

"John Greenleaf Whittier
His Character
and
His Works"

By
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John Greenleaf Whittier.

After studying the life and the surroundings of the Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, I find that from his first verse to his last he is a part of the people and very strong, Massachusetts people.

He dearly loved his country, and to him no orange grove of Sorrento could be sweeter than the beautiful pine grove of Ramoth Hill. No vale of Cashmere could ever hold to him half the wondrous beauty of Gloucester Woods.

He never envied power and glory. His life of toiling with pleasure of fishing, driving etc was pure and sweeter and more suited to his taste than all the glory attached to a crown.

He felt keenly on the cruelties of his faith, yet can we find another who has so thoroughly the New Englander's character; has looked upon his superstitious and folly with such forbearance as our loving poet Whittier?

So precise was he in his details of the traits, character, habits and details of the New England history, and still retain Whittier's

poems, we should indeed, lose nothing of that life, so clearly and minutely has he described it all in his poems.

In his beautiful poems he brings back vividly to our minds the story of the Mayflower as she glides in Plymouth Bay with her frozen sails "Hatched by winter stars" "and muffled by winter gales".

In 1647, Whittier moved from Newbury to Haverhill and brought there the first line of bees. He wrote quite a long poem about these very bees, who thrived nicely in that place, and filled the summer morning with their merry buzz.

The poem is excellent. It not only contains the trivial hum of these busy little fellows but it contains deep thought and hatred of oppression, justice for the weak and those cruelly wronged.

The first century had not yet reached its close when the treacherous Indian with fiendish mind, returned night after night with the bloody scalp of the innocent white man and his family, hidden in his belt, beneath the dirty blankets. With such surroundings; with nature, on the

the other hand, pure, beautiful and loving; with the life of a farmer boy; with an unlimited number of circumstances of his own; with an unshaken religious faith; could there have been produced another such poet as Whittier? He was born and bred a tailor, and was in sympathy with his fellow tailors. He despised not the man who must work for his daily bread; he rather honored him for being able to cope with the difficulties of this life and yet be able to say "I earn my bread, I am a tailor".

In the legend of his "Mogg Megone" he tells us of the Indians whose names he makes as musical as Homer's Iliad.

He was a great observer, and the occupations of the Early French, whose missions are so extensive, does not escape our poet's part. During all this, he finds poetry in the much discussed witchcraft and all the other superstitions of his time.

One would suppose this makes poet to carry a long tale, how nothing in his mind but the solemnity of occasions, but not so with John Whittier; he is always mirthful and jolly and tells of sleigh rides.

and huskyparties, applepearings, and all the customs of his country are told in jolly rhythm.

The life which he so beautifully describes was not an easy one, nor were the surroundings luxurious, yet Whittier never feared, and by his sweet poems we see beauty which otherwise would have remained unnoticed. He loved dear Old New England, and has touched us with the loyalty and praise of his civilization.

He sings the praises of those old New England days with sympathy, and it makes us wonder at the power he possesses. He blends that our land would prosper better by the freeman's vote.

He was one of the foremost of political leaders; and often edited various periodicals and journals. His writings were not all in poetry, for he also wrote narration and filled it with humor and satire. He was an ardent admirer of the Galib Bushing and Robert Rantoul.

Whittier's poems are full of the life of outcry, burning in fiery eloquence

and nothing can equal this outcry but the true agony which they were written.

The time in which this poet wrote was one of strings of insults, ostracism, wars and imprisonment, and we must not think that while he condemned them, he had any personal charge against them. He has the power of drawing sympathy and reason from the sweet beauty of his enemies.

His poems are full of the slavery movement. He writes such poems as "Barbara Fritchie", "Methidates at Chiav" and he calls to us the time when the slave shall be no more in bondage.

This has partially been reached but Whitier's poems carry a truth which will someday come to pass. He has written a great deal on this subject, but it is not the only topic for his thought. He looks at the beauty of things as well as at the hard side and by these visions he sets forth poems such as "Maud Muller", simple and sweet with perfect description.

Next comes "Snowbound" a perfect Idyl. As I just said, his range

of topics was not limited. He hailed the abolition of Egyptian and Brazilian slavery. His poems are essentially lyric and Whittier is full of music.

His poems are purely American, and we love him for it. Who does not love the man whose tongue and pen ever sing praises of America? He may say he is not alone in his praises of our beloved Columbia and possibly not, but take Bryant, Emerson, or Longfellow, can we not apply their praises to other lands?

When we think of Whittier we think of him as purely American. Take the simple "Barfleur Bay," How true and beautiful! When one reads this poem, one sees, and can not help seeing, the boy with uncovered feet, hands in his pockets, hat on one ear, trousers rolled to the knee, somersaulting leisurely down the path whistling a "Lar Zinn" or possibly "Better than Gold."

Is there, in our language or any other, such another poem, of its kind, as "Snow Banned"? It so minutely describes New England that any one

of that descent reads it with sympathy and
 rapture and loves our *Snake-Pit*. It is a
 perfect description of the time, the life and
 the civilization from the habits and
 customs, down to the minutest details.
 The Laverhill home was left when our
 beloved poet was about thirty years old. He
 moved to Amesbury, a manufacturing
 town when then boasted of mills of both
 steam and water power. To Amesbury he
 took his mother and his sister Elizabeth.
 Here they staid till death called them home.
 Their house was a one story cottage, but it
 was afterward remodelled. It was a frame
 house, painted cream color and furnished
 with white. It stands about two or three
 rods back from the street. The Garden
 Room is one of the most pleasant rooms,
 furnishing a beautiful view to Pawow
 Hill.

This was Whittier's own room, and his
 favorite room. He had his bed room directly
 above this. John G. Whittier, so loving, was
 a rather peculiar man. In his youth he
 was never romantic, at least no record
 can be found to state that he was such.

In "Benedicti" he writes a few lines, but at any rate he never married.

He loved his sister Elizabeth very dearly, and with the exception of Charles and Mary Lamb there was never brother and sister more attached and loving. Whittier never wrote now sensual verses on the spur of the moment, but he loved all kinds of innocent sports.

Whittier kept his age very well. When most people begin to get old they lose their bright twinkle in their eyes, their step becomes slower, and when you see them you know they are old. But Whittier at seventy six was still quite young; he still had the merry eyes, the same lightness of step and his hair was not so very gray.

He was a very handsome man when young, was very tall with dark eyes and skin. He looked very little like a Quaker, and no one would think it from his habits. He did not dress like a Quaker. One time his little niece wanted a red cage. She insisted upon having it, but met with opposition from all of the family on account of their Quaker customs. However, John Grundle finally persuaded the mother to let the child have her way.

This put was color blind, and an incident is told of how the paper on his wall was torn and he matched it and found out that instead of the original green piece he had put on a bright red one.

After the death of Elizabeth this niece before mentioned, kept house for him until her marriage. This broke up Whittier's house and he went to Sauveur which is about twenty miles from Boston.

Here he made his home at Oak Knoll ^{with} his cousins. Oak Knoll was a beautiful place. Great trees and beautiful grass with driveways and farks made it as beautiful as one might imagine. The trees are of special interest. Many of them being very rare there are magnolia, and tulip trees, English Elm, English Oaks, and Norway Spruce. Loblacks, Pines, Chestnuts, and every tree which nature permits to grow in the climate of New England.

The garden and every thing about it was a delight to Whittier, and early every morning he could be seen with his hoe and rake working away at the beautiful plants. Here he was extremely happy. He was near

Salem and Boston and many other places where his most intimate friends lived, and the house was always filled with callers. He loved the pure air and nature, and consequently he was out of doors a great deal.

One of the things he liked to do best was to drive. His nature was free, and he loved horses and dogs; and many an hour was spent in watching the squirrels and other game upon the place. Many were the signs "No Hunting in these Parts" and this was strictly enforced.

The house was not magnificent but very beautiful and airy, and Whittier was at home and happy there.

Although he stayed there and enjoyed it all to the fullest extent, yet he loved to wander back to the old familiar places in Amesbury, Merrimack, and Salisbury; but after a visit he always went back to dear Oak Knoll.

He was not a very forward boy, and when a man was rather timid with strangers but he was very social and had an unlimited number of friends. He was a rather nervous man, and did not enjoy being in a

hurthing crowd, but he liked to sit and watch a crowd. His quick eye noted all the comical, also the grovver sides of the crowd and his description is always perfect. He enjoyed loitering about on a hot piazza and taking in everything he could see. He always liked to help any young writer and often had a great deal of his time taken with these young people, who, ^{if} they asked a favor from him, he would not refuse. He received a very good sum of money for many of his most important writings, and he never had very much trouble in securing a publisher. Although he was not a rich man, he in very comfortable circumstances. His wealth was all gained through his pen.

He was a very fortunate author, and not infrequently he received twice as much for his compositions as he asked.

When he sent "Inow Bound" to the publishers, after having been paid for the poem he went away pretty well satisfied, but after a few weeks he was paid again the same sum.

Whittier was a great help to many poor souls, and dearly do we

all lost his name. This he has left to us

" Oh loving friends who love me,
Oh dear ones gone above me,
Careless of all my fame,
I leave to you my name "