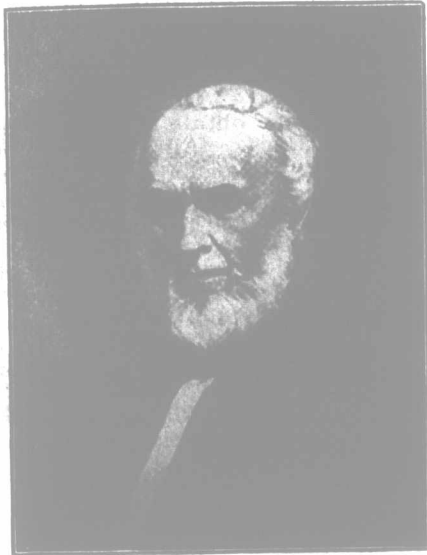




Life, Literature and Education.

The Quaker Poet.



John G. Whittier.

John Greenleaf Whittier was born on December 17th, 1807, in Haverhill, Massachusetts, in a house built by his first colonial ancestor in the seventeenth century. From this quaint old home of his birth no other house was visible. It was in a valley shut in by forests—only hills, trees and heaven in sight. His father and mother held to Quaker principles, and the neighborhood at large lived the Quaker life of simplicity and peace. Quaker, too, was the feeling against higher education, and so the boy, after getting what he could from the district school, went to the work of the farm. Nothing we know of him leads us to suppose that the agricultural life was distasteful to him, for many of his poems uphold the dignity and pleasure of rural life; but he knew how strenuous a life it was, and sympathized with the toilers on the farm. He had few companions, and fewer books; he had known no more of the actual world than could be seen at the small seaport a dozen miles away. Yet, while still a boy of sixteen, toiling daily in the fields or tending sheep and cattle, he was already living a twofold existence, and, although untrained in literary construction, he wrote poems for the county paper which educated men stopped to read and admire.

His elder sister gave him assistance and encouragement, and by her arrangement, the young poet received a visit from William Lloyd Garrison, who was then the editor of the county Free Press, and who had seen the promise indicated in the poems Whittier had submitted to him. This visit was the first glimpse of possible success, and its first result was to fill the lad with a desire for schooling.

He worked steadily on, filling in his spare time with shoemaking, and his twentieth year saw him on his way to college, where his remarkably able papers and essays attracted the attention of the masters. A favorite, too, among all who admire a

simple, sincere nature that could not be spoiled by flattery, and a high spirit, controlled by a strong and well-trained will. All through his life we see the same characteristics of the great man clearly displayed. His was a generous spirit, whose sympathies and affections were extended to all humanity, its joys and its sorrows. Children he loved, and wrote many poems on childhood, the best known being "The Barefoot Boy," and "In School Days."

All the suffering and down-trodden were sure of his encouragement and help, but the condition of the African in America awoke the strongest feeling of his nature. His spirit was that of the reformer, and in the abolition of slavery there was a work suited to the man. Aiding himself with the small and at that time unpopular party of abolitionists, he became editor of an anti-slavery journal, and by pamphlets, editorials and poems he sought to rouse the feelings of the nation on this subject. The finest and most spirited of his poems dealing with the slave question are: "Massachusetts to Virginia," with its strong, defiant refrain:

"No slave-hunt in our borders,—no pirate on our strand;
No fetters in the Bay State—no slave upon our land!"

And "Toussaint L'Ouverture," and "The Slave Ship."

Though his writing of political verse attracted and held the attention of the people of that time, because of the burning questions and exciting events which called forth his opinions, he is better known to the present generation by his poems on rural and home life, and his verses of a religious nature. His religious verse is national in its nature. His Quaker tolerance, moral earnestness, gentle nature and simple way of taking the world, made him the fitting spokesman of the most liberal religious feeling of his day. Parts of his poems have been adapted to church services, and are sung in many churches.

His poems on rural life preserve to us many of the scenes of his boyhood. The meadows, forests, sandy beaches, fishing villages, and tilled acres, were part of his life, and he never became too busy or too pre-occupied to lose his love for country ways. He tells of the evenings by the hearth, the old-fashioned frolics and bees, and the quaint or stirring romances of New England history—all told with spontaneous expressions of genuine feeling and interest. Three themes are his favorites in dealing with American life: The joys of childhood in the country, the equality of rich and poor, of laborer and aristocrat before the power of love, and the lost opportunities of the ordinary human life. And of these three themes, all belong essentially to the New World, where childhood may be so rich in all that delights the child, where few barriers of caste or rank exist to bar the true lover from his lady, and where fortune comes a-knocking at every man's door, and gives him at least one opportunity to succeed.

He had never married, but lived on at the old homestead, and in spite of delicate health, lived, an object of increasing reverence and affection,

until the 17th of September, 1892, when he died at the ripe age of eighty-five years.

The Kansas Emigrants.

"We cross the prairie as of old
The Pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West, as they the East,
The homestead of the free!"

"We go to rear a wall of men
On Freedom's southern line,
And plant beside the cotton-tree
The rugged northern pine!"

"We're flowing from our native hills
As our free rivers flow;
The blessing of our motherland
Is on us as we go."

"We go to plant her common schools
On distant prairie swells,
And give the Sabbaths of the wilds
The music of her bells."

"Upbearing, like the Ark of old,
The Bible in our van,
We go to test the truth of God
Against the fraud of man."

From "The Eternal Goodness."

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies."

"And if my heart and flesh are weak
To bear an untried pain,
The bruised reed He will not break,
But strengthen and sustain."

"No offering of my own I have,
Nor works my faith to prove;
I can but give the gifts He gave,
And plead His love for love."

"And so beside the Silent Sea
I wait the muffled oar;
No harm can come from Him to me
On ocean or on shore."

"I know not where His islands lift
Their fringed palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

From "Snowbound"

"Shut in from all the world without,
We sat the clean-winged hearth about,
Content to let the north wind roar
In baffled rage at pane and door,
While the red logs before us beat
The frost-line back with tropic heat;
And ever, when a louder blast
Shook beam and rafter as it passed,
The merrier up its roaring draft,
The great throat of the chimney
laughed;
The house-dog on his paws outspread
Laid to the fire his drowsy head,
The cat's dark silhouette on the wall
A couchant tiger seemed to fall;
And, for the winter fireside meet,
Between the andirons' straddling feet,
The mug of cider simmered slow,
The apples sputtered in a row,
And, close at hand, the basket stood
With nuts from brown October's wood.
What matter how the night behaved?
What matter how the north wind
raved?
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow
Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy
glow."

From "The Barefoot Boy."

"Blessings on thee, little man,
Barefoot boy, with cheek of tan!
With thy turned-up pantaloons,
And thy merry whistled tunes;
With thy red lip, redder still
Kissed by strawberries on the hill;
With the sunshine on thy face,
Through thy torn brim's jaunty grace;
From my heart I give thee joy,—
I was once a barefoot boy!
Prince thou art,—the grown-up man
Only is republican.
Let the million-dollared ride!
Barefoot, trudging at his side,
Thou hast more than he can buy
In the reach of ear and eye,—
Outward sunshine, inward joy:
Blessings on thee, barefoot boy!"

The Farmer's Christmas.

If we reason on the assumption that we are more interested in the people who like what we like, and are interested in the same things in which we are interested, then there is no man who should find the life of Christ upon earth more absorbing than the agriculturist, and certainly none who could better understand and appreciate much of His teaching and many incidents of His life; and this Christmastide should mean more to us than to others, and be, indeed, a happy season.

To the shepherds on the hillside, guarding their defenceless flocks and talking in low tones to one another under the quiet stars, came the first announcement of His coming to earth. Yet, it was singularly fitting that they who tended the sheep should hear first of Him—the great Shepherd whose sheep are we. To the stable they came, and there found the mother and her Babe, in the dim light of the lantern, amid the fragrance of the hay; and beyond, in the dimmer dusk, the wondering cattle opened drowsy eyes. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" the people asked when their towns were stirred by His mighty works. As far as we know, from His twelfth to his thirtieth year was spent in the little home in Nazareth, presumably part of His time at least given to service at the carpenter's bench. But, strange to say, in His teachings, His parables, stories, illustrations, there is but little gleaned from His experiences in the shop, the man who built his house upon the sand, which was destroyed when the rains descended and the floods came, being one of the very few allusions to what one would expect would have been often upon His lips.

But there seems to have been a great love in the heart of Jesus for the wonders of nature, for the sun and rain, for the miracle of growth, for seed-time and harvest, summer and winter; and there is scarcely a parable spoken by Him, or an incident in His life that does not bear upon this outdoor world and refer to agricultural life in its widest sense. In that first great sermon delivered on the Mount, the warning against undue anxiety and worldly cares is shown to be futile, for the fowls of the air do not reap nor gather into barns, the lilies of the field surpass Solomon in all his glory, and the perishable grass of the field is clothed with vernal beauty, and wherefore should we not