

as his verse, mellowed with advancing years;—whose muse, like Lord Tennyson's, was still so fresh at eighty-four, that, in his last fortnight, he could indite the touching birthday poem addressed to his old friend, Oliver Wendell Holmes, from which we have quoted one striking line, and which many have read with a mournful interest in the *Atlantic Monthly*, almost simultaneously with the news that for him its pathetic prediction has already been fulfilled :—

“ The hour draws near, howe'er delayed and late
When at the eternal gate
We leave the words and works we call our own
And lift void hands alone
For love to fill. Our nakedness of soul
Brings to that gate no toll.
Giftless we come to Him who all things gives,
And lives because He lives ! ”

Too soon must these prophetic words be true of the survivor of this venerable pair of friends—the gentle autocrat. And of how few writers can it be said that their “ words and works ” contain so little that at so solemn a moment needs to be regretted !

Of Whittier's rank as a poet we need say but little here. It is too well established to need any special recognition now ; and the number of his appreciative readers is ever growing larger. An eminently *spontaneous* singer, he might well also be called—in no disparaging sense—an *artless* one. His Quaker strain and education was too simple,—perhaps also the latter was too austere—to favour much artistic development. He sang with earnestness and sincerity, from the depths of his strong loving heart, and the reader who cares only for artistically moulded verse, for carefully rounded expression and finished metre, is too apt to look superciliously on Whittier's swiftly running verse, and to miss the noble soul of his somewhat untutored muse. For he had what is better than mere artistic skill,—the prophet's eagle vision—the poet's heritage as described by one of the most artistic of poets :—

“ Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
The love of love ;
He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
He saw through his own soul.
The marvel of the everlasting will,
An open scroll
Before him lay.”

Or, if he would have disclaimed this last—for no man more reverently trod the Holy of Holies, or confessed more frankly the awful mystery which ever limits

thought in the highest direction,—at least his mind and heart had grown so much into harmony with the everlasting will, that he could say with firm conviction in words that have often rung like music through many a perplexed soul :—

“ Yet 'mid the maddening maze of things,
And tossed with storm and flood,
To one fixed stake my spirit clings
I know that God is good ! ”

If Whittier's verse is at times rugged in form and lacking in the melody of diction, it is at its best full of the highest music, and not a few of his lyrics, by virtue of *this* music, seem to sing themselves in our souls, as they sang themselves first in his own. Of such we would only name a few ; each of his readers has his or her favourites, and each can add his own,—but “ Mirian,” “ The Overheart,” “ The Cry of a Lost Soul,” “ The Red River Voyager,” “ The Vision of Echard,” “ The Meeting,” “ Andrew Rykman's Prayer,” the lines in “ Memory of Joseph Sturge,” “ The Master,” and “ The Eternal Goodness,” will always rank with the best religious poetry in the English language. The two last, which clearly belong to each other, are gems of their kind,—to many hearts truly inspired psalms; and he who can not feel them so, only proclaims his own insensibility to the highest office of the poetic muse.

On a lower level, Whittier is emphatically a poet of the people. His exquisite descriptions of his own New England scenery—of the rural life in which he was cradled—are full of the freshness of the fields, the fragrance of the pine-woods, the thousand homely charms of rural life. In this respect we may call him the Burns of New England, and his lovely pastoral poem,—“ Snow Bound,” may stand as a companion picture beside “ The Cotter's Saturday Night.” Growing from childhood to manhood in somewhat similar circumstances with the Ayrshire peasant, his verses have much of the same open-air breeziness and lilting bird-like sweetness. One of his sweetest—which in its measure and familiar style recalls Wordsworth's “ Yarrow Unvisited ”—is his touching tribute to the genius of Burns, which proved the talisman to awaken his own. He had never read real poetry—save and except the poetry of the Bible—for in the Quaker home were few books and none “ of the imagination,” to use the old index phrase. When the young schoolmaster of “ Snow Bound ” first