

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

---

ARTICLE I.

WHITTIER AS MAN, POET, AND REFORMER.<sup>1</sup>

BY F. B. SANBORN, CONCORD, MASS.

It is no light task, in a brief space, to deal with the long and active life of one who was not only Man and Poet, and a Reformer in many directions, at the period of all others in our history abounding in the need and the diversity of reforms, political, religious, and social; but also a typical and representative New England citizen,—that character almost new in the world's long story, and destined to play so great a part in the drama of civilization on this continent. John Greenleaf Whittier bore in both his family names the evidence that his ancestors had been among the early settlers of New England; and if it be true that he was also descended from a daughter of Christopher Hussey, then he was likewise of the posterity of that sturdy old colonizer Rev. Stephen Bachiler, born four years earlier than Shakespeare, and dying, at nearly a hundred years old, in the domination of his associate in religion, Oliver Cromwell, and his son Richard. This clergyman, dispossessed of his parish in western England, at

<sup>1</sup> An address at the Haverhill Centenary of his Birth, Tuesday, December 17, 1907.

the suggestion of Bishop Laud, wandered for a time about England and Holland, and, after doing his part to establish a religious colony at Portland in Maine, and Yarmouth in the Pilgrim Colony, did found and partly organize the ancient town of Hampton in New Hampshire, to which his son-in-law Christopher Hussey, and his three grandsons of the Sanborn name, followed him in 1638 or soon after. The house in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, in which Whittier died stands on a part of the large estate of Christopher Hussey, and the house occupied by that patriarch of New Hampshire was not far off. Hussey also owned land in Haverhill, although he is not supposed to have lived here for any long time. In 1653, Thomas Whittier, the poet's paternal ancestor, joined with Hussey, Edward Gove, and the three Sanborn brothers in petitioning the Boston magistracy in favor of Major Pike of Salisbury, who had spoken too freely against the Boston tyranny in suppressing Joseph Peasley, another ancestor of Whittier, who felt a call to exhort in meeting, and afterward became a Quaker. Hussey was then dwelling at Hampton Falls, and was one of the few petitioners who refused to withdraw their signatures, when bidden so to do by the Boston authorities; as Thomas Whittier, and two of my ancestors, John Sanborn and Edward Gove, also refused, and were fined for their contumacy. In the next generation most of the Husseys, Goves, and Whittiers were Quakers; for by 1675 George Fox had visited New England, the Boston and Dover Puritans had whipped and hanged Quaker women,—the graceless physicians Dr. Barefoot and Dr. Greenland, aided by Major Pike, now a high magistrate, had rescued the whipped women from the scourge of Major Waldron,—and the natural result of fervent preaching and bloody persecution had taken place. Thus was Quakerism, itself a demonstration

for radical reforms in church and state, handed down through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to our Poet, born in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and living in literary activity almost to the twentieth, for he died late in 1892.

Nor did this descendant of the martyred Quakers fail to remember their persecutions, and to visit poetic justice upon the persecutors and their successors in the business of bigotry and tyranny,—the intolerant sectarians and natural Tories of New England. The Quakers, all through the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, had combined good citizenship and scrupulous obedience to decent laws, with a firm and demonstrative refusal to sanction negro slavery. But the so-called conservative classes—the clergy, the leading lawyers, the great merchants, and the politicians generally (with few exceptions after 1820, and until 1850)—were defenders or apologists for that blot on our Republic of Liberty. Consequently, the Man, Whittier, imbued with the ancestral spirit of opposition to legalized tyranny, and fully possessed of the democracy of religion (which Quakerism is), first drew public attention as one of the antislavery convention at Philadelphia in 1833, at the age of twenty-five. He was already known as a poet in his small circle, and indeed had then written more verses in number, and more pages of what passed for poetry, than Gray or Emerson wrote during their whole lives. But the general public hardly took note of these verses, which were eagerly read by his young contemporaries, and widely copied from the newspapers of his friends Garrison and Thayer, or from his own political newspapers, at Boston and Hartford. In these newspapers he advocated a protective tariff (as Garrison had done for a time) and the election of Henry Clay as president. His politics rather than his poetry interested the active

men of his youth ; but the question of slavery, which was to supersede all others in our politics, had not, till after 1830, taken a strong hold on the people of the North. But even as his youthful verses, now forgotten, served him as exercises in poetic composition, and his journalism trained him to be, as he afterwards showed himself, a sagacious and adroit politician ; so the years of his literary and ethical apprenticeship, from 1826 to 1833, slowly and almost unconsciously prepared him for the devotion of all the rest of his life to the great measures of reform, whether in his own land or elsewhere. His father, the Quaker farmer of the East Parish, was a Jeffersonian democrat, like Clay, Calhoun, and, in his own independent way, John Quincy Adams ; and though the young journalist joined for a time the party of which Clay was the leader, and which soon called itself "Whig," he in fact adhered rather strictly to the Jeffersonian principles. An evidence of this is his striking poem on "Democracy," written in 1841, and making allusion to his father's political affiliations. I quote from the earlier form of these verses, which seems better than the revision which the fastidious author made many years later. It began :—

"O fairest born of love and light,  
 Yet bending brow and eye severe  
 On all that harms the holy sight,  
 Or wounds the pure and perfect ear!  
 Beautiful yet thy temples rise,  
 Though there profaning gifts are thrown ;  
 And fires, unkindled of the skies,  
 Are glaring round thy altar-stone.

"O ideal of my boyhood's time!  
 The faith in which my father stood,  
 Even when the sons of Lust and Crime  
 Had stained thy peaceful courts with blood.  
 Beneath thy broad, impartial eye

How fade the lines of caste and birth !  
How equal in their suffering lie  
The groaning multitudes of earth !"

Out of these principles, from which the Quaker poet never departed, was developed, by a strange metamorphosis, the actual Democratic party of Whittier's early manhood under Jackson; against which the youthful politician soon revolted, at first under the lead of Henry Clay, himself nominally a Democrat. Garrison, too, as a beginner in politics, followed the lead of Clay; and it is a curious fact that a younger brother of the Kansas hero John Brown continued to be an active partisan of Clay, and edited a New Orleans newspaper in his interest, during the first administration of Jackson, and until his own death in 1833. Of this son Salmon Brown, his father, the old Calvinist Owen Brown, said years afterward: "Salmon was of some note as a gentleman. But I never knew that he gave evidence of being a Christian." It was otherwise with Whittier, who from the first was brought up as a Christian, though in much disregard of that form of conventional Christianity which attached importance to the office of the parish priest or minister. Nor was he, at first, very much addicted to the conventional religious literature, even of his own small sect. It was the age of Scott, Moore, and Byron, following the age of Robert Burns, who seems to have been Whittier's first favorite among poets. From none of these popular poets could he have imbibed much reverence for the titled clergy; while, from the history and traditions of his own people, he was sure to regard them as spiritual tyrants and bloody persecutors. Hence, in one of his first sallies against the Massachusetts clerisy, he recurred to the Puritan ministers who had so violently tiraded against his ancestors, the Peas-

leys and Husseys. In his scathing rebuke of the Congregational clergy in 1837 he cried, sarcastically:—

“ Oh, glorious days! when Church and State  
 Were wedded by your spiritual fathers;  
 And on submissive shoulders sate  
 Your Wilsons and your Cotton Mathers!  
 No vile ‘Itinerant’ then could mar  
 The beauty of your tranquil Zion,  
 But at his peril,—of the scar  
 Of hangman’s whip and branding iron.  
 Old Hampton, had her fields a tongue,—  
 And Salem’s streets,—could tell their story  
 Of fainting women dragged along,  
 Gashed by the whip accursed and gory.”

Whittier had learned thoroughly that dismal tale of the three Quaker women, Anna Coleman, Mary Tompkins, and Alice Ambrose, whom the old tyrant of Dover, Richard Waldron, had in 1662 ordered to be flogged at the cart’s tail from the Pascataqua River to Narragansett Bay, but who were released by the bold Major Pike of Salisbury, at the instance of Walter Barefoot, of Dover, and Henry Greenland, then of Newbury. These two doctors would have been excellent subjects for a second of those quiet novels of which “Margaret Smith’s Journal” was the first. Only their adventures would have been more boisterous than those of the gentle Margaret and her cousin Rebecca Rawson. Whittier was both poet and historian, as Scott was; and, had he not made himself quite early the poet of the Minority, he might have risen to more distinction as historical poet. As it is, he has contributed more to the ballad lore of New England than all the other poets; and this part of his work will perhaps outlast that which at first he regarded as more important,—his antislavery and reformatory verse. In the latter he seemed

to present a singular contrast between his Quaker and non-resistant principles and his belligerent words. This contrast attracted the laughing notice of Lowell, in his "Fable for Critics," who made his spokesman, Apollo, cry out:—

"'Is that,' one exclaims on beholding his knocks,  
'Thy son's bloody garment, O leather-clad Fox?  
Can that be thy son, in the battle's mid din,  
Preaching brotherly love,—and then driving it in  
To the brain of the tough old Goliath of sin  
With the smoothest of pebbles from Castaly's Spring,  
Impressed on his hard moral sense with a sling?"

Whittier was pleased at this recognition of the fighter under the drab coat; and I have seen a letter of his to Lowell complimenting the almost anonymous poet on his success in the "Fable."

To be a poet of the Minority is not always to be on the right side; but the greatest poets in the world's history have held that position. If we could know all the facts about the men who wrote the epics ascribed to Homer, it would probably be true of them; and certainly it was true of Æschylus and Sophocles among the Greek dramatists; of Lucretius in Rome; Dante in Florence; Milton in England; Burns in Scotland; Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats in England; and in our day it has been true of Browning there, and of Emerson here. This may be said, however, of the better poets of the Minority,—that if they represent, as they usually do, the higher national aspiration, the day comes, even in their lifetime, when the majority rally to their side, and they are for a while, at least, the voice of their nation. Dante never reached that fortunate day, but Milton did, and Wordsworth more slowly attained that position. So, in this country, did the poets of democracy and antislavery; and the popularity



which from the first attended the fortunate Longfellow overtook Bryant and Lowell and Whittier in the national crisis of the Civil War.

It does a poet of the right sort no harm to be mobbed a few times. Whittier was mobbed repeatedly in his early career; and twice was the serene Emerson mobbed,—at Cambridge in 1851, and at the Tremont Temple of Boston in the winter of 1860–61. In neither case was his life in danger. But when Whittier and George Thompson were mobbed, it was a question of serious bodily harm, even of death, at the hands of the furious ruffians who were impelled by those persistent American anarchists, the men of large wealth and commercial greed, who know that their riches have been immorally gained. Such were the slave-masters and their mercantile friends at the North, who sought Garrison's life in 1835, killed Lovejoy in 1837, burned the antislavery hall at Philadelphia in May, 1838, and for more than twenty years longer continued to display their sneaking form of anarchy in all the chief cities of the North. The last of this may have been the draft riots in Boston and New York in 1863; but by that time, and for a year or two before, the mob spirit turned against the defenders of slavery, and more than once compelled them to hang out the flag of their country, the Stars and Stripes; which, from the disgrace of protecting slave-auctions and floating over conquests made to extend negro slavery (as in the Mexican War), had suddenly, in 1861, become the flag of freedom once more. Through all this dismal period of national infamy, Whittier and the small band of emancipationists stood firmly for the rights of man, the cause of the poor. But I hardly think Whittier was involved in any dangerous mob after 1845; he withdrew from that physical activity in the cause which he had displayed for

a dozen years after 1832, left Haverhill for the quieter retirement of Amesbury, and did his work, either with the pen, in prose and verse, or through his rare sagacity, by advice to political associates, or those whom he wished to make such. He had undertaken to edit newspapers at Hartford, at Philadelphia, and finally at Lowell, where in 1844 he took charge of a journal devoted to political antislavery, the *Middlesex Standard*, and wrote for it not only political articles, but those brief papers, descriptive of periods or characters in New England story, which he published long ago under the title of "The Stranger in Lowell." In his capacity as editor in Lowell he became closely acquainted with the circle of young women who set going, and maintained for years, that interesting organ of literature among the factory girls,—the *Lowell Offering*. He knew Harriet Farley (who has lately died in New York at the age of ninety-two); her associate Harriot Curtis; a third Harriet, Miss Hanson, afterwards Mrs. W. S. Robinson of Concord and Malden; and Lucy Larcom, who continued to be an intimate friend so long as Whittier lived. He was therefore a well-informed witness to that cultivation of literature among the native American factory girls of New England which was so surprising a feature of our development two generations ago.

It was during Whittier's summer at your neighboring "Spindle City" of Lowell that his friend Emerson was induced by the antislavery women of Concord to place himself squarely on the emancipation side, by his address on the anniversary of West India Emancipation, given in Concord, August 1, 1844. My impression is that Whittier himself came over to report the proceedings of the day, and complained that Concord was a very mossgrown, stagnant sort of place; but that he found comfort in Emer-

son's Address, which took strong and new ground against the enslavement of a race by advantage of its virtues. It was a day long to be remembered in Concord. Hawthorne had been for two years living in the Old Manse, and was publishing those "Mosses" which preserve that ancient parsonage in immortal youth. Not sympathizing himself very much with the emancipationists, he yet made no objection to Mrs. Hawthorne's offering to have the "collation" tables spread under the trees of his avenue, which was to have been the resort of the audience after the address was over. But the summer day was lowering or rainy, and the tables were set, instead, in the county court-house, near the antique stone prison of Middlesex. To call the company together at the hour announced for the meeting, a bell must be rung; and the authorities of the two chief churches in the village, the Unitarian and Orthodox Congregational, were unwilling to have their bells rung on such an occasion. A bell was found, however, which did not refuse to ring when Henry Thoreau pulled the rope; and thus the faithful were summoned to the first of Emerson's strictly political addresses. I owe a knowledge of these facts to a lively letter by Miss Anne Whiting in the *Herald of Freedom*, at Concord, New Hampshire, a weekly edited by Thoreau and Whittier's friend Nathaniel P. Rogers. No considerable part of the address appeared in Whittier's Lowell newspaper, the orator reserving it for a pamphlet edition, which he soon issued. It was not long after this, and while Whittier had charge of the Lowell newspaper, that he offered to the poet Longfellow to have him nominated for Congress in the Middlesex District, on the Liberty Party ticket. A vacancy existed in this district, which then included Cambridge, Concord, and Lowell, because neither the Democratic nor the Whig party had been

able to elect their candidate, on account of the considerable antislavery vote in the county. Whittier had seen that the few antislavery poems of Longfellow, reprinted as a tract at the North, had been very well received, and he said to Longfellow that they "had been of important service to the Liberty movement." He therefore urged on his brother-poet the acceptance of a congressional nomination, saying, "Our friends think they could throw for thee one thousand more votes than for any other man." Dating his reply, September, 1844, Longfellow answered:—

"It is impossible for me to accept the Congressional nomination you propose, because I do not feel myself qualified for the duties of such an office, and because I do not belong to the Liberty Party. Though a strong anti-slavery man, I am not a member of any society, and fight under no single banner. At all times I shall rejoice in the progress of true liberty, and in freedom from slavery of all kinds; but I cannot for a moment think of entering the political arena. Partisan warfare becomes too violent, too vindictive for my taste."

This was not meant as a reproof to Whittier, but it indicated what was then a common view among educated men. Sumner himself was then averse to politics, like his intimate friend Longfellow, and "could not for a moment think of entering the political arena." He also declined a congressional nomination, two years later, against Robert C. Winthrop, and allowed his intimate friend Dr. Howe to lose credit and influence by standing for Congress in his place. A few years later Sumner was forced to become a politician, upon his election to the Senate. Indeed, Longfellow's brother-professor in Harvard College Dr. Palfrey was nominated and chosen to Congress from this same Middlesex District; and it was in support of his reelection that Emerson made the speech in 1851 which procured for him a storm of hisses at the Cambridge public meeting. Whittier never had scruples of this

scholarly kind against engaging in politics. In early years of activity he had desired a nomination to Congress; he had been chosen to the State Legislature, had served there, and was ready at all times to take his part, with his fellow-citizens, in the duties and discomforts of self-government. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than anarchy; he was one of the multitude himself, and depended on seeing the function of government duly performed in his province, whatever that province might be. If he thought ill of his country's Constitution, he knew how it could be improved, and he set to work to make things better. He was never a believer in the non-voting hypothesis of government, and he separated from Garrison and the extreme abolitionists on that issue, among others. Like most of the Quakers, however, he did not believe in war; and made the mistake of supposing, as late as 1859, that slavery could be peacefully abolished.

Things had got beyond that even in 1847, when Whittier became one of the chief editorial writers for Dr. Bailey's *National Era*, the antislavery weekly established in Washington, after the cause of Liberty began to have bold defenders in the House and Senate at the national capital. One of the first of these, in point of time, was the aged Ex-president John Quincy Adams, whose great political prudence had kept him from acting against slavery while president, and candidate for the presidency; but who, as early as 1820, had seen, with his native sagacity, that slavery and the Union could not continue long to coexist, and had entered in his Diary for February 24, in that year, this remarkable passage:—

“I had some conversation with Calhoun on the slave-question pending in Congress. He said he did not think it would produce a dissolution of the Union; but if it should, the South would be compelled to

form an alliance, offensive and defensive, with Great Britain. I said, that would be returning to the Colonial state. He said 'Yes, pretty much; but it would be forced upon them.' I pressed the conversation no further.

"But if the dissolution of the Union should result from the slave-question, it is as obvious as anything that can be foreseen of the future, that it must shortly afterwards be followed by the universal emancipation of the slaves. Slavery is the great and foul stain upon the North American Union, and it is a contemplation worthy of the most exalted soul, whether its total abolition is or is not practicable; if practicable, by what means it may be effected, and if a choice of means be within scope, what means would accomplish it at the smallest cost of human suffering?"

Having thus stated the problem Mr. Adams went on to foretell its solution, in these extraordinary words, which our age has seen literally fulfilled, forty-odd years after they were inscribed in the secret diary of a secretary of state at Washington:—

"A dissolution, at least temporary, of the Union as now constituted, would be necessary; and the dissolution must be upon a point involving the question of slavery and no other. The Union might then be reorganized on the fundamental principle of Emancipation. This object is vast in its compass, awful in its prospects,—sublime and beautiful in its issue. A life devoted to it would be nobly spent,—or sacrificed."

Many lives were, in effect, so sacrificed, but not Adams's own. He continued to uphold the Union as it was,—the Union fatally tied to the perishable barbarism of slavery, and certain, if the tie were not cut, to destroy both the country and its barbarism. Whittier for many years, after opposing slavery with all his might, still cherished the delusion that it could be peacefully abolished. Once it could have been, had Washington and Jefferson, in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, followed the lead of Franklin, wisest man of his century, who pressed actively for emancipation, as did the real leaders of the French Revolution, and the English

liberals. Both those great Virginians knew that Franklin was right; both were abolitionists; and Jefferson, who succeeded Franklin at the disorganized Court of the French monarchy, printed at Paris, in 1785, those words of truthful description which have been so often quoted:—

“The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most bolsterous passions, the most unremitting despotism, on the one part,—and degrading submissions on the other. . . . With what execration should that statesman be loaded who, permitting one-half the citizens to trample on the rights of the other half, transforms those into despots and these into enemies,—destroying the morals of the one part and the patriotism of the other! And can the liberties of a nation be deemed secure when we have removed their only firm basis,—a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God,—that they are not to be violated without His wrath? I tremble for Virginia when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever; that, considering numbers, Nature, and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of Fortune is among possible events; that it may become probable by supernatural interference. The Almighty has no attribute that can take sides with us in such a contest.”

Why, then, did not Washington and Jefferson, with their high-toned neighbor Colonel George Mason, act upon the considerations so forcibly stated? Because, I fancy, the political problems of their time were so pressing that they felt it a duty to hold the nation together, against the soured enmity of England, long coveting her revolted Colonies, and the wild ambition of Napoleon, which fluctuated between establishing an American empire based on negro slavery, and giving up the French possessions in America to strengthen our Republic against England, which was his real motive in selling Louisiana to Jefferson. And our nation was held together, in spite of the angry disunion sentiment of the New England Federalists in 1804, ready to join with Aaron Burr in overthrowing the “Virginia dynasty,”—and against the tendency to separation on the part of the Mississippi Valley States, a

few years later; when Burr hoped, by their aid, to establish for himself a vast slaveholding empire in Louisiana, Texas, and Mexico. Thwarted in this by the sagacity of Jefferson and the honesty of Andrew Jackson, Burr betook himself to Europe, and there for years sought to betray his country either to England or to Napoleon, as either should offer him the highest personal bribe. I have seen a letter from Washington by a New Hampshire member of Congress, John Adams Harper, in 1813, to his party leader, the Democratic Governor of New Hampshire, William Plumer, in which he reported an offer made by Napoleon, then beginning to be in straits after his failure in Russia, that he would join with England in dividing the troublesome American States at the Potomac,—Great Britain to take New England and the Northern half; and France, Virginia, Louisiana, and the Southern half. This offer, if ever made, may have been only one of those schemes chasing each other through the restless mind of the French despot; but it would not have been unacceptable to some of the New England Federalists, who were quite ready, from 1812 to the victory of Jackson at New Orleans, to welcome an alliance with England, if not absolute dependence on the still reigning George III.

However this may be, the necessity of holding our young Republic together forbade efforts to abolish slavery by peaceful compensation; and by 1830 it had so strengthened itself, with the aid of King Cotton, that the South became insolent, and refused even to consider its abolition. From that time forward, its destruction by force was the only solution of the problem, unless the North should be willing to see slavery made national, instead of decreasingly sectional. For this bad purpose the annexation of Texas was carried; and the Mexican War was waged; and after 1848 the question, as a



practical one, was no longer emancipation, but how to stop slavery extension and the reopening of the slave-trade. Upon that basis the Liberty party, of which Whittier was one of the chief founders, was merged in the Free-soil party of 1848, supporting Van Buren for the presidency against the Southern Whig General Taylor, and soon carrying Massachusetts by an alliance with the Jeffersonian democrats, headed by Boutwell and Rantoul. The disgust of Massachusetts at Webster's Fugitive-slave Law, and his seventh of March speech, in 1850, gave the election of that November into the hands of the coalition, and Whittier was then called upon to use his matchless powers of political combination and persuasion, to secure the election to the Senate of his friend Charles Sumner. It was he who induced Sumner to be the candidate of the coalition, in the early winter of 1850-51; and, although at one point he advised Sumner to withdraw, in order to rebuke the bad faith of certain Democrats,—among them his old friend Caleb Cushing,—yet the candidate stayed in the field, and was elected, late in April, by a single vote. This was the beginning of Sumner's great service to his native State, which continued till his death in 1874,—the most faithful servant and wisest statesman Massachusetts has had for a century. When he was maliciously censured by a partisan legislature, for one of the best acts of his life, Whittier was unwearied in getting the stigma removed.

By this time the poet of the Minority had become the aged seer and adviser of the Majority; and well did Whittier perform this later duty. Good sense is not reckoned among the most conspicuous and expected qualities of poets; but it was characteristic of our Merrimac Valley poet from the first. Had his health after childhood been as robust and cheerful as his common sense, he would have been a noted leader in

the most active paths of politics and reforms. But an early injury, growing out of his excessive farm-labors, kept him on the borders of invalidism all the rest of his days, and made him much more retired in his way of life than his natural tendency would have suggested. He had the good Yankee quality of "sociability"; he was neighborly and even gossiping in his nature, and spent many hours in his village existence, sitting on stools and boxes in groceries and shoe-shops, chatting with his townsmen. He did not put the company to flight, and check conversation, when he set foot in the familiar group seated around the stove, as Emerson complains that he did. Nor was there ever a poet who better understood the conditions and sentiments of labor in New England; and his "Songs of Labor," in their merits and defects, went very close to the mark. He had been a laborer himself, and from first to last he sympathized with the upright industry and thrift of New England.

His familiarity with all that went to compose the idyll of rural life in New England,—the toil, the prayer, the nooning of Summer, the snow-bound days of Winter, the grace of Spring, the painted pageant of October,—the domestic life of women, the fun and earnest of the village,—the days of haymaking on the Salisbury and Hampton meadows, the freighting of hay on the Merrimac,—all this and more constitutes Whittier the laureate of ancient Essex and Rockingham, the two counties with which his early life made him best acquainted. Few of us now survive who remember, of our own observation, all that he relates; but there it is, packed away, like honey in the hive, in the fascinating story of "Snow-Bound." It sounds a little strained to apply the word "great" to any one of Whittier's poems; but this one comes so near being a great poem, that the author's modesty

must allow the designation. The characters in "Snow-Bound" stand out clear and fresh, like the persons in Homer; or, more exactly, they recall the rustic scenes and personages of Hesiod. This field of poesy—what has been called both pastoral and idyllic—belongs to Whittier by natural right, as much as his hexameters to Hesiod, or the Doric and Sicilian strains of Theocritus or Moschus. Affectation is lacking; the picture is drawn, the person is presented, with all the offhand readiness of Nature herself. Only those who have forgotten the homely dialect of Rockingham and Essex will catch at some of Whittier's words as odd. They come naturally from him; and so do the colloquial misfits of accent and rhyme, that sometimes make the scholar smile. Whittier could accent "rómance" and "ídeal" on their first syllable, and we let it pass; as in that favorite poem of his own "The Reformer," which to me, also, has ever seemed one of his best, both in thought and melody:—

" Young Romance raised his dreamy eyes  
 O'erhung with paly locks of gold,—  
 ' Why smite,' he asked, in sad surprise,  
 ' The fair, the old? "

The picture is a good one; indeed, this poem is a series of pictures, in verse wellnigh faultless:—

" All grim and soiled, and brown with tan,  
 I saw a Strong One, in his wrath,  
 Smiting the godless shrines of man  
 Along his path.

" The Church, beneath her trembling dome,  
 Essayed in vain her ghostly charm:  
 Wealth shook within his gilded home,  
 With strange alarm.

" Fraud from his secret chambers fled  
 Before the sunlight bursting in:  
 Sloth drew her pillow o'er her head  
 To drown the din.

“ ‘Spare,’ Art implored, ‘yon holy pile!  
 ‘That grand, old, time-worn turret spare!’  
 Meek Reverence, kneeling in the aisle,  
 Cried out ‘Forebear!’

“ Gray-bearded Use, who, deaf and blind,  
 Groped for his old accustomed stone,  
 Leaned on his staff, and wept to find  
 His seat o’erthrown.”

All this shocks the poet; but after a pause he looks again:—

“ The grain grew green on battle-plains,  
 O’er swarded war-mounds grazed the cow;  
 The slave stood forging from his chains  
 The spade and plow.

“ Through prison walls, like Heaven-sent hope,  
 Fresh breezes blew, and sunbeams strayed;  
 And with the idle gallows-rope  
 The young child played.

“ The outworn rite, the old abuse,  
 The pious fraud transparent grown,  
 The Good held captive in the use  
 Of Wrong alone,—

“ These wait their doom,—from that great law  
 Which makes the past time serve To-day:  
 And fresher life the world shall draw  
 From their decay.

“ O backward-looking son of Time!  
 The new is old, the old is new;  
 The cycle of a change sublime  
 Still sweeping through.”

Here is the optimism, and something of the mysticism, of Emerson and Thoreau; and this poem dates from 1846, when the summer of Transcendentalism was not yet waning into autumn. But this optimism was sometimes amiss in its confident prediction; as in that mistaken ballad of Whittier on “Brown of Osawatomic,” which, late in 1859, hardly fifteen months before the outbreak of the Civil War, and while the

murders in Kansas were scarcely ended, declared that the day of battle was over:—

“Nevermore may yon Blue Ridges the Northern rifle  
hear  
Nor see the light of blazing homes flash on the  
negro’s spear!  
But let the free-winged angel Truth their guarded  
passes scale,  
To teach that Right is more than Might, and Justice  
more than mail.

“So vainly shall Virginia set her battle in array;  
In vain her trampling squadrons knead the winter  
snow with clay.  
She may strike the pouncing eagle, but she dares not  
harm the dove;  
And every gate she bars to Hate shall open wide to  
Love!”

Whittier’s mistake here was twofold; he assumed, contrary to the fact, that John Brown was inspired by hatred of the slaveholders; and he exaggerated the power of Christian love in dealing with men in a passion. The Virginians of 1859 were no longer capable of considering calmly the emancipation of their slaves, as they might have done while Washington and George Mason were living; they misinterpreted every effort to free the land from its worst clog and contradiction, negro slavery. As for Brown, his hatred of the barbarism of slavery was complete; but he regarded all men with a broad charity, and preferred to believe them good men until their actions showed the contrary. Unlike as he was in externals to Coventry Patmore’s gentle heroine, it could be said of him as of her:—

“His life, all honor, observed with awe,  
Which cross experience could not mar,  
The fiction of the Christian law,  
That all men honorable are.”

This also was Whittier's turn of mind, after he had outgrown the vehemence of his early onslaughts against classes and persons; it is, indeed, the principle of the higher Quakerism.

Brown was wiser than Whittier, when he said on the last day of his Virginia prison-cell, "I am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly, flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done." Six years had to pass, and the winter snow be five times trampled with the red clay of Virginia, before either Love or Hate could open the door to Richmond. Even then another martyr must be added to Brown, and the myriads who followed him in death; and Abraham Lincoln must die by an assassin, ere the cause for which Brown and Lincoln died could peacefully prevail. The bullet as well as the ballot was needful to destroy Slavery; and that our poet lived to see. Then, in fact, after years of battle,—

"Where frowned the fort, pavilions gay,  
And cottage windows, flower-entwined,  
Looked out upon the peaceful bay  
And hills behind,"

and the aged bard could sing, as he had chanted forty years earlier,—

"Grown wiser for the lesson given,  
I fear no longer; for I know  
That where the share is deepest driven,  
The best fruits grow."