

## ESSAY.

Compiled and read by a Friend at the Whittier Memorial Meeting held at Pickering.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker poet, was born in Haverhill, Mass., in Essex County, on the 17th of 12 mo., 1807. His parents were Friends and "plain people," farmers living in a modest and frugal way on a farm which had come down to his father from the first ancestor of his family, Whittier, who came to Massachusetts in 1638. The old home, the poet wrote some years ago in a reminiscent article for the press, 'nestled in the valley,' and the dear old landscape of my boyhood days lies outstretched before me like a daguerreotype from that picture within, which I have borne with me in all my wanderings.

Whittier's mother was Abigail Hussey, from New Hampshire, a member of an Irish family which had long been noted among Friends. There were several members of the Whittier family. I will mention one, his younger sister, Elizabeth, who, it is said, was the intimate companion of her brother in his literary work, and is said to have been a person of rare attractions and accomplishments.

Born on a farm, Whittier's first occupations were those of a farmer's boy driving the cows to and from pasture, riding to mill, fetching in wood for the undying kitchen fire, and helping in the lighter labors of haying and harvest. He was thus early brought into that intimate communion of Mother Earth and with Nature, which comes not by mere observation, and which gives such a peculiar charm of picturesque truth to so many of his poems. What he thus learned, and the use he made of it, are visible in many of his poems, which speaks of the manner of life in the old farm-house in the boyhood of the poet himself described in the stories told around the hearth-fire by his parents. His school days were necessarily few. At ten, it may be said, his active life commenced. Of the old

school-house he attended he has given a lively picture in that exquisite and touching poem, "In School Days." The happy and cheerful character of his boyhood life is declared in many places, but especially in "Barefoot Boy," where he sings,

"Oh, for boyhood time of June,  
Crowding years in one brief moon,  
When all things I heard or saw,  
Me, their master, waited for.  
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;  
Laughed the brook for my delight  
Through the day and through the night  
Whispering at the garden wall,  
Talked 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*!  
I was monarch; pomp and joy  
Waited on the barefoot boy."

It is said an early occupation, begun when he was 12 years old, was shoe-making. The work at the shoe-maker's bench and the devotion to the muse of poetry began nearly together. Roused by the example of Burns, a copy of whose poems had come into his possession when he was 14 years old, he began to versify. His first published poem was entitled, "The Exile's Departure," which was sent to the office of the Newburyport "*Free Press*" and inserted in the "Poets' Corner" to the unspeakable delight of the farmer boy. Soon other verses came from the same source, until the editor inquired of the postman who it was that was sending letters from East Haverhill? The postman said it was a farmer's son named Whittier, whereupon the editor decided to ride over on horseback, a distance of 15 miles and see his contributor.

The acquaintance then began grew into intimacy. Of the visit Whittier himself says:—"I was called in from hoeing in the cornfield to see him. He encouraged me and urged my father to send me to school. I longed