

John Greenleaf Whittier.

11

John Greenleaf Whittier was one of those persons whose career was formed by the time in which they lived; the period before the Civil War. As Wendell Phillips was an orator, John Brown, a fighter; and Horace Greeley, an editor, so Whittier was a poet, of the abolitionists. Whittier was a Quaker and therefore gentle and mild, but his gentleness was stirred to the utmost by the cruelties which he saw inflicted on human lives. He wrote many stirring poems on the inhuman practice of slavery.

The homestead, now two hundred years old, where Whittier was born has been made familiar to us in "Snow-Bound". It is a low brown farm house, a frame structure, the back part painted red, and standing close to the road, a short distance from the village of Haverhill, Massachusetts. Here December 17, 1807, John Greenleaf Whittier was born.

Not far distant is the little school house where he went to school in his boyhood. Whittier also attended the Haverhill Academy, supporting himself by the money he earned teaching school and making shoes and slippers.

21
He received his first impulse toward writing after reading the poems of Robert Burns, a copy of which was lent to him by his teacher, when he was fourteen years old. He began making rhymes of his own and sending them to the local news papers where they attracted the attention of the editor, William Lloyd Garrison, and it was through him that John went to the academy.

At first the ^{lad} wrote mostly for news papers and magazines, and later became editor of several periodicals at different times. Being a strong abolitionist he wrote much against slavery.

Whittier had one brother and two sisters. His uncle, Moses Whittier, and Miss Mercy Hussy, his mother's sister, lived at his home. He died in 1892.

Whittier also wrote in an entirely different field from that of slavery. He wrote many religious poems, for instance, "Worship," "Our Father," and "Andrew Rykman's Prayer," and that favorite Christian Endeavor hymn "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea," which however differs from the orthodox thought more than is realized.

His genius ventured into still another line, narrative poems of New England life, of which "Snow-Bound" is the chief.

Hestlake's "Common School Literature," says of him;

"In Whittier's poems we find masculine vigor combined with womanly tenderness; a fierce hatred of wrong, with an all embracing charity and love. In his anti-slavery and patriotic lyrics, "he seems" as Whipple says "to pour out his blood with his lines," so terrible is his energy; but in most of his poems, especially his later ones, we find only the ~~calm~~ earnestness of the enquirer after truth, combined with the sublime faith and prayerful resignation of the true Christian. He lacks Longfellow's wide and elegant culture, but surpasses him in real poetic genius, and ranks next to him in popularity

"Chamber's Cyclopaedia of English Literature," says;

"The Society of Friends or Quakers, in America can boast of a poet who more than rivals their English representative, Bernard Barton."

James Russell Lowell says:

"Mr. Whittier is essentially a lyric poet, and the fervor of his temperament gives his pieces of that kind a remarkable force and effectiveness..... Mr. Whittier, if the most fervid of our poets, is sometimes hurried away by this very quality, in itself an excellence, into being the most careless....."

His rhymes are often faulty beyond the most provincial license of Burns himself. Vigor without elegance will never achieve permanent success in poetry."

"The Round Table," says:

"We do not think that 'Snow-Bound' will increase Mr. Whittier's reputation of a poet, and it is quite likely that it may take away from it with those who do not consider the circumstances of its production. As it was written to beguile the weariness of a sick-chamber, it is hardly open to the usual criticism."

R. S. Mackenzie says:

"It is surprising to find in two stout volumes like these so little that is not good. There never was an exceptionable line written by John Greenleaf Whittier, and few poets have written so entirely for the greatest happiness of the greatest number."

Henry T. Tuckerman says:

"There is a prophetic anathema and a bard-like invocation in some of his pieces. He is a true son of New England, and beneath the calm, fraternal bearing of the Quaker, nurses the imaginative ardour of a devotee, both of nature and humanity."

Ellen S. Beldew. March 7, 1896.

Written for the "Clifton-Spring Literary Circle."

John Greenleaf Whittier.

Ellen Scranton Belden.

Clifton Springs
New York.

March 7, 1896.

Written for the "Clifton Springs Literary
Circle."

charity and love. — In his anti-slavery and
patriotic lyrics, "he