apples of Hesperides.

There was scanty time for play, however: that perpetual interest was eating up the meagre products of the farm; boys had to put their hands to the plough. "At an early age," he says, "I was set at work on the farm and doing errands for my mother, who, in addition to her ordinary house duties, was busy in spinning and weaving the linen and woollen cloth needed for the family."

The family was large, consisting, says Whittier, of "my father, mother, my brother and two sisters, and my uncle and aunt, both unmarried." In addition there was the district school-master, who boarded with them.

For graphic pen-pictures of this group, one must go to "Snow-Bound." There we shall see Uncle Moses, with whom the boys delighted to go fishing in the dancing brook.

His aunt, Miss Hussey, had the reputation of making the best squash pies that were ever baked. The influence of pie in developing character must not be overlooked. What oatmeal was to Carlyle, what the haggis was to Burns, the pie was to the true New Englander. It will not be forgotten how fond Emerson was of pie. Indigestion and poetry have a certain strange alliance; did not Byron purposely exacerbate his stomach in order to coin "Don Juan" into guineas?

Each member of that delightful household stands forth in living lines. "Snow-Bound" now needs

no praise. It has been accepted as the typical idyl of a New England winter, the sweetest flower of New England home life.

It is greater than "The Cotter's Saturday Night" because it was written more from the heart. It stands with "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and, though, quite unlike, may have been inspired by Burns's immortal poem. To Burns, Whittier owed his first inspiration, and he himself tells how he learned first to know the Scotch poet. A wandering Scotchman came one day to the Whittier farmhouse. "After eating his bread and cheese and drinking his mug of cider, he gave us 'Bonnie Doon,' 'Highland Mary,' and 'Auld Lang Syne.' He had a full rich voice and entered heartily into the spirit of his lyrics." When he was fourteen, Joshua Coffin brought a volume of Burns's poems, and read some of them, greatly to his delight. Says Whittier: "I begged him to leave the book with me, and set myself at once to the task of mastering the glossary of the Scottish dialect to its close. This was about the first poetry I had ever read (with the exception of that of the Bible, of which I had been a close student), and it had a lasting influence upon me. I began to make rhymes myself, and to imagine stories and adventure." When pen and ink failed him, he resorted to chalk or charcoal, and he hid away his effusions with the care with which a cat hides her young kittens.

It is interesting to know that recently one or two of Whittier's first attempts in rhyme, in Scotch dialect and in the manner of Burns, have been discovered.

When Whittier was in his eighteenth year, that

is, in 1825, he wrote several poems which found their way the following year to the Newburyport *Free Press*, then just established by William Lloyd Garrison. The Whittiers subscribed for it, and in the "Poets' Corner" appeared in print the first of the young man's published verses, entitled "The Exile's Departure," written in the meter of "The Old Oaken Bucket." It is noticeable that the Exile sings: —

Farewell, shores of Erin, green land of my fathers,  
Once more and forever, a mournful adieu.

It would seem that Thomas Moore's Irish melodies must have fallen into his hands. The trace of Whittier's reading is often to be found in his poems. "Mogg Megone" also shows the insidious influence of "Lalla Rookh." "The Bridal of Pennacook" is Wordsworth, pure and simple, the praise of whom betrays its origin; but not as yet, and not until long afterwards, did he succeed in attaining felicity in epithet. It was also the day of the Scott and of the Byron fever, and Whittier did not escape it.

It is said that Whittier was mending fences when the carrier brought the paper that contained his first printed lines and the editorial notice: "If W. at Haverhill will continue to favor us with pieces beautiful as the one inserted in our poetical department of to-day, we shall esteem it a favor." Whittier could hardly believe his eyes. He accepted the invitation. The second of his *Free Press* poems was in blank verse and entitled "Deity." He confided the secret to his sister. She informed Garrison that it was her brother who wrote them. One day when the young poet was hoeing in the corn-

field, clad only in shirt, trousers, and straw hat, he was summoned into the house to see a visitor. It proved to be Garrison, who had driven over from Newburyport to make the acquaintance of his contributor. He insisted that Whittier showed such talent that he ought to have further education.

Whittier's father remonstrated against putting notions into the lad's head. "Sir," he said, "poetry will not give him bread." Besides, there was no money and no prospect of money. Suddenly a way opened. A young hired man knew how to make ladies' shoes and slippers. He offered to teach the art to his employer's son. Mr. Moses Emerson, one of Whittier's early teachers, used to relate how Whittier worked at his shoemaking in a little shop which stood in the yard, and how he sat on a bench amid tanned hides, pincers, bristles, paste pots, and rosin, stitching for dear life.

During the following winter he earned by it enough money to buy a suit of clothes and pay for six months' schooling at the new Academy in Haverhill. Whittier wrote the ode that was sung at the dedication of the new building. He boarded at the house of Mr. A. W. Thayer, editor and publisher of the *Haverhill Gazette*. Naturally the young poet contributed also to this paper some of his verses. He was now nineteen, and was long remembered as "a very handsome, distinguished-looking young man" with remarkably handsome eyes; tall, slight, and very erect, bashful but never awkward.

Whittier used to like to relate the story of his first visit to Boston. He was dressed in a new suit of homespun, which for the first time were adorned



with "boughten buttons." He expected to spend a week with the Greenes, who were family connections. Shortly after his arrival he sallied forth to see the sights. He described how he wandered up and down the streets, but somehow found it different from what he expected. The crowd was worse on Washington Street, and he soon got tired of being jostled and thought he would step aside into an alley-way and wait till "the folks" got by. But there was no cessation of the "terrible stream of people," some of whom stared at him with curious or mocking eyes. He stayed there a long time and began to be "lonesome."

At last, however, he mustered courage to leave his "coign of vantage," and safely reached Mrs. Greene's in time for tea. She had guests, among them a gay young woman whose beauty and vivacity especially interested him. But she began to talk about the theatre, and finally asked him to be present that evening. She was the leading lady! Whittier had promised his mother that he would never enter a playhouse. He was terribly shocked at the danger which he had run. He could not sleep that night, and next morning he took the early stage-coach for his country home. In after years he told this story with great zest, but he never broke the promise which he made to his mother.

At the close of the term, Whittier taught the district school at West Amesbury, thus enabling him to return for another six months at the Academy. Garrison had meantime gone to Boston, and through his influence Whittier secured a place there at a salary of nine dollars a week on the *American Manufacturer*. But this engagement was of

short duration. In 1830 he was editing the *Haverhill Gazette*. He was beginning to be widely known as a poet. Next he became editor of the *New England Weekly Review* of Hartford, Conn., to which he also contributed upwards of forty poems, besides sketches and tales in prose. He boarded at the Exchange Coffee House, and lived a solitary, sedentary life. His health even then was delicate. At this time, if ever, occurred the hinted romance of his life. Writing of a visit to his home, he said: "I can say that I have clasped more than one fair hand, and read my welcome in more than one bright eye." More than one love-poem dated from this time. Long afterwards he touched upon these episodes in "Memories" and in "A Sea-dream." But Whittier never married.

He published his first volume in 1831, — "Legends of New England," a collection of his prose and verse. This was afterwards suppressed, as well as his first narrative poem, "Moll Pitcher," published the following year. So far, with much promise, he had as yet shown little originality. He bade fair to be simply a poet. But two years later he took part in an event which was destined to change the face of all things, not for him alone, but for his country. In 1833 he helped to organize the American Anti-slavery Society. Henceforth, during a whole generation, his life was to be a warfare: —

Our fathers to their graves have gone ;  
Their strife is past, their triumph won ;  
But sterner trials wait the race  
Which rises in their honored place, —  
A moral warfare with the crime  
And folly of an evil time.

So let it be. In God's own might  
 We gird us for the coming fight,  
 And, strong in Him whose cause is ours  
 In conflict with unholy powers,  
 We grasp the weapons He has given, —  
 The Light and Truth and Love of Heaven.

Side by side with William Lloyd Garrison stood Whittier. The manifesto of the one was the inspiration of the other: "I will be harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. I am in earnest; I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard!"

Whittier in the same spirit sang: —

If we have whispered truth, whisper no longer;  
 Speak as the tempest does, sterner and stronger;

Still be the tones of truth louder and firmer,  
 Startling the haughty South with the deep murmur;

God and our charter's right, Freedom forever,  
 Truce with oppression, never, Oh, never!

Nor would he allow the charms of mere literature to beguile him into pleasant paths. Putting aside melancholy, sentimental yearnings, he resisted the temptation, as he pathetically sings in the poem entitled "Ego."

The question of slavery began to be borne in upon him even before he settled in Hartford. On his return home he made a thorough study of the subject and wrote a twenty-three page pamphlet entitled "Justice and Expediency; or, Slavery Considered with a View to its Rightful and Effectual Remedy,—Abolition." It was printed at Haver-

hill at his own expense. Its argument was never answered. It concluded with this eloquent peroration:—

“And when the stain on our own escutcheon shall be seen no more; when the Declaration of Independence and the practice of our people shall agree; when Truth shall be exalted among us; when Love shall take the place of Wrong; when all the baneful pride and prejudice of caste and color shall fall forever; when under one common sun of political Liberty the slave-holding portions of our Republic shall no longer sit like Egyptians of old, themselves mantled in thick darkness while all around them is glowing with the blessed light of freedom and equality—then and not till then shall it GO WELL FOR AMERICA.”

This preceded and led to his appointment as one of the delegates of the great Anti-slavery Convention at Philadelphia. Next to Magna Charta and the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Principles then formulated, and signed by Whittier, is a document of which the generations unborn will be most proud. A copy of it framed in wood from Pennsylvania Hall, destroyed by a pro-slavery mob, was one of Whittier's most precious possessions.

In spite of his stand on an unpopular side, Whittier's character was appreciated by his fellow-citizens. He was elected a member of the Massachusetts State legislature in 1835. He held only one other public office—that of presidential elector. But the people of his own communion looked askance upon his political, reformatory, and literary achievements. He was even brought into danger of discipline, and it is said that in his later days he used to remark jokingly that not until he

was old would the Quakers of his society show any willingness to put upon him the little dignities from which his position as a reformer had in his youth excluded him.

The very year that he was a member of the Massachusetts legislature, he had his first experience of a mob. George Thompson, the famous English abolitionist and member of Parliament, came to this country to preach abolition. It was noised abroad that he was brought over to disseminate dissension between North and South, so as to destroy American trade, to the advantage of British. This noble reformer had narrowly escaped a mob in Salem. Whittier invited him to his East Haverhill home, that he might have perfect rest and quiet. The two men enjoyed making hay together and were entirely unmolested. At last they started to drive to Plymouth, N.H., to visit a prominent abolitionist there. On their way they stopped at Concord, where Thompson was invited to speak on reform.

After the lecture they found it impossible to leave the hall, which was surrounded by a mob of several hundred persons. On their way back, they were assailed with stones. Whittier declared that he understood how St. Paul felt when the Jews attacked him. Fortunately, their heads were not broken, but they were severely lamed. The mob surrounded the house and demanded that the Quaker and his guest should be handed over to them. His host opened the door and exclaimed: "Whoever comes in here must come in over my dead body." Decoyed away, the rabble returned with muskets and a cannon. Their lives were in



danger. They managed to harness a horse, and then, when the gate was suddenly opened, they drove off at a furious gallop and escaped from the hooting mob, which one of themselves afterwards declared was like a throng of demons. At Plymouth they narrowly escaped another mobbing. Not long after, when Whittier was attending an extra session of the legislature, the female anti-slavery society meeting was broken up by a mob. The police rescued Garrison, just as they were going to hang him to a lamp-post. Whittier's sister was one of the delegates, and the two were stopping at the same house. Whittier managed to remove her to a place of safety; he and Samuel J. May sat up all night watching developments. Those were exciting times.

Most of the year Whittier, like Cincinnatus, worked his farm. His father had died, and the brunt of the burden of supporting the family rested on him. He was often seen in the fall of the year at the head of tide-water in the Merrimack, exchanging apples and vegetables for the salt-fish brought by coasting vessels. In the spring of March, 1838, he went to Philadelphia to edit the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, which had its offices in a large building built by the anti-slavery people, and named Pennsylvania Hall. It was publicly opened on the fifteenth of May with speeches, and a long poem by Whittier. That evening a stone was flung through one of the windows of the hall. This was the preliminary symptom of impending trouble. The next day a mob collected and disturbed the meetings with their jeers and yells. On the third day, in spite of the association's formal

demand for protection, and the mayor's promise, the building was given into the hands of the mob, which sacked it and then set it on fire. The firemen refused to quench the flames and were complimented by the Southern press on their *noble conduct*. One paper printed a boasting letter from a participant saying: "Not a drop of water did they pour on that accursed Moloch until it was a heap of ruins."

A charitable shelter for colored orphans was also burned, and a colored church was attacked and wrecked. The members of the Pennsylvania Anti-slavery Society met the next morning after the outrage, beside the smoking ruins of their hall, and calmly elected their officers while a vast mob was still howling around them. Whittier's investment in the paper was lost, but he stayed in Philadelphia for about a year, when his failing health compelled him to return to Massachusetts. The East Haverhill farm was sold in 1840, and he removed with his mother, sister, and aunt to Amesbury, which was his *legal* residence through the rest of his life. Within ten or twelve minutes' walk of Whittier's house rises Pow-wow Hill, so often celebrated in his verse. The surrounding region which is visible from it has been well called his Ayrshire: far to the north the White Mountains are dimly visible, — his beloved Ossipee and Bearcamp. To the south, Agamenticus — Adamaticus, as the natives call it — stands in its purple isolation. The Isles of Shoals are visible, like rough stones in a turquoise arch, the lone line of beaches which he often called by name, and the rock-ribbed coast of Cape Ann. Scarcely a point which had not a legend, scarcely a legend which he did not put into verse.

After the death of his sister and the marriage of his niece, he resided during the most of the year with his cousins, at their beautiful country-seat at Oak Knoll, Danvers.

The storm and stress were past. Henceforth, for the most part, he devoted his genius to song. His watchword was:—

Our country, and Liberty and God for the Right.

He was not afraid to lift the whip of scorpion stings: he called the pro-slavery congressmen:—

A passive herd of Northern mules,  
Just braying from their purchased throats  
Whate'er their owner rules.

The Northern author of the congressional rule against receiving the petitions of the people in regard to slavery was thus held up to execration:—

. . . the basest of the base,  
The vilest of the vile,— . . .

A mark for every passing blast  
Of scorn to whistle through.

When he felt that Daniel Webster, whom he had so much admired, was recreant, he wrote against him that tremendous accusation entitled "Icha-bod." He never ceased, however, to regret the severity of those awful lines, which make Brown-ing's "Lost Leader" sound flat and insipid in comparison.

Whittier was never despondent. In the darkest hours he saw the rainbow promise bent on high.

He cried in 1844 to the men of Massachusetts:—

Shrink not from strife unequal.

With the best is always hope;

And ever in the sequel  
God holds the right side up.

Thus, while he knew how to apply the lash, he also could cheer, and encourage, and advise. His practical common sense, his clear vision, saw far ahead.

It would be impossible to write the history of Emancipation and not recognize the influence of Whittier's lyrics. Lacking in imagination, in grace, in what is commonly called poetic charm, often clumsy, ill-rhymed, and unrhythmical, they yet have an awakening power like that of a trumpet. Plain and unadorned, they appealed to a plain and simple people. They won their way by these very homely qualities.

Whittier learned from his parents the art of story-telling. Naturally, the Indians first appealed to him, and many of his earliest poems have the Red-skins as their heroes; speaking of "Mogg Megone" many years after it was written, he says:—

"Looking at it at the present time, it suggests the idea of a big Indian in his war-paint strutting about in Sir Walter Scott's plaid."

But the early history of New England was full of folk-lore, and Whittier had the ballad-maker's instinct. As he grew older, his sureness of touch increased. The homely names conferred on his native brooks and ponds fitted into his verse. Thus:—

The dark pines sing on Ramoth Hill  
The slow song of the sea.

The sweetbriar blooms on Kittery-side  
And green are Eliot's bowers.

And he talks about the "nuts of Wenham woods."

One could quote hundreds of such felicitous touches, which endear a poet to his neighbors and then to his nation. Catching hold of the New England legends and turning them into homely rhymes, as a ballad-singer would have done in the early days, he becomes not only the poet, but the creator of the legends. The very meaning of the word "poet" is the maker. A friend sends him the rough prose outline of a story connected with some old house, and Whittier easily remodels it and makes it his own. Thus he is the Poet of New England, and as New England has colonized the West, his fame spreads over the whole land. He gets hearers for himself by this double capacity. He is the ballad-maker; and in this view he stands far higher as a poet than in his nobler but less poetic capacity of Laureate of Freedom and Faith. The word "Liberty" has a hundred rhymes; the word "slave" its dozens. How the poet is put to it when he wants to find a rhyme for "love"! "Dove" and "above" and "glove" are about all the words that are left to him. Whittier, with his ease of rhyming, put little poetry but immense feeling into his anti-slavery poems. Not by them will he be judged as a poet.

He has still another claim on us. He was the descendant of godly men and women. No American poet of his rank was so distinctively religious, and yet his verse is absolutely

undimmed

By dust of theologic strife or breath  
Of sect, or cobwebs of scholastic lore.



He could not be kept within the narrow limits of a sect. His religion was a vital principle with him. Like his own "Quaker of the Olden Time," he made his daily life a prayer. Faith in God was supreme. Read any of his hymns, his addresses to friends, his memorials to the dead; there are more than seventy of them gathered in the second volume of his collected works. How they speak of immortality and the Eternal Goodness! In one of his last poems, while he speaks almost mournfully of sitting alone and watching the

warm, sweet day  
Lapse tenderly away,

he calms his troubled thought with these words: —

Wait, while these few swift-passing days fulfil  
The wise disposing Will,  
And, in the evening as at morning, trust  
The All-merciful and Just.

The solemn joy that soul communion feels  
Immortal life reveals;  
And human love, its prophecy and sign,  
Interprets love divine.

One of his last letters was written in favor of a union of the numerous sects in the one vital centre — the Christ. After this, it seems almost ungracious to speak critically of Whittier's work. He himself often wished that at least half of it were sunk in the Red Sea. A good deal of his early work had indeed

The simple air and rustic dress  
And sign of haste and carelessness

which he attributes to it, but also it was

More than the specious counterfeit  
Of sentiment or studied wit.

He calls his verse "simple lays of homely toil."

He may have written commonplaces, but he declared that he could *not* trace the *cold* and *heartless* commonplace.

Whittier was utterly color-blind; he also declared that he did not know anything of music, "not one tune from another." "The gods made him most unmusical," he whimsically remarked. Lack of musical ear is not uncommon in poets. Burns was behind all his schoolmates in that respect. Bryant had no music in his soul; Byron also lacked it. The rhythmic sense atones for the lack. Whittier, unlike Lowell, did not try to write in the Yankee dialect, but his origin betrayed itself. The long-suffering "r" was absolutely ignored. We have such rhymes as "gone — worn — horn"; "war — squaw"; "accurst — lust" (as though he pronounced it *accust*); "water — escort her"; "honor and scorner"; "off — serf"; "sisters — vistas"; "reward and God" (such infelicities did not offend his taste); "farmer — hammer"; "thus — curse"; "ever — leave her — Eva"; "favors — save us"; "tellers — Cinderellas"; "treasures — maize-ears"; "woody — sturdy"; "Katahdin's — gardens." He, like Byron (who pronounced "camelopard" "camel-leopard"), often put the wrong accents on words: "strong-*hold*," "an-*cestral*," "pol-*troons*," "grape-*vine*," "moon-*shine*," "ro-*mance*," "violin" as though in two syllables. True to his Quaker origin, he rarely makes refer-

ence to music. Once he speaks of "The light viol and the mellow flute." He rarely indulges in comparisons. In that respect he is like the author of the *Iliad*. As a general thing his lines flow rather monotonously in the four-line ballad meter; he was neither bold nor very happy in more complicated structures of verse. His few sonnets were not successful. Sometimes he allowed the exigences of rhyme to force him into showing the Indian's birchen boat propelled by glancing oars. He once in a while wrote such lines as these: —

The faded coloring of Time's tapestry  
Let Fancy with her dream-dipt brush supply.

Whittier, in conversation with his intimates, possessed a remarkable vein of humor; his letters are full of drolleries, but he seemed to have little sense of the ludicrous, else he could not have written such a line as

Gurgled the waters of the moon-struck sea,  
or

From the rude board of Bonython  
Venison and succotash have gone.

He rarely indulged in alliteration, yet we find "greenly growing grain" and "Summer's shade and sunshine warm." In one place he boldly indulges for rhyme's sake in such bad grammar as this: —

When Warkworth wood  
Closed o'er my steed and I.

And again: "twixt thou and I." In spite of these faults, we would not willingly let a line of

Whittier's verse perish. Even the fugitive pieces of his youth, which he himself came to detest, the crudities of "*Mogg Megone*," are interesting and valuable. When his verse is studied chronologically, it is easy to see what constant progress he made. It was the noble growth of a New England pine, which, while the branches near the ground are dead and broken, still towers up higher and higher, with ever abundant foliage toward the sun-kissed top. And what pictures he painted!

Whittier, without the advantages, or so-called advantages, of college training, without ever traveling abroad, a hermit, almost, in his later years, keeping aloof from the people, painfully suffering from constant ill-health, unable to work half an hour at a time, ranks with the greatest of American men of letters. His prose is simple and pure; his verse goes right to the heart. It is free from the sentimentality and turbidity of Lowell, from the artificiality that we sometimes feel in Longfellow, from the classic coldness of Bryant. He was the poet of the people, and yet the cultured find no less to love and admire in him. To have written "*Snow-Bound*" alone would have been to achieve immortality. But Whittier wrote so many popular poems, which have become household words, that I have not even attempted to enumerate them or the date of their appearing.

He lived to see the crown of immortality unanimously conferred upon him. He lived to a grand old age, and yet he has said that for many years not merely the exertion of writing but even the mere thought of taking his pen into his hand brought on a terrible headache. Neither could he

read with comfort. He therefore had to sit patiently and wait for Friend Death to come and lead him into that world where he believed the loved ones were waiting to welcome him. He died on the seventh of September, 1892, not at his favorite abiding-place at Oak Knoll, Danvers, but at Hampton Falls, N.H., where he was visiting the daughter of an old friend. Pure, simple, humble, unspoiled, full of love to God and man, triumphing in his faith, Whittier went forward into the unknown. Such a death is not to be deplored. He was willing, nay, anxious to go.

Let the thick curtain fall ;  
I better know than all  
How little I have gained,  
How vast the unattained.

Sweeter than any sung  
My songs that found no tongue ;  
Nobler than any fact  
My wish that failed of act.

Others shall sing the song,  
Others shall right the wrong,  
Finish what I begin,  
And all I fail of, win !

The airs of heaven blow o'er me,  
A glory shines before me  
Of what mankind shall be —  
Pure, generous, brave, and free.

Ring, bells in unrecared steeples,  
The joy of unborn peoples !  
Sound, trumpets far off blown,  
Your triumph is my own !

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.