POPULAR AND PROPHETIC TRADITIONS IN THE POETRY OF JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

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ABSTRACT

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POETRY OF JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

By

Delwyn Lee Sneller

Literary critics of the first half of the twentieth century disagree about Whittier's worth as a poet, and recent criticism has brought the poet to a middle ground where he is neither despised nor canonized but called a minor poet who wrote perhaps a dozen poems of value. But criticism thus far has not discovered and explained what themes or clusters of symbols pull Whittier's many poems into an organized group. I find that Whittier's verses radiate from one or both of two centers. One center is popular nineteenth-century culture and the other is the biblical prophetic tradition. The poet's contemporaries definitely recognized these centers to his works, but they never explained them fully. Whittier is the first American poet to consciously and consistently develop the image of the poet as prophet and to make that image popular. For more than sixty years he successfully blended sweet melodies from the gilt-edged lyre of popularity with harsher notes from the lightning-strung lyre of prophecy.

Between 1820 and 1860 Godey's Lady's Book and The Christian Examiner and Theological Review published thousands of poems and

articles about poetry which reveal what types of poetry nineteenth-century readers demanded. The stylistic qualities of popular verse (clarity, simplicity, sweetness, purity, meter, rhyme) and elements such as the sentimental experience, the national literature movement, hymnology, and death as poetic subject are discussed in detail. When the themes and styles of Whittier's poems are compared with the themes and styles of popular magazine verses, it is not difficult to understand his steady rise to fame. Whittier not only understood and practiced popular poetic theories, he also improved literary taste through his works.

Whittier also consciously aligned himself with the prophetic tradition and imitated the writings of the Old Testament prophets. His calling, view of his times, style of message, redefinition of sin, sense of God's nearness, view of nature, divided predictions, intercessions for the wicked, identification with his nation, vision of apocalypse, belief in prophetic succession, and purity and consistency of purpose clearly link him with the biblical bards he idolized. Besides the Hebrew prophets, Whittier also considered the early Quaker martyrs, the American pilgrims, Marvell, and Milton to be prophet figures. This belief partially explains his attraction to seventeenth century British literature. As early as 1840, Whittier discovered that popular and prophetic poetry have elements in common, and, in fact, that they complement each other.

Aside from its artistic excellence, Snow-Bound derives its peculiar charm from the fact that it is Whittier. The popular and biblical themes and styles scattered throughout his other works are

collected and made immortal in this one poem. The fire-lit idyl is Whittier's soul, because through its music he interprets and embodies the popular (the fire-side genre, memory as theme, flemish pictures) and the prophetic (the family circle gathered around the fire of faith as a symbol of and cure for post-War America) traditions of literature.

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> Life made by duty epical
> And rhythmic with the truth.

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TWO CENTERS OF WHITTIER'S POETRY

> All that the critics write about a work of art, even at the best, even when most sound, convincing, plausible, even when done with love, which is seldom, is as nothing compared to the actual mechanics, the real genetics of a work of art.

Henry Miller's comment[1] seems especially pertinent in dealing with Whittier, because accounts of the dynamic life and activities which surrounded and produced this poet's works of art rise pyramid-like above not only criticisms of his writings but also above the writings themselves sometimes. His handicaps, like his numerous good deeds and eventual national fame, touch the realm of legend. For Whittier is the friendless farm boy who grew up to write the poem which inspired President Abraham Lincoln to compose one of our greatest historical documents, The Emancipation Proclamation.[2] He is the shy hermit who bragged about ill health and never ventured south of the Potomac or west of the Alleghenies, but who outlived almost all of his contemporaries, was visited by the Emperor of Brazil, by Matthew Arnold and Charles Dickens, and had a ship and a city in California named after him.

As an abolitionist in 1839 he advocated tearing down the American flag, because it made "despots smile and good men frown"

to see it hung above "the slaver's loathsome jail."* Yet following the Civil War he became, as one modern critic says, "an object of veneration and awe in a class with Mount Vernon and the American flag."[3] During the 30's and 40's pro-slavery mobs burned him out of his office, threatened his life, and stoned and rotten-egged him out of their towns. People listened to him under protest. But after the War, strangers traveled miles just to shake his hand, and one admirer even offered him a cottage in Florida.[4] His seventieth and eightieth birthdays were celebrated as national holidays. Moreover, his writings were read so avidly that they brought him over $100,000.[5] The shy Quaker became one of America's most photographed poets and his fame eclipsed Longfellow's. By 1892 he had gained such respect that 59 Senators, 333 members of the House, and the entire bench of the Supreme Court, among other world dignitaries, attended his funeral.[6]

Accounts of his life yield many examples of the sincere, though bizzare, forms of honor paid him by admirers. Many worldly young ladies courted dark-haired, handsome Whittier, and then drove him almost to the point of suicide by rejecting him because of his poverty. But during those years he trimmed his long white beard and gave away money to people he had never met, ladies sent him snips of their dresses and asked him for locks of his hair[7] or other intimate tokens. Some unmarried lady poets built room-for-two houses near his. Whittier, in desperation, installed a spring trap near his door to warn of their approach so he could escape their embraces and

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*All following references to Whittier's poetry and prose are from John Greenleaf Whittier, The Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Standard Library Edition in seven volumes; Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892). This reference is (III, 66).

marriage proposals by dashing out the back door.[8] In 1889 he was hard pressed to comfort a lady by letter whose child had been born with some dreadful defect.[9] And Dorothea Dix offered his poem "At Last" the high tribute of a place in her coffin.[10]

To overcome his lack of travel experience and limited formal education, Whittier read tirelessly, and, judging by the number and variety of quotations blended into his works, his memory must have been remarkable. At any rate, the author of "In School Days" was, between 1858 and 1886, elected an overseer of Harvard and was awarded an honorary master's degree and doctorate by that same institution, even though its graduates groaned at some of his rhymes. So great was his reputation as a literary person that he was elected a member of the Scottish Society of Literature and Art.[11] His books were cherished throughout the Continent of Europe as well as in Ireland and England. His Snow-Bound is still remembered as one of the four best-known long poems in American literature.

Undoubtedly the above paragraphs echo nineteenth-century criticisms written with too much love and too little objectivity--those which say criticism should stand mute before Whittier's achievements. Admittedly, a few paragraphs which set Whittier's handicaps alongside his accomplishments, or which contrast the murderous yells drunken mobs hurled at the black-clad abolitionist and the overflowing love post-War readers showed the poet all too easily disguise the fact (developed in Chapter III) that Whittier's rise to literary hero was predictable and slow. His fame did not rush blizzard-like from the pages of Snow-Bound; it unfolded for more than half a

century, developing as steadily and surely as the Pennsylvania Pilgrim's aloe flower.

During those years of tiding reknown, Whittier studied a surprising variety of subjects. The range of his interests extended far beyond those of Longfellow, or of any other contemporary poet. Besides his well-known anti-slavery poems, he wrote against capital punishment, and for better treatment of the Indians, a free Kansas, Italian liberty, and Irish freedom. He also took interest in the affairs of Iowa and Nebraska.[12] In 1839 he wrote Elizabeth Neal, "I go the whole length as regards the rights of women," and thirty years later he expressed similar sentiments in a letter to the Newport Convention in behalf of Woman's Suffrage.[13] During his years as a newspaper editor, he spoke out for temperance, labor reform, the Ten Hour Bill, labor unions, and tariffs.[14]

His Songs of Labor, 1850, predates Whitman's poetry on the same subject, and his renditions of early American superstitions[15] anticipate Hawthorne. His newspaper article, "American Literature," which calls for a truly American literature, appeared three years earlier than Longfellow's "American Literature" published in 1832 in the North American Review, and, although less well written than Emerson's essay, his "American Genius," 1829, anticipates Emerson's "The American Scholar," 1837, as the "Declaration of Intellectual Independence of America."[16]

He also wrote articles about fanaticism and utopian schemes, besides a host of biographical sketches and historical studies. Margaret Smith's Journal, with its seventeenth-century title page

and 1849 publication date, remains fascinating and worthwhile reading. Moreover, Whittier composed hundreds of occasional and personal poems about current events and to acquaintances. Edward Everett Hale, while looking over the scrapbook he had compiled on Whittier, exclaimed, "Whittier's the chief in the variety of subjects he handles."[17]

As might be expected, such a range of concerns could win enemies as easily as allies. And Whittier did (and does) have enemies. The 1830 Catskill Recorder ridiculed him so harshly that he hid the paper from his publishers and friends who visited his office.[18] And in 1850 Brownson's Quarterly lambasted Songs of Labor and their author:

> Mr. Whittier has some of the elements of a true poet, but his poems, though often marked by strength and tenderness, are our abomination. He is a Quaker, an infidel, an abolitionist, a philanthropist, a peace man, a Red Republican, a nonresistant, a revolutionist, all characters we hold in horror and destation, and his poems are the echo of himself. God gave him noble gifts, every one of which he has used to undermine faith, to eradicate loyalty, to break down authority, and to establish the reign of anarchy, and all under the gentle mask of promoting love and good will, diffusing the Christian spirit, and defending the sacred cause of liberty. He approaches us in the gentle and winning form of an angel of light, and yet whether he means it or not, it is only to rob us of all that renders life worth possessing. If he believes himself doing the will of God, he is the most perfect dupe of the Evil One the Devil has ever been able to make. . . . With this estimate of Mr. Whittier how can we praise his poems, or commend them to the public?[19]

But Whittier's friends generally out-wrote, out-preached, and out-talked angered critics. One example of unreserved admiration was rendered by a friend of Mrs. Mary B. Claflin who said, "I would rather give a man or woman on the verge of a great moral lapse a marked copy of Whittier than any other book in our language."[20]

Some twentieth-century critics have (perhaps unknowingly) reemphasized the conflicting criticisms of the previous century. In 1925 Clement Wood gave Whittier only one sentence in his Poets of America: "As a poet, Whittier has a hard-headed Quaker; his flight brushed the ground."[21] Yet Harvey B. Marks wrote in 1938 that Whittier was "One of America's ablest lyrical . . . poets," and in 1950 H. A. L. Jefferson, another hymnologist, calls him "One of America's greatest poets."[22] In 1931, however, Henry S. Canby completely ignored Whittier in his Classic Americans.[23] But eight years later Whittier's works inspired W. Harvey-Jellie to write that "no greater soul was ever produced on this continent" and that the Quaker poet was "incontestably the greatest man of letters within the galaxy of writers and thinkers which New England gave to the literary world of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries."[24] Thus Whittier's reputation gleams and rusts.

During the last fifteen years, much Whittier scholarship has brought the poet to a middle ground; he is neither despised nor canonized but called a minor poet who wrote perhaps a dozen poems of permanent literary value and whose life-long pacifism and reform activities seem relevant today.[25] In his enjoyable and penetrating book, The Fields Were Green, George Arms favors Whittier above the other Schoolroom Poets. John B. Pickard, who apparently knows more about Whittier than anyone else, is presently editing a multi-volume collection of Whittier's unpublished letters. These volumes will surely be as valuable to Whittier students as his sensitive study of Snow-Bound, "the minor masterpiece"[26] of American literature. Also, Roland

Woodwell will soon publish a new Whittier biography. Two other contemporary critics who have balanced love and objectivity in their studies of the Essex County poet include Edward Wagenknect and Lewis Leary.

Certainly Whittier will never again be as popular as he was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Industrial Revolution has changed the landscapes familiar to those who revered his descriptive nature poetry, and immigrants have replaced the neighbors for whom he always wrote. The audience of his time, has since fractured into thousands of ethnic or interest groups, and religion, art, and politics have retreated further into separate shelters.

Moreover, radical changes in poetic taste and in literary criticism have rendered much nineteenth-century literature and first reviews of that literature shallow and bathetic. How difficult it is for someone whose critical theories have been shaped by reading T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richardson, and Murray Krieger to approach the verse of Whittier, who believed along with his readers that the poet's personality could not be separated from his poetry and that consequently a wicked or selfish person could never write good verse.

And how can someone with a limited knowledge of the Bible even begin to appreciate poetry written during those years when The Scriptures were so well-known and respected that James A. Garfield could quell a draft-riot mob in New York by quoting Psalm 97:2 and that a verse from Numbers was chosen to be the first message sent over the Atlantic Cable?[27] Similarly, during our age of hospital

emergency rooms and rest homes, religious poems written to be read or sung around a deathbed have little appeal. But a hundred years ago, Whittier was praised precisely because he supplied poems for such quiet hours.

> They [Whittier's poems] come to the lips upon all occasions of deep feeling almost as naturally as the scriptures do. . . . They are the Alpha and Omega of deep, strong religious faith. . . . to those who mourn and seek for consolation, how naturally and involuntarily come back lines from his poems they have long treasured, but which perhaps never had a personal application until now.[28]

We who rarely read poetry aloud or in unison, as Whittier's audience did, do him ill tribute by naming a highway after him.[29] After all, Walt Whitman is the muscular vagabond of the open road whose lines capture the racket and sparks falling from the knife-grinder's wheel. But Whittier's rhymes evoke the quietness of the sacred sentimental, and his somber images portray the "sea's long level, dim with rain." During the past seventy years, several critics have written very sentimental pleas for a return to Whittier's poetry and to his gentle, sincere way of life.[30] Perhaps if Marshall McLuhan's prediction is correct that the nation is "moving into a very religious age,"[31] Whittier will again be a popular poet.

Although the differences separating our culture from that which inspired Whittier's muse are great, I believe the first step one should take in studying him (or any of his popular contemporaries) is that of getting into the very atmosphere of nineteenth-century popular culture. This step brings to light valuable but long-neglected popular theories about poetry which prove that Whittier's

readers had many valid reasons for demanding and treasuring the kind of verse he wrote. In brief, the adjective "popular" must not be ignored but understood.

Besides studying popular literary expectations, the critic should try to discover what themes or clusters of symbols pull Whittier's many poems into an organized group. I find that his verses radiate from one or both of two centers. One center is popular culture. W. Harvey-Jellie and Hyatt Waggoner brush by the other center:

> The real Whittier, however, the Whittier so dear to the humble and unsophisticated--the Whittier whose fame will live when the simple life of the past has been lost in the Maelstrom of civil competition--is the Whittier of faith and mysticism. As such, his message possesses something of the perennial and eternal element; it is pregnant and as pertinent to-day as when it fell fresh from his lips. . . . Whittier dazzled the literary world as the foremost spokesman of the mysticism of the restful soul.[32]

> Whittier's contemporaries read him chiefly as a religious poet. . . . He is I think one of a rather small number of religious poets in America whose work is still readable as poetry and not just as devotional exercise.[33]

The phrases "mysticism of the restful soul" and "religious poet" remain abstract hints. Other critics who have more closely examined the religious aspects of Whittier's verse agree that it embodies the ultimate expression of Quaker beliefs, hopes, and ponderings.

> It is my sober judgment that John Greenleaf Whittier grasped more steadily, felt more profoundly, and interpreted more adequately the essential aspects of the Quaker life and faith during the fifty years of his creative period, from 1830 to 1880, than did any other person in the American Society of Friends of that half century. I am unable, furthermore, to think of any English Friend of those same years who saw as

> clearly or who expressed with equal wisdom and balance the universal significance of the central Quaker principles.[34]

Although I admit the value of studying Whittier's poetry along with Woolman's Journal (perhaps the Whittier edition), I believe Whittier transcends both Quaker and religious elements. The other center to his poetry involves more than these, as his first readers definitely realized. With his apparent cooperation and appreciation, early reviewers and biographers repeatedly compared him with the Hebrew prophets, Christ, or with Milton, a later prophet figure.

Today, of course, these nineteenth-century tributes reek of hero worship. But again, we should recall that their authors knew the Bible and probably would not make biblical comparisons ignorantly or whimsically. Their suggestions deserve new investigation, even at the risk of resurrecting the household prophet image of Whittier.

Whittier's general appearance, his facial features, and especially his eyes inspired numerous prophet comparisons. Only three are reprinted here: Lyman Abbott's description of the poet's face, Elizabeth S. Phelps' impression of his eyes, and David A. Wasson's phrenology-based interpretation of the poet's features.

> His illuminated face has made quite real to me the picture in Exodus of Moses when he descended from the mount where he had talked with God and "his face shone." Whittier's was a shining face.[35]

> "Longfellow is sick!" he [Whittier] cried, "very sick! They are very anxious." He leaned back on the carriage cushions, much perturbed. . . . The drive back to Boston was a gloomy one. . . . He scarcely spoke to either of us all the way; but stared solemnly out of the window with eyes that seemed to

> see nothing nearer than the world to which his great friend was called. Every one who knew him can understand what his wonderful eyes must have been to look upon at such a time. . . . Longfellow died, if I am correct about it, two days after. To this day, I seem to see him passing on, through the seer's look in Whittier's eyes.[36]

> . . . and the first thought on seeing him was--"the head of a Hebrew prophet!" It is not Hebrew--Saracen rather--the Jewish type is heavier, more material; but it corresponded strikingly to the conceptions we had formed of the Southern Semitic crania, and the whole make of the man was of the same character. The high cranium, so lofty, especially in the dome--the slight and symmetrical backward slope of the whole head--the powerful level brows, and beneath these the dark, deep eyes, so full of shadowed fire--the Arabian complexion--the sharp-cut, intense lines of the face--the light, tall, erect stature--the quick axial poise of the movement--all these answered with singular accuracy to the picture of those preacher-races which had been shaping itself in our imagination.[37]

But his physical characteristics by themselves did not summon forth these paragraphs and hundreds like them. While looking through engraved portraits or photographs of other nineteenth-century authors, one can find many men who resemble stereotypes of prophets. Yet they are not compared with the ancient prophets. Whittier's religiosity and reform activities are undoubtedly the primary inspirations or reasons for such tributes. B. O. Flower, an American Friend, and Arthur Rowntree, a British Friend, include the words "prophet" and "seer" in the titles of their biographies. Flower's book suggests that the "sincerity and transparency" of Whittier's life are the best embodiment of "the teachings of the great Galilean" to appear during the nineteenth century.[38] Bayard Taylor believed Whittier to be the "high priest" of American poets,[39] and R. H. Stoddard and Whitman Bennett portray him walking and talking with "seers and prophets" all of his life like the "patriarchs of old" and having the "truth"

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revealed to him while watching "the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night."[40]

Stoddard also reports in his short biography that Whittier, like Milton, possessed a "Hebraic cast of mind."[41] Moreover, the publisher Fields dedicated his company's edition of Milton's prose to a grateful Whittier.[42] Possibly Whittier himself wrote the 1889 sketch appearing in Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography which compares him with Milton.[43] When George Childs donated the Milton window for the Church of the House of Commons, Archdeacon Frederic W. Farrar could think of no one "so suitable" as Whittier to write the four-line dedication for the window. In 1888 he told Whittier why he chose him:

> I think that if Milton had now been living, you are the poet whom he would have chosen to speak of him, as being the poet with whose whole tone of mind he would have been most in sympathy.[44]

Because it is typical, and because it summarizes popular sentiment towards Whittier, Mrs. M. B. Claflin's description of his life also deserves printing here. It echoes one of Phoebe Cary's last poems which calls him "a cantical of love."[45]

> He seemed more akin to God than most human beings, in his child-like trust and faith in the fatherhood of the divine Being, and in his exquisite love to Him whom the Father sent to teach us the brotherhood of man. Mr. Whittier's love to his kind, his godlike justice and mercy in all his dealings with his fellow-men, were so apparent that it was not easy to turn aside from the straight and narrow path of righteousness when dealing with him.[46]

Thus the household prophet image of Whittier grew, until the middle of this century, when, to the joy of critics, it was forgotten. A few traces of the legend, however, do linger in modern criticisms. Edwin Markhim, in his poem written for the unveiling of the Whittier bust in the Hall of Fame in 1905, calls Whittier the "prophet king" and the "God-touched laureate of the slave" who snatched up "Isaiah's stormy lyre" and "towered a flame upon the age."[47] More recently, Albert Mordell said that he "is one of the few prophets in American literature" and is "the Milton of America rather than its Burns."[48]

But these remarks, like most of those made a century earlier, are too vague to be of much value. They hint at or indicate the prophet center of Whittier's poetry, but they give no thorough examination of his poems, showing what makes them similar to the writings of Isaiah. Furthermore, they do not define prophecy. The following quotations at least begin to supply these necessities. The first two are from nineteenth-century sources, and the last is from Aaron Kramer's 1968 book, The Prophetic Tradition in American Poetry 1835-1900.

> The poet Whittier always calls to mind the prophet-bards of the olden time. There is much of the old Semitic fire about him, and ethical and religious subjects seem to occupy his entire mind. . . . His poems are so thoroughly imbued with this religious spirit that they seem to us almost like the sacred writings of the different times and nations of the world. . . . They are current coin with reformers the world over. . . . Whoever would best express his entire confidence in the triumph of the right, and his reliance upon God's power against the devices of man, finds the words of Whittier upon his lips. . . . To the wronged, the downtrodden, and the suffering they appeal as strongly as the Psalms of David. He is the great High Priest of Literature. But few priests at any time have had such an audience and such an influence as he. . . . Who can ever estimate the power which his strong words had in the days that are now but a fading memory,--in the great conflict which freed the bodies of so

> many million slaves? And who can ever estimate the power his strong words have had throughout his whole career in freeing the minds of other millions from the shackles of unworthy old beliefs? His blows have been strong, steady, persistent. He has never had the fear of man before his eyes.[49]

> Our Whittier was one of this elect line of seers and makers. . . . To his eyes our rugged New England was a holy land, the White Hills were authentic Sinais and Olivets, and the Merrimac a river of God, whose wavelets were set to the measure of a ceaseless psalm. The necessity laid on him as a poet was accepted by Whittier with the glad and solemn earnestness of a prophet, and for sixty years he was more influential as a teacher of religion than any other man in America. Believing as he did in God and human nature he was a foredoomed emancipator. Whether the slave was black or white, whether the tyrant was an evil law or a superstition that held men captive in the service of an infinite hate, Whittier never ceased to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. And he had the felicity, rare in the experience of prophets, of living to see his message headed both by the state and the church.[50]

> Many Whittier poems do overflow in ardent cliches; yet to reject him for not being a Whitman or an Emily Dickinson is to miss what he is. If the successful prophet is he who compels the attention, irritates the conscience, restores the vision, and incites the motion of his own time and people, then Whitman is--as he knows himself to be--unsuccessful, and Whittier is, for an amazing span of years, brilliantly triumphant.[51]

But even Kramer does not do Whittier's prophetic powers justice, because in his book he often emphasizes a sociological rather than a biblical definition of prophecy so that he can include non-Christian authors who also cry out against the political evils of their times. Just as it is impossible to appreciate Whittier's popularity without first exploring popular nineteenth-century ideas about poetry, so too it is impossible to understand why Whittier's first readers called him a prophet unless detailed comparisons are made between his theology and poetry and that of the Hebrew prophets.

Furthermore, it must be understood that the two centers of his poetry, popularity and prophecy, complement one another. What good is a prophet with no audience? Fortunately Whittier's popularity assured him of an audience, almost right from the first. Sometimes his audience shouted threats at him; but they did listen. John Greenleaf Whittier is the first American poet to consciously and consistently develop the image of the poet as prophet and present that image to a large audience. His major contribution to American letters is that he first defined and made popular the prophet-poet image. During his years as a reformer, he knew what popular literary taste was and wrote many extremely popular poems. And when his abolitionist days ended and his fame was world-wide, he still posed as a prophet and wrote some fierce prophecy against his society. For more than sixty years he successfully blended sweet melodies from the gilt-edged lyre of popularity with harsher notes from the lightning-strung lyre of prophecy. Both sounds were forever changed and enriched by the balancing power of Whittier's good-hearted and defiant genius. The following chapters will define popularity and prophecy and trace their expression in Whittier's poetry.

NOTES--CHAPTER I

[1]Henry Miller, "Reflections on Writing," in The Creative Process, edited by Brewster Ghiselin (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1952), p. 183.

[2]Albert Mordell, Quaker Militant John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston: Riverside Press, 1933), p. 211.

[3]John B. Pickard, John Greenleaf Whittier (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1961), p. 43.

[4]Anonymous, "The Letter-Box," St. Nicholas, 5 (March, 1878), p. 372. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Chapters From a Life (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), p. 163.

[5]Accounts of Whittier's wealth vary, as the following articles prove. J. J. McAleer, "Whittier's Quest for Humility," Bulletin of the Friends' Historical Association, 50 (1961), 42. John Anderson, Jr., "The Library of John Greenleaf Whittier," Emerson Society Quarterly, 34 (1964), 70.

[6]Samuel T. Pickard, Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier (Volume 2; Boston: Riverside Press, 1894), pp. 726-727.

[7]Anderson, "Library," p. 70.

[8]Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England (new revised edition; New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1937), p. 400.

[9]Anderson, "Library," p. 34.

[10]Mordell, Militant, p. 297.

[11]J. A. Pollard, "Whittier's Esteem in Great Britian," Bulletin of the Friends' Historical Association, 38 (1949), 34-35. See also the following. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, John Greenleaf Whittier (New York: Macmillan Company, 1902), p. 1. N. C. Talbot, "English Reactions to American Literature: A Study in the Periodicals, 1870-1887" (unpublished thesis for the degree of Ph.D., Leeds, 1962).

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[13]Higginson, Whittier, p. 70. Francis H. Underwood, John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), pp. 394-395. Also see Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 380. Of further interest is Whittier's "Suffrage for Women," VII, 247-248.

[14]Frances Mary Pray, "A Study of Whittier's Apprenticeship as a Poet: 1825-1835" (unpublished thesis for the degree of Ph.D., Bristol, New Hampshire: Musgrove Printing House, 1930), pp. 33, 195, 200-201. Higginson, Whittier, pp. 86-88. Also see J. A. Polland, "Whittier on Labor Unions," New England Quarterly, 12 (March, 1939), 99-102.

[15]Of interest concerning Whittier's use of superstitions is Harry Oster, "Whittier's Use of the Sage in His Ballads," Studies in American Literature, 26 (1960), 58-77.

[16]Mamoru Ohmori, "John Greenleaf Whittier and American National Literature," Essays in English and American Literature, 14 (1961), 221-222.

[17]Edward E. Hale, "Impression of Whittier," Outlook, 87 (December, 1907), 861.

[18]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 84.

[19]"Review" of Songs of Labor and Other Poems from Brownson's Quarterly Review, October, 1850, p. 540. Reprinted by Lewis E. Weeks, Jr., "Whittier Criticism Over the Years," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 100 (1964), 165.

[20]Higginson, Whittier, p. 99.

[21]Weeks, "Criticism," p. 175.

[22]Harvey B. Marks, The Rise and Growth of English Hymnody (Philadelphia: The Blakiston Company, 1938), p. 180. H. A. L. Jefferson, Hymns in Christian Worship (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 247.

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[24]W. Harvey-Jellie, "A Forgotten Poet," Dalhousie Review, 19 (April, 1939), 93.

[25]Osborn T. Smallwood, "The Historical Significance of Whittier's Anti-Slavery Poems as Reflected by Their Political and Social Background," Journal of Negro History, 35 (April, 1950), 150-173. See also Bliss Perry, "Whittier for Today," Atlantic Monthly, 100 (December, 1907), 858-859.

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[27]James Stacy Stevens, "Whittier's Use of the Bible," The Maine Bulletin, 33 (December, 1930), University of Maine Studies, second series, number 16, pp. 79, 81.

[28]Hattie Tyng Griswold, Home Life of Great Authors (6th edition; Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1886), p. 238. See also Robert S. Rantoul, "Some Personal Reminiscences of the Poet Whittier," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 37 (April, 1901), 131.

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[30]For these sentimental pleas see the following. Perry, Today, p. 857. Scott, Exiles, p. 28. H. Mumford Jones, "Whittier Reconsidered," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 93 (1957), 232. Harvey-Jellie, "Forgotten," p. 100.

[31]Tom Bowers, "Christianity Terrifying--McLuhan," Michigan State News, February 13, 1970, p. 13.

[32]Harvey-Jellie, "Forgotten," p. 95. See also B. O. Flower, Whittier: Prophet, Seer and Man (Boston: The Coming Age Company, 1899), p. 105.

[33]Hyatt H. Waggoner, "What I Had I Gave: Another Look at Whittier," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 95 (1959), 34. See also Albert Edward Bailey, The Gospel in Hymns (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 536.

[34]Edward D. Snyder, "Seventy Years of Whittier Biographies," Bulletin of the Friends' Historical Association, 43 (1954), 2. See also Henry J. Cadbury, "Whittier's Religion," Christian Century, 75 (February, 1958), 167.

[35]Lyman Abbott, "Snap-shots of My Contemporaries: John Greenleaf Whittier, Mystic," Outlook, 127 (January, 1921), 97.

[36]Phelps, A Life, pp. 158-159.

[37]Quoted by W. J. Linton, Life of John Greenleaf Whittier (London: Walter Scott, Limited, 1893), p. 184.

[38]Flower, Whittier, p. 131.

[39]Anderson, "Library," p. 25.

[40]R. H. Stoddard, "John Greenleaf Whittier," Appletons' Journal, 5 (April, 1871), 434. Whitman Bennett, Whittier: Bard of Freedom (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 268. Also see Higginson, Whittier, pp. 153-154 and Rantoul, "Reminiscences," p. 131.

[41]Stoddard, "Whittier," p. 434.

[42]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 506.

[43]McAleer, "Humility," p. 44.

[44]Anderson, "Library," p. 11.

[45]Bailey, Gospel, p. 542.

[46]Mary B. Claflin, "John Greenleaf Whittier As I Knew Him," in Personal Recollections of English and American Poets, edited by Manley Woodbury Kilgore and George Frank Woodbury (n.p.: 1935), p. 68.

[47]Mordell, Militant, p. viii.

[48]Ibid., pp. 321, xv.

[49]Griswold, Home Life, pp. 238-239. See also Truman J. Backus, Shaw's New History of English Literature (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1875), p. 395.

[50]William Henry Savage, "Whittier's Religion," in Personal Recollections of English and American Poets, edited by Manley Woodbury Kilgore and George Frank Woodbury (n.p.: 1935), p. 80.

[51]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 147.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTER AND FUNCTION OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS POETRY, 1820-1860

What precisely is meant by popular American nineteenth-century religious poetry? Religious poetry, in this study, means Christian poetry (Catholic and Protestant) which is based upon the Bible, calls its readers to thankfully and humbly worship the Savior, assures all of God's loving Providence, comforts believers who mourn, provides instruction in the ways of piety, calls attention to heavenly themes, and enumerates Christian virtues, duties, trials, and joys. Poems which sing of Law, Beauty, Duty, Nature, or Virtue are up-lifting and moral but are not religious according to this Christian definition.

Since hundreds of American newspapers, almanacs, magazines, periodicals, and journals published thousands and thousands of religious poems, I chose to examine only those which were printed before the Civil War (see Appendix I for post-War culture study) in Godey's Lady's Book and in The Christian Examiner and Theological Review. Because these two magazines were indeed popular and are typical of the others, they represent them well. To complement and explain the excellent variety of religious verse they contain, both magazines (especially The Examiner) provided lengthy and valuable

articles concerning the nature of poetry and its relation to faith and the nineteenth-century way of life.

Religious verses were by far the most popular art form of this age, because they grew out of and enhanced the nineteenth-century's preoccupation with revival meetings, hymn sings, Sabbath schools, and churches. Churches were so numerous in 1850 that they could accommodate 70 percent of the total white population. Needless to say, ministers, Sunday School teachers, and revival leaders, as well as editors of popular magazines, sought and deeply appreciated the labors of hymn writers and devotional poets. Let him who would begin to understand nineteenth-century popular poetry study first the Christian muse. Hymns and meditative lyrics were as much a part of nineteenth-century life as stereo records and televisions are of our age.

Aside from content, Christian poetry lies near the heart of popular literature in another significant way. Stylistically, religious verse closely resembles other popular types of poetry: love poems (verses wept over by young virgins trembling like winter-stricken birds), patriotic poems, legendary or narrative verse, laments over the loss of youth, nature lyrics, and translations ("The Moon," an Icelandic Song, literally translated). Even the most irreligious, epicurean, or transcendental poem could be identical to a Christian lyric in metre, in nature of imagery, and in function of rhyme. The following poem, for example, though thematically non-Christian, is written in a common hymn metre, Eight and Sevens:

Cui Bono?

What is Hope? a smiling rainbow
  Children follow thro' the wet;
'Tis not here, still yonder, yonder--
  Never urchin found it yet.

What is Life? a thawing iceboard
  On a sea with sunny shore.
Gay we sail--it melts beneath us--
  We are sunk, and seen no more.

What is Man? a foolish baby,
  Fighting fierce for hollow nuts;
Demanding all, deserving nothing--
  One small grave is what he gets.

Unfortunately, much nineteenth-century literature seems ridiculous or at best dull to us now, even though it was reverently read by its first audience. But now who would not laugh at a poem describing the marriage of a mute gentleman and a deaf lady which ends this way:

> No word! No sound! and yet a solemn rite
> Proceedeth 'mid the festive lighted hall.

Or at "To Melancholy," by Maria to Edwin, which is prefaced by this pointed apology:

> The following stanzas were written by a young Woman, who, when composing them, was labouring under a very considerable degree of active mania.

But if popular artists like Francis S. L. Osgood, N. P. Willis, J. H. Kimball, Laetitia Elizabeth Landon, the Rev. Hobart Caunter, James Montgomery, T. A. Worrall, W. Gilmore Simms, Bayard Taylor, M. E. MacMichael, Horatio E. Hale, H. T. Tuckerman, Leman Grimstone, Miss E. Gooch, Seba Smith, and N. C. Brooks wrote

unfortunate poems sometimes, they also wrote superb religious poems sometimes. John Ross Dix's description of heaven is still touching:

> . . . a noble band,
> Redeemed from every tribe, from every land
> Shall walk with us by overflowing streams,
> And hold high converse on immortal themes.
> What bliss to roam those radiant fields among,
> And hear of Abraham's faith from Abraham's tongue;
> Mark rapt Isaiah's look of holy fire,
> Or list to melodies from David's lyre--
> Converse with him whose voice delayed the sun--
> Learn wisdom from the lips of Solomon,
> And him of Patmos see, to whom 'twas given,
> On earth, to lift the veils of Hell and Heaven.

Mrs. Felicia Hemans, a British poetess who was immensely popular in America, wrote these simple but impressive lines:

> Oh! beautiful is Heaven, and bright
> With long, long, summer days!
> I see its lilies gleam in light,
> Where many a fountain plays.

Shocking realism veins the blank verse "Scripture Anthologies," composed by N. C. Brooks. The following passage, which describes the beheading of John The Baptist, is powerful and vivid.

> The man of blood bore in the gory head
> On reeking platter, while the pallid lips
> With life still quivered, and the blanching cheek,
> And o'er his dying eyes the lids were drawn,
> Like faded violets. In the gasp of death,
> In all its lividness, in all its writhe
> Of mortal agony, with gouts of blood
> Stiffening the beard, clotting the mangled locks--
> The youthful maiden, with complacent smile
> And step of triumph, bore the bleeding head
> Unto her mother.

But what lies between the poems which twentieth-century readers laugh at and those which seem modern and strong? Sheer boredom--at first reading. The following example, typical of nineteenth-century religious verse, is composed of vague phrases and worn out imagery.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

He [Christ] points them to the red cloud's wings
Above the radiant east unfurl'd;
And lo! the sun majestic springs
In gladness on the waking world.
The rock and hill--the wave and shore--
The field and forest are all bright,
And Nature's thousand voices pour
Her full heart-breathings of delight.
'Tis like your God! his gentle rain,
His liberal sunshine widely falls
Alike upon the desert plain,
And yonder city's towering walls.
The undeserving of his care,
And they whose thoughts are all above,
The guilty and the grateful share
A Father's never-weary love.
. . . . . .
Be like thy God--be like the sun--
And where thy healing power extends,
Let willing deeds of love be done
Alike to enemies and friends;

How should one approach such poetry? A writer calling himself Clarence A. F. gives this advice in the Lady's Book of 1847:

> When a critic cannot get out of himself to comprehend life different than his own, and read another's work in the very atmosphere where it was written, he will not show us the truth, though he may think he has the voice of an oracle.[1]

The truth of his suggestion can not be overemphasized--especially in studying the popular poetry (religious or otherwise) of his time. Getting "in the very atmosphere where it was written," though nearly

impossible to do, is absolutely essential, because the verse was written to satisfy definite needs of nineteenth-century American society. Poems were not merely enjoyed during this period; they were used. Poets rendered a household service through their art.

How were poems used, or what were their functions? First, popular poets fashioned poems specifically to muffle the worries, sooth the tensions, and relax the minds of their readers. The nineteenth-century reader found his respite from perplexing cares in melodic stanzas which portrayed life's "highest, clearest, calmest, best hours."[2] Longfellow's "The Day Is Done" describes, and is itself precisely this kind of poem.

> The day is done, and the darkness
> Falls from the wings of Night,
> As a feather is wafted downward
> From an eagle in his flight.
>
> I see the lights of the village
> Gleam through the rain and the mist.
> And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me,
> That my soul cannot resist.
>
> A feeling of sadness and longing,
> That is not akin to pain,
> And resembles sorrow only,
> As the mist resembles the rain.
>
> Come read to me some poem,
> Some simple and heartfelt lay,
> That shall soothe this restless feeling,
> And banish the thoughts of Day. . . .

This excerpt from a review of the 1833 edition of Miss Gould's Poems further emphasizes the public's need and respect for afterhours poetry:

> It is impossible to find fault with Miss Gould's poetry. It is so sweet and unpretending, so pure in purpose and so gentle in expression, that criticism is disarmed of all severity, and engaged to say nothing of it but good. It is poetry for a united family circle, in their hours of peace and leisure. For such a companionship it was made, and into such it will find, and has found, its way.[3]

As this passage indicates, the reverent optimism and gentle assurance of Christian poetry (which suited Miss Gould's talents exactly) made hearth-side hours entertaining, satisfying, and comforting.

According to nineteenth-century literary criticism, popular poetry, besides evoking restful and hypnotic magic, also possessed evangelical powers. It was seen as the "Priestess of Religion," because it shed "a rosy light upon the path of duty" and presented "Images of what is lovely, affecting, and glorious in human character." Thus, poetry could serve as a "source of much pleasure as well as improvement."[4] This produced lines like the following, which are soothing and yet didactic.

> Let me my weary mind recline
> On that eternal love of Thine,
> And human thoughts forget;
> Childlike attend what thou wilt say;
> Go forth and do it while 't is day,
> Yet never leave my sweet retreat.

These comments, published in 1826, reveal the tone and heart of popular literary theories.

> We . . . believe that poetry, far from injuring society, is one of the great instruments of its refinement and exaltation. It lifts the mind above ordinary life, . . . and awakens the consciousness of its affinity with what is pure and noble. In its legitimate and highest efforts, it has the same tendency and aim with Christianity; that is to spiritualize our nature. . . . Poetry has a natural alliance with our best affections. It

> delights in the beauty and sublimity of outward nature and of the soul. . . . Its great tendency and purpose is to carry the mind beyond and above the beaten, dusty, weary walks of ordinary life;--to lift it into a purer element, and to breathe into it more profound and generous emotion. It . . . strengthens our interest in human nature by vivid delineations of its tenderest and loftiest feelings, spreads our sympathies over all classes of society, knits us by new ties with universal being, and through the brightness of its prophetic visions helps faith to lay hold on the future life.[5]

Clearly, then, poems were expected to tranquilize their readers and bring them the gospel of salvation and Christian duty--sometimes both at once. A third function is closely related to the second; if poetry showed man that he is more than dust, it also showed him that nature is more than granite and dew.

> Who has not seen a leaf whirled about by the wind, and then lodged in the hollow of a tree? But who except a poet would have recalled the circumstance? Who but a poet would have found in it an analogy to any thing in the moral world? This is to look upon nature with a poet's eye, and to interpret nature with a poet's sense.[6]

In order to fashion nature "into a thousand emblems of spiritual things," the poet was expected to use his imagination as a "mediator between the senses and the soul."[7] "The Sermon on the Mount" (quoted above) obviously moves from nature description to divine teaching. Similarly, a good many Christian hymns, usually grouped in a section called "The Seasons," also bridge or link natural revelation and divine revelation, sea shore and sacred thoughts, enjoyment and emblem, senses and the Scriptures.

Fourthly, popular religious poetry was intended to comfort families mourning the death of a friend or relative. Death, during the nineteenth century, formed a trinity with birth and marriage,

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as sacred as that of the Divine Trinity. The death bed summoned family reverence and prayerful silence. During this wait, simply-worded lyrics about heaven and Jesus were read aloud or sung. And they gave comfort.

But to that bright land of love I go,
With the fountain clear of ceaseless flow,
Where Sharon's rose and lily grow,
  And the balm of life perfumes the air;
While drop no tears--no grave is seen
To mar the fields of living green;
No storms obscure the sky serene;
  No piercing thorn can wound me there.

Closely related to the consoling function of popular religious poetry is the fact that a great many poets tried to make their readers weep. Why? Because many families found it not only enjoyable but sincerely necessary to weep over poems such as this:

LINES ON THE DEATH OF
LITTLE CHILDREN

I came where, in its snow-white shroud,
  The form of little Willie lay;--
How my heart ached! I wept aloud--
  For anguish I could scarcely pray.

"Oh God! and is this all," I cried,
  "That's left of little Willie now?"
And bending down by his bedside,
  I kissed that cold and stony brow.
. . . . . .
Dear Willie! what a weight of grief,
  What agony I've borne for thee!
But oh, unspeakable relief!
  To feel, thy spirit now is free:--

To feel that thou art safe and well
  From pangs that rend mortality;
That thou art gone, sweet lamb! to dwell
  'Mid the pure pasture of the sky.

The reason why such an astonishing number of "little Willie" poems appear in popular literature and why they were appreciated and even demanded by their audience remains a mystery until one examines the mortality figures for nineteenth-century America. Of the approximately 250,000 whites who died in the United States during 1850, well over 100,000 were children under ten years old. And of the 100,000 nearly 97,000 were children under five. In other words, in 1850 almost 40 percent of all deaths occurred to children under five years old. Baffling illnesses and farm accidents stole many children away from their families during the nineteenth century. Writing and crying over "little Willie" poems was not a fad but a common, tragic necessity.

'T was in the time of early spring,
  When the small rain falls soft and fast,
When the first vernal warblers sing,
  In hope that winter's hour is past;--

'T was then our darling's grave we made,
  Where earth was moist with Nature's tears;
And there, in silent sorrow, laid
  The blighted hope of future years.

Two misconceptions concerning the sentimental experience (crying over a poem) must be corrected. First of all, this experience was by no means spontaneous or chaotic; it was carefully anticipated by poets and thoughtfully prepared for by readers. Moreover, its effect was both refreshing and profound. Secondly, there really is no such thing as a sentimental poem--only a sentimental experience which demanded more of the reader than of the poem. To be sure, the poet went to great pains to prepare a special type of poem which would

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help the sentimental experience to occur (as will be shown later), but the poem, through its style and desecription, served only as a catalyst to sentimental ecstasy. Thus, the poem was secondary, and the reader's preparation primary. Before a poem could encourage sentimental ecstasy to take place, the reader needed four elements. If any one of the four was missing from the reader's being, the ecstasy would never occur. Besides having a death poem before her, the soon-to-weep reader (1) had to have experienced a loss similar to that described in the poem, (2) had to still be sorrowful over the loss, (3) had to know that others had also experienced similar sorrow (weeping alone was sadness not sentimental release), and (4) had to be religious enough to believe in the soul's immortality and salvation. Perhaps the third and fourth necessities do not seem to fit, but they were definitely essential, for only when individual sadness was seen to be part of cursed mankind's sorrow, and contrasted with God's eternal love, could the full power of the sentimental ecstasy be enjoyed.

> Expressions and descriptions of human suffering, instead of depressing us with melancholy, become sublime or touching, when that suffering is brought into direct or indirect contrast with man's nature and hopes as an immortal being, or is represented as calling into exercise those virtues which can exist in such a being alone. There is no pathos in the mere lamentations of an individual over his own peculiar lot, or over the condition of a race to which he feels it an unhappiness to belong.[8]

Biographical fact, memory, sensitivity to the sufferings of all men, and faith in Christ's loving providence fused around even the vaguest and simplest of poems, giving them splendor and depth enough "to bid

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the big tear start, / Unchallenged, from its shrine, / And thrill the quivering heart / With pity's voice."

Sentimental rapture which crystallized around nature poetry also depended upon the same types of necessities. Before one could weep over a nature poem, he (1) had to have seen a lake similar to the one described by the poem, (2) had to remember the sight vividly (the reader's memories--not the poet's trite images--summoned tears), (3) had to know that others had also witnessed similar natural grandeur, and (4) had to be religious enough to believe that nature contains moral lessons and teaches eternal promises.

A sixth (and final) service popular poets rendered their readers is easy to recognize but difficult to describe or explain. Magazine verse (especially religious) attempted to instill the public with child-like virtues. In nineteenth-century eyes, children instinctively adored natural beauty, were blessed with Christian innocence and humility, and were free of the hypocrisy, passions, and obsessions which ruined the sensitivity of adults. Literary critics argued that such child-like virtues enabled one to properly understand nature.

> May it not be assumed that a warm perception, and high enjoyment of what is beautiful in creation proves some degree of virtue? Can the feelings which are not in harmony with themselves, respond to the melodies of nature? Do not the corrosions of hatred, the festerings of remorse, pour a poison-cup over her purest charms? Can the heart which is a prey to the grosser passions, inflated by ambition or seared with the love of gain, humble itself to the simplicity of the lessons, which the flowers and the fields teach? Do not even the artificial customs of society impair the relish for rural pleasures, and tempt the spirit away from the trustful child-like adoration of the Supreme?[9]

These same endowments, according to the critics, also enabled poets to write verse. Childhood and poetic genius are consistently equated.

> We believe there is poetry, eloquence, genius in every child that is born; but early education (and that, to be sure, is a very comprehensive cause), the influence of artificial, conventional life, and the world's delusions quench the heaven-kindled spark, or so encrust the soul that the fire cannot find its way outward. . . . As a child grows up, he is ashamed to be a poet.[10]

Adult poets, then, either had never lost their childhood naturalness, or had rediscovered it by reading poems describing and praising child-like virtues and genius.

And what did such spiritually child-like poets do? They wrote child-like poems (humble, harmonious, pious, natural) to help their readers become child-like again. Here, of course, the circle takes shape. No poet or poem could properly interpret or transfer to others the Bible's message of humility or nature's message of pure harmony, unless both poet and poem first became their message--became child-like.

This belief also explains why childhood and death merged in the nineteenth-century poetic mind. Only a poet blessed with child-like vision and faith could interpret death's significance as a part of nature controlled by God's providence and promise. Furthermore, the thought that children possess poetic genius greatly added to the pathos of "little Willie" poems.

Although religious verse served household functions, it was never purely utilitarian and stylistically shoddy. It was artless,

perhaps, and naive, but rarely careless or obtuse. The author knew precisely why he wrote clear, plain, quiet poems. Undoubtedly, complicated metres and surprising language would obliterate a sentimental experience by drawing the reader's attention away from his own background, memories, and faith and too much towards the poem's artistic structure. What the reader brought to the poem was far more important than any stylistic brilliance and freshness displayed in the poem. In fact, nineteenth-century readers distrusted poetry which displayed feelings. What they sought instead was

> the presence without the display, of a tenderness and pathos, an elegant simplicity and devotional feeling, which win upon the heart, and sometimes touch it as with strains from unearthly worlds.[11]

A display of artistic language would only "caricature sentiments, and present the most grotesque images to fancy." One critic, who praised Bryant's Poems (1836), claimed that "he breathes a calm and quiet strain that harmonizes well with the gentle excitement awakened by contemplating the beauties of Nature."[12]

Secondly, religious poets purposely filled their stanzas with "easy transitions," "natural associations," and "the free, simple, unaffected language of the heart,"[13] because complexity would quickly garble the spiritual lessons they meant to teach. The popular poet's audience, while literate, was hardly sophisticated or educated beyond practical skills. The majority of adults and children demanded simple poetry, and those poets who put Christ's example of humility first in their thoughts and who sincerely intended their lyrics to spread the gospel avoided writing anything

new, rare, or complex. Christ did, after all, stress charity and simplicity rather than wit. Should not the Christian poet follow Christ's example? While composing religious verse, should he forget this advice?

> Religion ought to be left in her native simplicity, rather than hang her ears with counterfeit pearls.[14]

Of course, popular bards forgot their pride sometimes and wrote some embarrassing stanzas; for this they were chided:

> We always regret to find dull, prosy, unmeaning stories and poems palmed off under the title of "moral and religious," as though nothing could be pious that was not stupid.[15]

A hollow or awkwardly trite poem would seem as irreverent at a death-bed scene as would a too-clever poem. Both would be insulting and insincere; simplicity, tenderness, and imagery had to blend silently.

> Come to the bed of death!
> Step lightly--check that rising sigh;
> Behold the parting of the breath,
> Without an agony;
> Behold how softly fades
> The light and glory in that eye.
> As gently as the twilight shades
> The azure sky;
> Come and bow in thankfulness
> To Him who life's last hour can bless!

In many ways, then, the religious and the sentimental, as they were expressed in popular verse, were similar. Both demanded poems sufficiently vague and simple for the reader to identify with easily, and both required more of him than of the poem. Poets were faced with creating verses which were graceful enough to hold the reader's attention, but not so stunning as to make him forget himself.

Another reason why nineteenth-century religious poets wrote sweetly quiet poetry sails against the gales of modern trends in poetry. Romantic reviewers constantly emphasized that truth was sweet and calm. Therefore, poems consisting of "language and imagery offensive to good taste" embodied no truth.

> Especially in a community like ours, where so many harsh and excited voices are sounding, we gladly hear the gentler accents of the bard. At a time when truth and conscience themselves are made not seldom to speak in a tone of severity borrowed from the passions, we are glad to have their own proper sweetness restored to them in the numbers of the Muse.[16]

Since truth was sweet, slavery and other disturbing topics were unsuited to poetry. L. A. Godey and Sarah Hale, who scarcely dared to whisper about women's rights, kept all mention of slavery out of their magazine. And The Christian Examiner, which bravely discussed capital punishment and the American Indian problem, at first refused to "support . . . any particular theory upon a subject so embarrassing" as slavery.[17] Later, however, it published descriptive articles about it. Popular reviewers made one thing powerfully clear; the horror which Garrison battled with his cleaver-edged eccentricity was hardly a topic for prose, and never one for poetry. Paradoxically, the age which idolozed heroic Milton as "the sublimest of men,"[18] feared to praise the strong verses eeeked out by its own remnant of reformers.

A fourth advantage afforded by the humbleness and vagueness of popular verse is analogous to the virtues of a treasured tobacco pipe, which pleasantly reminds the smoker of many other relaxing smokes he enjoyed and the happy occasions surrounding them. So too

with the poetry. Since uniqueness was discouraged, these poems commonly resembled one another. One poem could, therefore, bring to the reader's mind several other poems he had enjoyed, and one peaceful reading hour could recall the comfort of previous reading sessions. Thus the popular poem heightened its effect not by displaying its own peculiar beauties but by calling upon the reader's memory.

The popular poet's avoidance of earthy or robust imagery stemmed from the common belief that poetry should extract and concentrate "life's ethereal essence," arrest its "volatile fragrance," and prolong its "more refined but evanescent joys." Moreover, popular religious verse fitted the nineteenth century's definition of meditation; "pausing on truth already discovered."[19] Because poets were expected to spiritualize society, and not to present new theological truths, they relied heavily upon traditional and biblical imagery. Never-changing truths were expressed in never-changing words. Popular taste dictated that God, slavation, and heaven were subjects best described through abstraction and understatement, which did not mean that the result need be ineffective. An example of tastefully restrained understatement is this brief description of a saved soul meeting Jesus in heaven:

> And away through their midst came the
> Savior of men.
> And my heart he engraved with his love-
> writing pen,
> And he gave me the crown which the
> Cherubim wore,
> And he whispered, "Go forth, thou art
> mortal no more."

The nineteenth century demanded what critics called a "truly American literature," constructed out of the vocabulary of everyday speech and from images of familiar American landscapes and home life. The Christian Examiner of 1845 expressed great concern for verse couched in the language of ordinary men, avoiding a false poetic diction:

> The truth, we believe, is, that if a man has the spirit of poetry in him, he will be more apt to utter it in the strong, simple speech of everyday, homely life, especially if he be dealing with subjects familiar to every eye and heart, than to resort to that hereditary stock of phrases called "poetic diction."[20]

Popular poetry of this character attempted to unite people--to give the nation coherence. Bryant, for instance was deeply respected because he did exactly this; said one reviewer:

> He deals not in those obscure thoughts and images which present themselves to a small class only of thinkers, but pours the soft light of his genius over the common path on which the great multitude is moving. His poetry is simple and unaffected, beautiful without being overloaded with ornament, inspired by quiet communion with nature, not a transcript from the writings of others.[21]

Another reason why popular poets kept their stanzas clean and clear results from the belief that poetry and music had much in common. The most captivating poems, critics believed, were those which could be set to music or which were intrinsically melodic in metre and rhyme. Bryant's "Death of the Flowers" enchanted its readers with musical charms:

> Here is description, here is feeling, and here is music, too, music of the most tender soul-subduing kind.[22]

As the adjective "soul-subduing" hints, critics realized that poetry's musical qualities, like music itself, possessed powers beyond those which merely gave pleasure.

> Music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is a bitter enemy; for it removes from the heart the weight of sorrows and the fascination of evil thoughts. Music is a kind and gentle sort of discipline: it refines the passion and improves the understanding. Those who love music are gentle and honest in their tempers.[23]

Similarly, rhyme, while adding grace to verse, strengthens the moral thrust of poetry:

> Rhyme has a nobler mission than merely to tickle the ear and please children. Perhaps the pleasure derived from it is akin to that which comes from listening to the echo in fields. Two lines ending harmoniously seem like the mouths of two witnesses establishing and enforcing the thought expressed.[24]

Given the nineteenth-century's moral tone, the communal vigor of music, and the plain strength of popular verse, probably the most effective poetry written during this time was the hymn, which not only combined music and religion with poetry but also greatly simplified memorization of spiritual lessons. Seemingly simple and artless, the hymn-poem was anything but that. Although it avoided acrobatic metrical contortions and stayed with traditional forms and images, a great deal of skill and art went into the lyrics, which often were reprinted as a religious poem. A listing (see Appendix II) of the hymn metres understood and recognized by average nineteenth-century churchgoers cannot help but impress modern readers. A knowledge of hymn metres enables one to appreciate the artfulness of poems which at first appear as simple as nursery rhymes. Those who read the poems

which appeared in the journals, and who sang the hymns whose lyrics the popular poets composed, knew the skillful from the awkward, and appreciated the competence of the skilled. Those bards who ignored hymn metrics and/or rhyme schemes soon lost popularity. N. C. Brooks, for example, composed over twenty-four blank verse "Scripture Anthologies" between 1840 and 1847, but his poetic retellings of biblical history were never popular for long. He and his imitators faded into obscurity, while less-profound and less-erudite but more-musical poets grew in fame.

A few disturbing questions remain (and probably always will remain) unanswered about nineteenth-century poetic theory. Is it true, as romantic readers assumed, that a selfish man could never write poetry and that an evil man could neither create nor understand religious poems? Can poet, poem, and message ever be separated? And how valuable to society is intellectual genius which is void of "Moral beauty"? Should "Moral Excellence . . . be estimated far above Intellectual Superiority, because of its purifying effect on the heart"? Do humble religious poets help mankind more than authors such as "Byron, and Voltaire, and Rousseau" who "were almost gods" in understanding but who "destroyed every virtuous principle and feeling" of their readers?[25]

> The soul's divine whom God employs
> To comfort humankind--rejoice,
> While Falsehood groans, to hear thy voice
> So clear and true,
> Whose swelling music drowns the noise
> Of Folly's crew.
> . . . . . .

Oh! ye self-honoring bards and sages,
Whom busy vanity engages
In making names for coming ages,
      Ye little feel
That God will criticize your pages
      Without appeal.

NOTES--CHAPTER II

[1]Clarence A. F., "Editors' Book Table," Godey's Lady's Book, 34 (1847), 52.

[2]Anonymous, "Article VI (Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 221.

[3]Anonymous, "Article IV (Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 14 (1833), 320-321.

[4]B. B. Thatcher, "Religious Character of the Poetry of Mrs. Hemans," Godey's Lady's Book, 21 (1840), 166. Anonymous, "Article V (Bryant)," The Christian Examiner, 22 (1837), 66. Anonymous, "Review (of Mrs. Hemans' The Forest Sanctuary and Other Poems)," The Christian Examiner, 3 (1826), 411. Sarah J. Hale, "The 'Conversazione,'" Godey's Lady's Book, 14 (1837), 3.

[5]Anonymous, "Article I (Milton)," The Christian Examiner, 3 (1826), 33-34.

[6]Anonymous, "Article VII (Coleridge)," The Christian Examiner, 14 (1833), 113.

[7]Anonymous, "Article VII (Poetry and Imagination)," The Christian Examiner, 42 (1847), 263-264.

[8]Anonymous, "Article V (Poetry of Mrs. Hemans)," The Christian Examiner, 19 (1836), 347.

[9]Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, "The Perception of the Beautiful," Godey's Lady's Book, 20 (1840), 10.

[10]Anonymous, "Article VI (Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 225. See also Anonymous, "Article V (Children's Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 13 (1833), 332.

[11]Anonymous, "Article XVIII (Bowring's Poems)," The Christian Examiner, 4 (1827), 525.

[12]Anonymous, "Article V (Bryant)," The Christian Examiner, 22 (1837), 67, 63.

[13]Anonymous, "Article V (Bryant)," The Christian Examiner, 22 (1837), 63.

[14]Anonymous, from "The Gatherer," Godey's Lady's Book, 3 (1831), 183. See also Anonymous, "Article II (Lays of the Gospel)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 318.

[15]Sarah J. Hale, "Editors' Book Table," Godey's Lady's Book, 20 (1840), 45.

[16]Anonymous, "Article IV (Mason)," The Christian Examiner, 4 (1827), 67-68. Anonymous, "Article VII (Poetry and Imagination)," The Christian Examiner, 42 (1847), 251.

[17]Anonymous, "Miscellany: On Slavery in the United States," The Christian Examiner, 4 (1827), 201.

[18]Anonymous, "Article I (Milton)," The Christian Examiner, 3 (1826), 31. The metaphysical poets were also highly regarded during this period.

[19]Anonymous, "Article I (Milton)," The Christian Examiner, 3 (1926), 35. Anonymous, "Article II (Bulfinch's poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 316.

[20]Anonymous, "Article VI (Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 217-218.

[21]Anonymous, "Article V (Bryant)," The Christian Examiner, 22 (1837), 67.

[22]Anonymous, "Article III (Commonplace Book)," The Christian Examiner, 12 (1832), 95.

[23]Anonymous, from "The Gatherer," Godey's Lady's Book, 5 (1832), 168.

[24]Anonymous, "Article VI (Poetry)," The Christian Examiner, 38 (1845), 213.

[25]Anonymous, "Is Genius Desirable?", Godey's Lady's Book, 14 (1837), 162.

CHAPTER III

WHITTIER'S STEADY RISE TO FAME: A BLENDING OF CONTRASTS

> The friendless boy has been mocked at; and, years ago, he vowed to triumph over the scorners of his boyish endeavors. With the unescapable sense of wrong burning like a volcano in the recesses of his spirit, he has striven to accomplish this vow.
>
> The truth is, I love poetry, with a love as warm, as fervent, as sincere, as any of the more gifted worshipers at the temple of the Muses. . . . If I am worthy of fame, I would ask it now,--now in the springtime of my years; when I might share its smile with the friends whom I love, and by whom I am loved in return.

As these letters[1] show, Whittier, from 1827 to 1832, was anything but humble, withdrawn, or idealistic. Instead he was a courtly poet whose tempestuous soul and passion for fame drove him to publish a poem nearly every week during those five years. In 1827 and 1828 alone, the Haverhill Gazette published ninety-six of his poems.[2]

Happily, these effusions early brought him the fame he sought. Highly respected newspapers across the nation reprinted young Whittier's verses, and found that their readers valued them. The July 21, 1827 issue of the Boston Statesman, for instance, called Whittier a "genius" and "one of the brightest lights in our poetical firmament."[3] Abijah W. Thayer, who planned to publish a subscription edition of Whittier's poems, called him "a genius unparalleled among

American poets," and two years later, in 1829, Robert Morris of the Philadelphia Album stated that the young poet had "attained a distinguished station among American writers," a station "not unworthy the most intellectual and respected."[4] In England, Mary Russell Mitford praised his talents before 1833.[5] While at the peak of her fame, Mrs. Lydia Sigourney befriended Whittier at Hartford and became his literary confidante. Later she introduced him to other popular literary people, including "Grace Greenwood" and Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth.[6]

Whittier's "humility" during these years of growing renown was evidently the product of great self-control. A trustworthy picture of his real feelings can be found in his early reviews of popular literature. While paging through the Atlantic Souvenir for 1831, he momentarily put aside his Quaker upbringing, and was awed by engravings "of the highest order," the "typographical neatness," and the "durability and beauty of its binding." He enjoyed gift books precisely because to "finger their delicate gilt-edged leaves"[7] inspired his own drive for literary fortune and immortality.

Although John Greenleaf Whittier was widely read before Longfellow and Hawthorne were even heard of,[8] he was plagued by poverty. Perhaps he had thought that literary fame would bring him wealth. But it did not, and his worldly lady-friends, Mary Emerson Smith prominent among them, cold-heartedly mocked his poverty and left him, as he said, "a wreck of being--flung / Upon a sea that darkened round me."[9] Ill health and inability at public speaking made him forget the political career he had envisioned for himself.[10]

After his father's death, financial obligations brought the Yankee out in him; he now desired to be well-paid for his talents. Thus, when offered the editorship of the New England Review in 1832 for $500 a year, he accepted, remembering all the while from earlier experiences, that this position would advance his reputation, since small communities eagerly read such publications.[11]

Then too, he rejected his quest for a Felicia-Hemans-style fame, because he had grown weary of the theological students, housewives, lawyers, and doctors who bloated the literary field with their clumsy attempts at verse. And, as might be expected, he at last tired of the nationalists and publishers who demanded poems portraying a happy, democratic America, for from childhood on, Whittier had heard his family and other Quakers speak out against slavery as a perversion of democracy and a sin against man and God. During the autumn of 1832, he wrote his friend Jonathan Law, "I have done with poetry."[12] Frustrated over his financial failure and disgusted with the tyrannical sweetness of genteel blindness, he finally heeded the pleas of his friend Lloyd Garrison and of his own lacerated conscience, and joined the abolitionists.

This does not mean he entirely abandoned poetry, when he "quietly put aside ambition . . . and . . . numbered himself among the remnant." To be sure, in doing this, he discovered a refreshing "inner peace which is the reward of selfless labor."[13] But how could he forget these sentiments, which he penned in 1829 concerning the literature produced by American writers?

> They have multiplied the slender and unsubstantial fabrics of their fancy, but they have laid no deep foundations and unheaved no massy pillars. Their productions have been like the frost-work of an autumn night--beautiful in the first gush of sunshine; but unfitted to abide the winds and the heat of noonday. They are studded here and there with delicate sentiment and exquisite beauty but they lack the sternness of thought--the concentrated power--the overmastering grasp of imagination, which alone can fix the mighty conceptions of genius in the eternity of mind. We have no Milton to urge the wing of inspiration into the awful regions of eternity . . .[14]

These same prophetic feelings caused him to accuse his friend N. P. Willis of "boyish vanity and affectation." The true poet, argued Whittier, "should stand up in the strength and dignity of manhood, conscious of his responsibility to his Maker and to his fellow-men."[15] Whittier, at this time, had resolved to become America's Milton, and anti-slavery and reform poetry, he believed, would fill the lack he found in his country's literature. In April of 1831 he expressed these ideals to Mrs. L. C. Tuthill:

> Disappointment in a thousant ways has gone over my heart, and left it dust. Yet I still look forward with high anticipations. I have placed the goal of my ambitions high--but with the blessing of God it shall be reached. If my life is spared, the world shall know me in a loftier capacity than as a writer of rhymes. There--is not that boasting?--But I have said it with a strong pulse and a swelling heart, and I shall strive to realize it.[16]

Of course, Whittier realized that being an abolitionist could harm his reputation and might even cause his death. Garrison and he faced stone-throwing mobs, and heard about assaults on Sumner and Dana, and read of Lovejoy's gruesome murder. Whittier himself called the summer of 1834, with its organization of pro-slavery hoodlums in New York, a "Reign of Terror" ("Leggett," VI, 192-193), and complained

he knew few publishers, because he was "essentially tabooed in good society."[17] Willis's Home Journal, a powerful periodical, carefully avoided any mention of strong subjects, and Godey's Lady's Book bitterly attacked Whittier as being "too sectarian" for its readers. Many years later, he still recalled how Lydia Maria Child's 1833 book, Appeal in Behalf of that Class of Americans called Africans, devestated her bank account and literary reputation ("Lydia Maria Child," VI, 290).[18]

But despite these dangers, or perhaps because of them, there was a popular aspect to the Anti-Slavery Society. Whittier surely sensed that being an abolitionist-poet would make him a hero of sorts--that it would set him above the legions of N. P. Willises, scurrying from one literary tea to another. His powerfully and sanely written Justice and Expediency, 1833, "cleared the air like a clap of thunder," for he "had said what a hundred other men had wanted to say, and what thousands knew to be basic truth." He quickly became a nationally respected reformer,[19] whose eyes were said to flash with prophetic fire. In 1835 he wrote Lydia Sigourney, "I have found that my political reputation is more influential than my poetical."[20] Scores of anti-slavery gatherings trembled with pride to hear ministers and orators read Mr. Whittier's fiery protests aloud. Such readings of his poems, claimed one nineteenth-century observer, were "wild, stirring bugle-calls" which not only held the anti-slavery forces together, but which also invaded "the camp of the enemy" with such "stern defiance" and "masterful power" that "some gallant enemies deserted to his side," because he had

convinced them they were "fighting against God." Clearly, then, Whittier's poetry and prose relentlessly molded public sentiments against slavery; sentiments which finally elected Republicans in 1860.[21] Though not part of the genteel tradition, such effectiveness can only be described as a form of popularity.

In fact, the entire abolition movement, though sometimes splattered with blood, definitely possessed a popular side. Until the late 1820's, most attacks on slavery came, surprisingly enough, from the South, where one hundred and six Anti-Slavery Societies were located (the North had only twenty-four Societies). Although every Southern Anti-Slavery Society vanished before 1837, the ones in the North increased rapidly. Because they systematized abolition activities, they encouraged the writing of "an enormous amount of anti-slavery literature."[22]

Moreover, these Societies sponsored annual bazaars and anti-slavery fairs which sold furniture, confections, books, needlework, and many other household items to help fill the abolition coffers. At least seven Anti-Slavery Gift Books were issued at these occasions. One of them, the Liberty Bell, received financial support from foreign countries as well as from America, and gained such intellectual and literary respectability that it was reissued for nearly twenty years. Whittier's the North Star was issued for an anti-slavery fair which opened December 23, 1839. Though an attractive little gift book, it was not as successful as the Liberty Bell, partly because it was not illustrated.[23] Even the funerals of anti-slavery martyrs received public attention. For instance,

Whittier reported that when Torrey, a clergyman who helped slaves escape, died in Maryland's State Prison in 1846, his funeral was attended "by thousands," and a "long procession followed his remains to their resting place at Mount Auburn" ("The Funeral of Torrey," VI, 271-272).

Whittier's literary reputation, though somewhat altered, evidently was not too severely damaged. In Thomas Franklin Currier's listing of critical articles about Whittier, 1833 till 1843, the tributes outnumber the insults by a wide margin. The Boston Quarterly Review wrote in 1837 of Whittier that, "He is a living answer to the accusation that this country can produce no genuine poet," and Reverend Rufus W. Griswold included twelve of Whittier's poems in the 1842 edition of Poets and Poetry of America. Of course, Griswold's sensitivity to popular taste prevented him from publishing any anti-slavery verses, although he personally felt they were among Whittier's best productions. Still, Whittier's poems cover sixteen more pages than Longfellow's do.[24]

Even during those ten years he was a wholehearted abolitionist, he composed popular verses which added to his fame. His 1834 sentimental death poem surely met with immediate approval:

> As a cloud of the sunset, slow melting in heaven,
> As a star that is lost when the daylight in given,
> As a glad dream of slumber, which wakens in bliss,
> She hath passed to the world of the holy from this.
> (IV, 11)

Nineteenth-century readers also enjoyed the nature descriptions of "The Merrimac," 1841. And his "The Demon of the Study," 1835, when

read aloud by families, must have filled evening hours with merriment. Who would not laugh at such a description:

> A stout old man with a greasy hat
> Slouched heavily down to his dark, red nose,
> And two gray eyes enveloped in fat,
> Looking through glasses with iron bows.
> (I, 26)

Even as Whittier had left Sigourney's circle in 1833, so too, ten years later, he drifted away from the Anti-Slavery Society, which he had helped to form, and concentrated more on poetry. Certainly ill health was one reason for this break. Already, in 1830, his physician predicted that unless he gave up his political activities, he would not live a year longer, and in 1840, illness forced him to quit the editorship of the Pennsylvania Freeman.[25]

But I believe the main reason for his leaving the Anti-Slavery Society involved his soul. During the early thirties, the fanciful and selfish preoccupation with fame which he witnessed in others and felt within himself pricked his conscience until he joined Garrison's ranks. Now his conscience was disturbed again; this time not by dilettanteism or affectation but by the militaristic irrationality and clamorous posing committed by his fellow abolitionists, Garrison among them.[26] How it must have vexed Whittier, who favored working within the boundaries of the Constitution, to hear Garrison advocate disunion of the North and South! Garrison's ugly egoism enjoyed martyr-like confrontations with mobs; Whittier tried to avoid them. Whittier respected Lydia Maria Child very much, because she, unlike Garrison, "rarely spoke of her personal trials, and never

posed as a martyr" ("Lydia Maria Child," VI, 292). Furthermore, Garrison and his group seemed to enjoy striking out at multitudes of evils all at once--mainly for the sake of striking out. This, according to Whittier, overloaded the anti-slavery wagon with too many other issues. And most importantly, Whittier's Quaker belief that even the vilest of men possess some goodness, since they too can experience the inner light, sounded treasonous to Episcopalian-Baptist Garrison, who joined with others to loudly overemphasize the evils, not of slavery, but of the slave owner. In brief, the shrill pride of would-be martyrs, militaristic talk of disunion, packing the anti-slavery agenda with unrelated protests, and constant wrangling over petty issues finally frayed Whittier's patience. In the spring of 1840, he complained to May about William Lloyd Garrison and Mrs. Chapman, who added women's rights to the Liberator's causes:

> There is a dictatorial censorious intolerant spirit about them which I cannot fellowship. I loathe this whole quarrel.[27]

Whittier, then, went his own way; he concentrated on petition writing, personal lobbying, and creating popular and reform literature --"his greatest natural interest."[28] While not completely forsaking Garrison and the others, he, between 1845 and 1874, joined with Charles Sumner to battle slavery by working through the political system. Quite by himself, Whittier made Sumner a Senator, destroyed Cushing's political career, and later persuaded Freemont not to oppose Lincoln's re-election.[29]

Garrison, meanwhile, was irritated and perplexed. At the onset of their careers, Whittier had pictured him marching "onward with a martyr's zeal" and promised him that because he loved him "with a brother's love," nothing could "dim the sunshine" of his "faith / and trust" in him ("To William Lloyd Garrison," III, 9-10, 1832). But in 1840 Garrison felt compelled to agree with Rogers, who wrote in the Liberator that Whittier had been tamed.[30] It is interesting to note that when Garrison died in 1879, Whittier called the 1832 poem (quoted above) a "youthful tribute." Most of the poem which Whittier inscribed to Garrison's memory praises him; but the lines picturing him going to heaven do contain a slight trace of negative feelings:

> Go, leave behind thee all that mars
> The work below of man for man;
> (Garrison," III, 269-270)

During the years of schism, Whittier published many "spirited popular verses which carried thousands of readers with them."[31] Lays of My Home, 1843, contains mostly non-political poetry, and is the first of his works to be published by William D. Ticknor, the publishing frim which, under various names, thenceforth always published his authorized editions, all of which were splendidly printed and bound. Although Whittier gained little financially from Lays,[32] its contents made him Longfellow's rival in popularity, and, according to nineteenth-century critics, assured him of a permanent place in American letters.[33] All of Whittier's books published between 1843 and the end of the War contain ballads or other popular types

of verse, along with some of his best prophetic poetry. The Panorama, and Other Poems, 1856, for example, brought its readers the first book printing of "The Barefoot Boy" and of "Maud Müller." The title poem had been read five months earlier by the Reverend Thomas Starr King to an appreciative audience gathered in Tremont Temple, Boston.[34] It is the longest and one of the best-written of the anti-slavery poems.

It might seem contradictory that Whittier published sweet, quiet, fanciful verses between the same covers as shocking abolition poems, which were meant to "raise / Where'er they fall, an answering blaze / Like flints which strike the fire from steel." After all, he had, in "The Sentence of John L. Brown," rejected the "soft measures" of the "graceful lay" and called for a "stern and startling strain" which would make his readers "Speak out in acts" (III, 93). But he did have several reasons for mixing popular and reform verses in his books. First of all, he and his publishers realized that inclusion of ballads and fanciful poems, especially those widely read earlier in the newspapers, would help sell his books. Thus, Whittier's popular poems would bring many readers into contact with anti-slavery poems they might not otherwise read.

The second reason for this practice is the reverse of the first. Reform-minded people, thought Whittier, needed to read calm, quiet poetry along with anti-slavery verses meant to excite action. He recognized this need clearly in 1844 when he wrote that although the reformer must rise up "a Nazarite consecrated to" the "altars" of "truth and duty" and must "go forward in God's name" to face

mobs who call him a "moral outlaw," he must always "preserve his cheerfulness and faith in man" ("The Scottish Reformers," VI, 426 & 428). Especially after his experiences with Garrison, Whittier recognized the dangers of becoming a fanatic, and he hoped that printing the two types of poetry together would add a sense of balance to his books that would prevent his abolitionist readers from becoming sour or too serious-minded.

> Unhappily, in the case of the reformer, his most dangerous foes are those of his own household. . . . Sin abounds without; but is his own heart pure? While smiting down the giants and dragons which beset the outward world, are there no evil guests sitting by his own hearth-stone? Ambition, envy, self-righteousness, impatience, dogmatism, and pride of opinion stand at his door-way ready to enter whenever he leaves it unguarded. . . . He must learn that, although the most needful truth may be unpopular, it does not follow that unpopularity is a proof of the truth of his doctrines or the expediency of his measures.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . Nor is he altogether without kindly human sympathies. All generous and earnest hearts which are brought in contact with his own beat evenly with it. All that is good, and truthful, and lovely in man, whenever and wherever it truly recognizes him must sooner or later acknowledge his claim to love and reverence.
>
> ("The Scottish Reformers," VI, 427 & 429)

Thirdly, Whittier gathered up his newspaper and periodical verses and published them in his books, because he did not want these poems to become lost or mutilated beyond his recognition.[35] He obviously could not stop writing popular verse altogether:

> Such music as the woods and streams
> Sang in his ear he sang aloud;
> In still, shut bays, on windy capes,
> He heard the call of beckoning shapes,
> And, as the gray old shadows prompted him,
> To homely moulds of rhyme he shaped their
> legends grim.
> ("The Tent on the Beach," IV, 231)

The fourth reason involves an important discovery Whittier made concerning the relation between reform and popular poetry. Both types of verse, he found, had the same source of inspiration. In his 1847 review of Burleigh's The Poetry of Heart and Home, he paused after quoting Burleigh's sentimental poem about the death of a little child, "Our Bessie," to write these thoughts:

> Those of our Southern readers who have supposed that an abolitionist must necessarily be a sour-featured fanatic, prompted by envy and malice to disturb their quiet, and excite their slaves to rebellion and massacre, would, we think, be speedily undeceived by an acquaintance with the life and character of such men as the author of the foregoing lines. The same warm affections and deep and tender sympathies which breathe in his writings, prompted him early in life to devote his best energies to the cause of universal freedom.[36]

Whittier expressed similar feelings a year later while reviewing Lucy Hooper's poetry. The entire article is filled with words denoting mildness and kindness.

> With the simplicity of a child, and the shrinking modesty of a sensitive woman, she did not hesitate to advocate the cause of freedom and humanity.[37]

Now Whittier realized that calm popular verse and serious-minded reform poems not only complemented one another when combined in a book, but they also had the same aim--to spiritualize society. The same sensitivity which urged the poet to create and the reader to enjoy poems about Jesus, or death, or natural beauty, should compel one to desire that all men, slaves included, be free to experience the inner peace of religion and the grandeur of natural revelation.

This unifying step which Whittier took in the late 1840's was entirely natural and predictable. He had rejected his early affectation and lust for fame, but had never lost his love of popular verse. Twenty years later he rejected the irrational and vicious elements of the Anti-Slavery Society, but he never lost his deep humanitarian and religious concern with setting the nation right. At last, reform activities and popular literature merged in his mind and in his books. And all the while, new dimensions were added to his reputation as politician, prophet, and poet.

Whittier's literary reputation received a great boost in 1849, when Benjamin B. Mussey, a friend of the abolitionists, published Whittier's Poems, which became the best-seller of the decade.[38] Several editions were printed and over 175,000 copies were sold. The poet gained five hundred dollars for the copyrights, besides a percentage on sales. This first comprehensive edition of Whittier's poetry included all of his anti-slavery verses previously published in separate books, a few poems of special interest to Quakers, and many popular poems--among them one about a favorite food of the poet, pumpkin pie. Although Whittier was pleased by the success of Poems, he was disappointed with the frontispiece portrait of him. But the illustrations by H. Billings made up for the portrait. Moreover, the binding is the most decorative ever used for his books. It must have seemed sinfully gaudy to some of his more conservative Quaker readers.

It is interesting that during the same year Mussey's edition appeared, Godey's Lady's Book published what it claimed to be a

letter and poem by Whittier. But both letter and poem are faked--that is, they are not by Whittier.[39] The Lady's Book did, however, publish at least one authentic Whittier poem in the same number. And a year later, the magazine praised his prose work, Old Portraits and Modern Sketches, as being "written in the peculiar and beautiful style of this favorite author." The review ends by predicting "the book cannot fail to become exceedingly popular."[40]

Whittier's fame in England grew rapidly, thanks to the work of critics like Mary Mitford, who in 1852 called him "the most intensely national of American bards" and believed his anti-slavery poems to be "noble effusions" and "imperishable." She compared his "Cassandra Southcote" [sic] with "Mr. Macaulay's fine classical ballads" and said it "can scarcely be overrated." Similarly, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine of 1855 praised the poet's vigor and sensitivity, and the Irish Quarterly Review claimed that his direct simplicity, patriotic concerns, and rousing language mirrored the magnificence of his country.[41]

Hundreds of reviews and biographical sketches could be cited to prove how deeply America loved Whittier by 1860. One publication, which reveals his popularity as an after-hours poet, is the Reverend William Rice's 1860 book, Moral and Religious Quotations from the Poets. This large book went through three editions in one year. Of the six hundred authors quoted, the compiler chose to include engraved portraits of five as a frontispiece: John Milton, William Cowper, Charles Wesley, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier. The Reverend William Rice hoped that his book

would "be found a repository of truth and beauty valuable in the study, and welcome in the parlor or by the fireside."[42]

It is little wonder, then, that Whittier's In War Time, and Other Poems sold so well that he felt as "rich as Croesus."[43] And what a powerful effect his war poems had on civilians and soldiers, North and South! They were eagerly read in numerous periodicals and magazines, the Atlantic and the New York Independent among them. Or, when Whittier wished to reach the public even faster, he sent his stanzas to the weekly newspapers which copied and recopied them. His war poems affected public sentiment more profoundly than had any other poetry in America's history.[44] As might be expected, many of his poems were set to music and sung as hymns. As early as 1856, Charles A. Dana had written the poet, urging him to compose poems which could be easily memorized and sung to popular and stirring tunes. One of the most successful war hymns of those terrible years was Whittier's "Ein feste unser Gott," which found its way into the Cabinet of the President, as well as into every household and army camp of the North.[45]

It is important to note that while Whittier's war poems became immediately popular, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe's "Battle-Hymn of the Republic" was "never fully accepted by the soldiers," because they thought it "too fine and literary for a song."[46] Whittier's skills as a popular poet gave his war songs their special appeal. Again, he and his readers discovered that popular verse and reform verse did not contradict one another. Lowell, for example, wrote in 1864 that Whittier was the most patriotic of poets, precisely because he

loved home life and country scenes. His popular sentiments were the root of his humanitarian concern for reforming America.

> One quality which we especially value in him is the intense home-feeling which, without any conscious aim at being American, gives his poetry a flavor of the soil surprisingly refreshing. . . . In these times, especially, his uncalculating love of country has a profound pathos in it. He does not flare the flag in our faces, but one feels the heart of a lover throbbing in his anxious verse.[47]

Another nineteenth-century critic, Charles F. Richardson, echoed Lowell's review of In War Time:

> In Whittier, as in tens of thousands of the world's brave soldiers, love of the country and love of country seem almost identical.[48]

During the half decade following the War, Whittier's fame took wings with the publication of three extremely popular books: Snow-Bound, 1866; The Tent on the Beach, 1867; and Among the Hills, 1869. But even these three books were not the peak of Whittier's steadily rising fame, for while his older poems continued to reach young readers through collected editions, many very successful new books appeared, some of them gorgeously bound and beautifully illustrated by the country's leading artists and engravers: Marcia and Charles Woodbury, Harry Fenn, William McCullough, A. V. S. Anthony, W. J. Hennessy, Alfred Fredericks, Granville Perkins, F. O. C. Darley, and Winslow Homer.[49] But beyond the glamor of literary reputation (which Whittier needed more and more as he lost friends, family, and causes to the grave), his readers sensed that he was different and even better than Longfellow and other popular

contemporaries, because he had fused the prophetic and the popular, the energies of the reformer and the gilt-edged book on the hearth.

NOTES--CHAPTER III

[1]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, pp. 101-102. See also the following articles. Cecil B. Williams, "Whittier's Relation to Garrison and the 'Liberator,'" New England Quarterly, 25 (1952), 253. John Neal, Wandering Recollections of a Somewhat Busy Life: An Autobiography (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1869), p. 337. McAleer, "Humility," p. 32.

[2]Higginson, Whittier, p. 94. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, pp. 56, 81. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 551. McAleer, "Humility," pp. 31,33.

[3]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, pp. 61, 80. Pray, Apprenticeship, pp. 36-37, 139.

[4]Quoted in Thomas Franklin Currier, A Bibliography of John Greenleaf Whittier (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. 487. Pray, Apprenticeship, p. 41. Quoted in Mordell, Militant, p. 26. See also William Cranston Lawton, The New England Poets (New York: Macmillan Company, 1898), p. 169.

[5]William B. Cairns, British Criticisms of American Literature, 1815-1833, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, Number 14 (Madison, 1922), pp. 8, 56, 180.

[6]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 87.

[7]John Greenleaf Whittier, Whittier on Writers and Writing, edited with an introduction by Edwin H. Cady and Harry H. Clark (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1950), pp. 54. 58.

[8]Brooks, New England, p. 398.

[9]Brooks, New England, p. 400. See also the following. McAleer, "Humility," p. 34. Pray, Apprenticeship, pp. 47, 207.

[10]Rantoul, "Reminiscences," p. 136.

[11]Williams, "Garrison," p. 254. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 82. Bertha-Monica Stearns, "John Greenleaf Whittier, Editor," New England Quarterly, 13 (January, 1940), 280.

[12]McAleer, "Humility," p. 35.

[13]Vernon Louis Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America, volume 2 of Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 364. McAleer, "Humility," p. 35.

[14]Whittier, On Writers, pp. 24-25.

[15]Ibid., p. 30.

[16]McAleer, "Humility," p. 34.

[17]Mordell, Militant, p. 307.

[18]For a similar account concerning Mrs. Oakes-Smith's reputation see Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 336. From Sarah J. Hale, "Editors' Book Table," Godey's Lady's Book, 38 (1849), 18.

[19]Bennett, Freedom, p. 84.

[20]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, pp. 113-114.

[21]Griswold, Home Life, p. 240. Smallwood, "Whittier's Anti-Slavery Poems," p. 173.

[22]Benjamin Lundy, The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy . . . (Philadelphia: n.p., 1847), p. 218. Lorenzo Dow Turner, Anti-Slavery Sentiment in America Prior to 1865 (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc., 1929), p. 121.

[23]Ralph Thompson, "The Liberty Bell and Other Anti-Slavery Gift Books," New England Quarterly, 7 (March, 1934), 154-166.

[24]Williams, "Garrison," p. 251. Weeks, "Criticism," pp. 159-160.

[25]Abbott, "Sanp-shots," p. 96. John B. Pickard, "John Greenleaf Whittier and the Abolitionist Schism of 1840," New England Quarterly, 37 (1964), 251.

[26]Especially see Williams, "Garrison," pp. 248-251, 253. Also of interest are the following. Pickard, "Abolitionist Schism," pp. 250-251. C. M. Taylor, "Whittier vs. Garrison," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 82 (July, 1946), 261-263. William Sloane Kennedy, John Greenleaf Whittier the Poet of Freedom, American Reformers Series, edited by Carlos Martyn (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1892), pp. 143-169.

[27]Quoted in Mordell, Militant, p. 115.

[28]Williams, "Garrison," p. 248. Also see Perry, "Today," p. 855.

[29]For a full account of Whittier's brilliant political intrigues see John A. Pollard, John Greenleaf Whittier, Friend of Man (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Comapny, 1949). Taylor, "Whittier vs. Garrison," p. 270. J. Welfred Holmes, "Whittier and Sumner: A Political Friendship," New England Quarterly, 30 (1957), pp. 58-72.

[30]Williams, "Garrison," pp. 252-253.

[31]Percy H. Boynton, Robert M. Lovett, and William V. Moody, A First View of English and American Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 435.

[32]Currier, Bibliography, p. 48.

[33]Brooks, New England, p. 401. Brander Matthews, An Introduction to the Study of American Literature (New York: American Book Company, 1896), p. 146.

[34]Currier, Bibliography, p. 78.

[35]Whittier expressed this concern already in 1838, when, in his brief introduction to the "MISCELLANEOUS POEMS" section of Poems, he stated that publication in book form of his early popular poems was "a matter of self-defence" against those newspaper editors who had "mutilated" them or "changed" them "from their original rhythm and sentiment." John Greenleaf Whittier, Poems (Philadelphia: Joseph Healy, 1838), p. 93.

[36]Whittier, On Writers, pp. 124-125.

[37]Whittier, On Writers, p. 139.

[38]For full information on 1849 Poems see C. H. Taylor, "The 1849 Best Seller," Bulletin of the Friends' Historical Association, 38 (1949), 36-37.

[39]I sent John B. Pickard a copy of the so-called Whittier letter and poem, asking him about them. His reply, January 30, 1970, was as follows: " . . . yes, I had seen this supposed Whittier letter and the poem with it. The letter struck me as an obvious fake, in its tone and manner, as well as the absurd poem that went with it. I mentioned this to Mr. Roland Woodwell, now writing the definitive Whittier biography, and he agreed. I really think it is a definite fabrication." The poem and letter are in "Specimens of American Poets with Fac-similes of Autographs," Godey's Lady's Book, 39 (1849), 416. While on the subject of a letter from Professor Pickard and of Whittier's rise to fame, I should also mention the fact that Joseph Rickelson Williams, Michigan State University's first president, asked Whittier to write an ode for the University's opening in May of 1857. Whittier could not do this, so he sent the request on to Frances Sargent Locke Osgood. But one of Whittier's poems, "Seed Time and Harvest," was sung during the ceremony by a Lansing choir. Mr. M. H. Ingersoll, also of Lansing, set the poem to music. This information is from a letter to Dean Combs, M.S.U. Library, from John B. Pickard, December 24, 1969, and from Mr. Combs' reply, January 8, 1970.

[40]John Greenleaf Whittier, "Flowers" printed in "The Monthly Boquet," Godey's Lady's Book, 40 (1850), 222.

[41]Mary Russell Mitford, Recollections of a Literary Life; or, Books, Places, and People (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), p. 334. Weeks, "Criticism," p. 166.

[42]William Rice, compiler, Moral and Religious Quotations from the Poets (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1860).

[43]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, pp. 475-476.

[44]Underwood, Whittier, p. 382. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 442.

[45]Anderson, "Library," p. 9. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 467.

[46]Henry A. Beers, Initial Studies in American Letters (New York: Chautauqua Press, 1891), p. 183.

[47]James R. Lowell, "Whittier's In War Time," The North American Review, 98 (1864), 292.

[48]Charles F. Richardson, American Literature 1607-1885, Popular edition (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1888), p. 177.

[49]A fine example of the high quality engravings done for Whittier's books are those done for Ballads of New England, 1870. Of particular interest are the engravings depicting "Skipper Ireson's Ride." I must mention here too that some engravings found in Whittier's books were not necessarily done specifically for those books. The same engravings found in some of his books can be found in books by Longfellow and other popular poets. This practice points to the fact that not only were poems kept vague so that readers could identify with them, but also engravings were kept vague for the same reason.

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CHAPTER IV

THE POPULAR ASPECTS OF WHITTIER'S POEMS

During the summer of 1827, Whittier published "To Roy," a poem praising N. P. Willis:

> Yes! I have dwelt upon thy lays
> With glowing heart--my humble praise
> Unsparingly to thee was given;
> For I believed that thou wast one,
> The muse's pure and sunlit heaven,
> With cloudless splendor shone upon.[1]

Such adoration is but one indication of how much young Whittier coveted the fame enjoyed by Willis, Sigourney, and Hemans. Predictably, his "glowing heart" produced numerous poems which followed popular standards concerning proper subjects and styles for poetry. This adherence to popular taste quickly brought him fame.

But what nineteenth-century reviewers appreciated, modern critics are apt to think of as too sentimental. Frances Pray, in her study of Whittier's early poems, summarizes all their flaws with the phrase "too much of everything." More specifically, she says they contain "too much moralizing and too much repetition," and finds them overly sentimental, overly dramatic, far too self-centered, and unusually gloomy. She also points out his "fault of

ornate adjectives," and suggests that some of his effusions are little more "than a stringing of rhymes."[2]

We should remember, however, that popular poets did not try to display artistic novelty in their poems. Instead they wrote verses which achieved meaning and power by appealing to the reader's memory and faith. Although such poems could not give purely artistic enjoyment, they did render household services. Whittier's "The Dying," for instance, seems quite useless now, but following its publication in 1830, it was appreciated by those who read it aloud around death beds. And since these mourners believed in heaven, the last stanza did not seem tediously moralistic to them, but beautifully reassuring and reverently refreshing. Such lines as these from the poem were not supposed to make readers think about death or about themselves in a new or different way, but in a way which would bring comfort and consolation:

> I know that Death is near me,
> And yet I feel it not--
> It is but shedding sunshine on
> The shadows of my lot--
> A welcome from the spirits
> Of the pure and sin-forgiven--
> The lifting of the curtain-fold
> Which shadows Earth from Heaven![3]

Similarly, his several effusions on the deaths of children, such as "Lines," 1827, brought grieving mothers much-needed sentimental release or ecstasy. Certainly, no one who loved Lydia Sigourney's death poetry would have thought Whittier's "Lines" overly sentimental.

Child of the brief but cloudless day!
O! who can mourn e'en now,
That time hath had no power to lay
Its shadows on thy brow!
Thou'rt beautiful in death--no trace
By care's dark pencil writ,
E'er passed upon that quiet face--
No crime hath darkened it;
But free thou art, as at thy birth,
From all the thousand stains of earth.[4]

Whittier's "Night," published the same year as "Lines," closely resembles much of the verse found in popular magazines of the time. It begins with a quiet, vague, trite description of the stars. Because this description is rhymed and written in a hymn metre, and because the images are calm and usual, readers surely found them comforting.

Blest lights of Heaven--celestial gems
Of pure and fadeless glow,
Beaming like golden diadems
On evenin's dusky brow!
There is a soul-enchanting spell,
A power in each mild ray
Ye shed abroad o'er night, to quell
The stormy cares of day.

The next stanzas move the reader from nature description to a moral lesson drawn from natural revelation, and then finally the poet calls the reader to act on this lesson. Whittier says he loves night, because it lacks "The pomp and glare of day" and lifts his "mind from earthly things." The last lines ask the reader to appreciate with the poet God's glory as revealed in the night sky:

Roll on! roll on! ye stars of night,
'Till doubting mortals own
That in your paths of stainless light
Eternal power is shown.[5]

Such three-part (description, moral, call to action) or sermonic poetry was welcomed by ministers and editors, because it was religious, musical, simply worded, and easily memorized. Like the parables of Jesus, "The Night" and similar poems brought many people entertainment and instruction.

Although young Whittier was sometimes artless in the best sense of the word, he occasionally wrote poems which were so over-charged with pathos and so simple that they soured nineteenth-century readers. His "The Betrothed Burnese To Her Heathen Lover" is a fine example of "too much of everything." In later life, the poet himself angrily supressed such poems.[6]

But his muse gradually rejected the excesses which spawned poetic disasters. Especially between 1827 and 1834 he replaced worthless rhetoric and meaningless emotions with a "more simple and natural expression" and a genuine interest in local color materials.[7] In poems such as "The Quaker" (1827), "The Fat Man" (1832), and "The Lean Man" (1832), he began to develop his superb sense of humor,[8] which later created lines like the following:

> The priest came panting to the shore,
> His grave cocked hat was gone;
> Behind him, like some owl's nest, hung
> His wig upon a thorn.
> ("The Exiles," I, 58)

> And for myself, obedient to her wish,
> I searched our landlord's proffered library,--
> A well-thumbed Bunyan, with its nice wood pictures
> Of scaly fiends and angels not unlike them;
> Watts' unmelodious psalms; Astrology's
> Last home, a musty pile of almanacs,
> And an old chronicle of border wars
> And Indian history.
> ("The Bridal of Pennacook," I, 84)

Body of turkey, head of owl,
Wings a-droop like a rained-on fowl,
Feathered and ruffled in every part,
Skipper Ireson stood in the cart.
("Skipper Ireson's Ride," I, 175)

Cotton Mather came galloping down
All the way to Newbury town,
With his eyes agog and his ears set wide,
And his marvellous inkhorn at his side;
Stirring the while in the shallow pool
Of his brains for the lore he learned at school,
To garnish the story, with here a streak
Of Latin, and there another of Greek:
And the tales he heard and the notes he took,
Behold! are they not in his Wonder-Book?
("The Double-Headed Snake of Newbury," I, 194-195)

We drive no starvelings, scraggy grown,
Loose-legged, and ribbed and bony,
Like those who grind their noses down
On pastures bare and stony,--

Lank oxen, rough as Indian dogs,
And cows too lean for shadows,
Disputing feebly with the frogs
The crop of saw-grass meadows!
("The Drovers," III, 306)

Moreover, during this time of growth, he also sharpened his interests in reform activities. "The Jersey Prison Ship" (1827) and "Tariffiana" (1829) reveal his early political thoughts, and "The Convent" (1827) thunders with the same well-aimed invective against cold religious creeds as does "Saint Gregory's Guest" (1886). From the 1820's until his death, Whittier's feelings about slavery, America, temperance, religious freedom, and war did not change significantly; they only intensified.[9]

When poverty and conscience convinced Whittier to join the anti-slavery ranks, he did not reject popular poetry. Instead, he

came to realize that reform verse complemented and had the same inspiration and aim as popular poetry. He did believe, however, that popular poetry had to be more vigorous, manly, and humanitarian than it was. Largely through Hawthorne's prose and Whittier's poetry, the public began to see that imagistic, compact prose could bring enjoyment and that strong subjects and realistic nature descriptions could find musical expression in poetry. But America's literary taste changed so slowly that during the late nineteenth century, many readers still demanded poetry with a Sigourney-like sweetness and simplicity.

The stylistic qualities of Whittier's anti-slavery poems illustrate just how completely popular literary theorists like N. P. Willis and Sarah Hale controlled the type of poetry produced during their reign. To be sure, Whittier's reform verses soon brought him a unique and sensational reputation as a reformer and eventually made him a nationally loved poet, when, following the War, his views were made law, but his first audience must have been shocked by their strong subjects. Yet, stylistically these poems have much in common with popular poetry; even they conform to very many popular stylistic theories.

Nearly all of Whittier's reform poems are rhymed and musical and many of them are written in common hymn metres. "To Faneuil Hall" (1844), for instance, is in 7 & 5's Metre, and the 1853 edition of Christian Hymns for Public and Private Worship (cited in Appendix II) contains two of Whittier's anti-slavery poems in the section called "National Hymns." This hymn book titles the poems "National

Anniversary" and "Freedom."[10] The first, written in Long Metre, begins with these familiar lines:

O Thou, whose presence went before
Our fathers in their weary way,
As with thy chosen moved of yore
The fire by night, the cloud by day!

"Freedom," also in Long Metre, closes with these sentiments:

Speed on thy work, Lord God of hosts!
And when the bondman's chain is riven,
And swells from all our country's coasts
The anthem of the free to heaven,
O, not to those whom thou hast led,
As with thy cloud and fire before,
But unto thee, in fear and dread,
Be praise and glory evermore.

Whittier obviously meant his reform poems to be read aloud or sung as hymns during anti-slavery meetings and church services. Therefore, he frequently wrote in hymn metres, as the popular poets were doing, to gain an audience for his protests.

Like the musical qualities, the Quaker directness of the anti-slavery poems made them easy to understand and memorize, even for uneducated readers. In fact, these poems were so clearly worded that, according to Carlos Martyn, they kindled "a fire and passion of enthusiasm in the hearts of . . . anti-slavery boys and girls."[11] James Russell Lowell rightly emphasized that these poems appealed "as much to the blood as to the brain."[12] In order to do this, they had to be plain and direct, for far from drawing attention to their own artistic uniqueness, they were meant to draw the reader's attention to himself, to his moral and patriotic duty of freeing

the slaves. The anti-slavery poems had the same direction as the sentimental verses of Lydia Sigourney--towards the reader. Lines like these which describe how diseased slaves were thrown overboard from slave ships were meant to make the reader weep and to give him a moral sentimental experience:

> Hark! from the ship's dark bosom,
> The very sounds of hell!
> The ringing clank of iron,
> The maniac's short, sharp yell!
> The hoarse, low curse, throat-stifled;
> The starving infant's moan,
> The horror of a breaking heart
> Poured through a mother's groan.
>
> Up from that loathsome prison
> The stricken blind ones came:
> Below, had all been darkness,
> Above, was still the same.
> Yet the holy breath of heaven
> Was sweetly breathing there,
> And the heated brow of fever
> Cooled in the soft sea air.
>
> "Overboard with them, shipmates!"
> Cutlass and dirk were plied;
> Fettered and blind, one after one,
> Plunged down the vessel's side.
> The sabre smote above,
> Beneath, the lean shark lay,
> Waiting with wide and bloody jaw
> His quick and human prey.
> ("The Slave-Ships," III, 21)

Frequently, however, the similarities between Whittier's anti-slavery poems and popular magazine verses go deeper than just style or direction. Although the subjects of the two are different, their themes are quite often the same. Whittier's reasons for attacking slavery, or, in other words, his themes, were that slavery went against the Bible's teachings, that it destroyed black homes, that

it spoiled hearth-side hours by angering conscientious white families, and that it contradicted the democratic spirit of the Pilgrims. Popular poetry also centered itself around the Bible, the home, the hearth, and patriotism.

The biblical emphases of Whittier's protest verses, and, in particular, the prophet motif in this literature will be detailed later. But reference here to one of his anti-slavery poems would help to illustrate the biblical and sentimental aspects of his reform poetry. "A Sabbath Scene," which Whittier wrote in 1850 to expose northern clergymen who used the Bible to support The Fugitive Slave Law, is clearly Bible-centered. The poem begins with a description of a runaway bondwoman dashing into a church for refuge. At first, the congregation and minister protect the slave from her furious master, who has followed her into the House of God. But the minister soon takes the side of slavery:

"Who dares profane this house and day?"
   Cried out the angry pastor.
"Why, bless your soul, the wench's a slave,
   And I'm her lord and master!

"I've law and gospel on my side,
   And who shall dare refuse me?"
Down came the parson, bowing low,
   "My good sir, pray excuse me!

"Of course I know your right divine
   To own and work and whip her;
Quick, deacon, throw that Polyglott
   Before the wench, and trip her!"

Plump drooped the holy tome, and o'er
   Its sacred pages stumbling,
Bound hand and foot, a slave once more,
   The hapless wretch lay trembling.

I saw the parson tie the knots,
   The while his flock addressing,
The Scriptural claims of slavery
   With text on text impressing.

"Although," said he, "on Sabbath day
   All secular occupations
Are deadly sins, we must fulfill
   Our moral obligations:"
(III, 160-161)

Whittier follows the brilliant irony and bitter humor of these lines with his biblical reaction to the clergyman's defense of the slave owner:

My brain took fire: "Is this," I cried,
   "The end of prayer and preaching?
Then down with pulpit, down with priest,
   And give us Nature's teaching!

"Foul shame and scorn be on ye all
   Who turn the good to evil,
And steal the Bible from the Lord,
   To give it to the Devil!

"Than garbled text or parchment law
   I own a statute higher;
And God is true, though every book
   And every man's a liar!"
(III, 162)

The last two lines allude to Romans 3:4. Naturally, the biblical emphasis of this poem attracted the attention of nineteenth-century readers, and if the biblical quality did not, the quiet, sentimental ending of the poem must have. "A Sabbath Scene" ends with a picture of Whittier waking up from the all-to-real daydream he has been having, and with a typical nature description, a moral interpretation of that description, and a biblical call to abolish that crime which nature and God cry out against.

I started up,--where now were church,
   Slave, master, priest, and people?
I only heard the supper-bell,
   Instead of clanging steeple.

But, on the open window's sill,
   O'er which the white blooms drifted,
The pages of a good old Book
   The wind of summer lifted.

And flower and vine, like angel wings
   Around the Holy Mother,
Waved softly there, as if God's truth
   And Mercy kissed each other.

And freely from the cherry-bough
   Above the casement swinging,
With golden bosom to the sun,
   The oriole was singing.

As bird and flower made plain of old
   The lesson of the Teacher,
So now I heard the written Word
   Interpreted by Nature!

For to my ear methought the breeze
   Bore Freedom's blessed word on;
Thus saith the Lord: Break every yoke,
   Undo the heavy burden!
(III, 162-163)

Incidently, these stanzas describe rather well the workings of the inner light, that presence or power (in some ways similar to what other poets call poetic inspiration) which reveals to the poet the spiritual message hidden in common events.

Although the subject of this poem (an attack on slavery) was an unpopular one, its biblical theme, nature description, sermonic organization, stylistic clarity, musical qualities, and sentimental call to action made it similar to popular poetry of the day. Poems like "A Sabbath Scene" encouraged a New Englander critic to write in 1848 that Whittier's anti-slavery book Voices of Freedom proved that pleasure and instruction could be combined in poetry.[13]

Ironically, most of the stylistic abilities which encouraged Whittier to become a poet (directness, clarity, artlessness, sincerity, and simplicity) and nearly all of the themes which appear in his protest and popular poetry (hatred of religious and political oppression, an optimistic love of God and man, great pride in the pilgrims who founded a democratic America, respect for the dignity of work, a reverence for home sentiments, a closeness to God's natural revelation, and an interest in early American legends) are the very abilities and themes taught to him by his family and other Quakers, who at best distrusted the worth of poetry. Undoubtedly, as a boy, Whittier heard numerous religious, patriotic, and sentimental attacks against slavery. These remembered attacks thunder mightily through poems such as "Expostulation" (1834), which questions how a country founded on liberty could condone chattel slavery that deprives men of freedom, blasphemes the dignity of work, and destroys families.

> What, ho! our countrymen in chains!
> The whip on woman's shrinking flesh!
> Our soil yet reddening with the stains
> Caught from her scourging, warm and fresh!
> What! mothers from their children riven!
> What! God's own image bought and sold!
> Americans to market driven,
> And bartered as the brute for gold!
> (III, 25)

With equal vehemence, "In The Evil Days" (1850) decries the bewitching effect the Fugitive Slave Act had on the American home, which was supposed to be a place of kindness and mercy.

The evil days have come, the poor
   Are made a prey;
Bar up the hospitable door,
Put out the fire-lights, point no more
   The wanderer's way.

For Pity now is crime; the chain
   Which binds our States
Is melted at her hearth in twain,
Is rusted by her tears' soft rain:
   Close up her gates.
. . . . . .
I hear a voice: "Thus saith the Law,
   Let Love be dumb;
Clasping her liberal hands in awe,
Let sweet-lipped Charity withdraw
   From hearth and home."

I hear another voice: "The poor
   Are thine to feed;
Turn not the outcast from thy door,
Nor give to bonds and wrong once more
   Whom God hath freed."
(III, 163, 164-165)

While publishing such hymn-metred protests, he, of course, composed popular poems, many of which contain Quaker-inspired themes. In fact, while scouring history books and the Bible for anti-slavery materials, he often discovered old legends and Bible texts which he eventually worked into his popular poems.[14] And really, are the popular poems and reform poems worlds apart? After all, his Songs of Labor and his many verses about home affections can be read as anti-slavery poems. By revealing the dignity of such common work as shoe making or corn husking and by praising the virtues of Christian home life, he is, through contrast, condemning the horrors of slavery. Moreover, the anti-slavery, legendary, and religious peoms are linked to each other, for all three attack that which makes man hate man, whether it be an evil law, a superstition, or a creed. As might be

expected, the reform protests, biblical studies, home life descriptions, and folklore interests sometimes merged in his mind. conjuring forth memories of his boyhood hearth, memories he later immortalized in Snow-Bound.

If Whittier's apprenticeship poems occasionally rise above their excesses to reveal traces of appealing artlessness, and if even his reform poems contain some popular themes and stylistic peculiarities, one would expect his mature, non-political verses to be filled with popular themes and stylistic devices. Of course, this expectation is correct. Although he believed that poetry should be more vigorous, terse, and manly than N. P. Willis's effusions were, he seldom ignored popular literary standards and created richly unique poems. That Whittier's poetic works do contain some brilliant realistic passages and complicated styles is indeed a credit to his genius.

As he said in his 1857 poem, "The Last Walk in Autumn," Whittier did sincerely want his poems to "find a place at home and hearth" (II, 46), and the directness, simplicity, and clarity of his verse helped him realize this desire. Popular publications sought his poems and families cherished his books. Over and over, critics lauded the artlessness, tenderness, passion, and music of lines such as these from "Our Master" and "Hazel Blossoms":[15]

> Hush every lip, close every book,
> The strife of tongues forbear;
> Why forward reach, or backward look,
> For love that clasps like air?
> . . . . . .

Death comes, life goes; the asking eye
   And ear are answerless;
The grave is dumb, the hollow sky
   Is sad with silentness.
. . . . . .
The healing of His seamless dress
   Is by our beds of pain;
We touch Him in life's throng and press,
   And we are whole again.

Through Him the first fond prayers are said
   Our lips of childhood frame,
The last low whispers of our dead
   Are burdened with His name.
(II, 273-274)

The grass is browning on the hills;
   No pale, belated flowers recall
The astral fringes of the rills,
   And drearily the dead vines fall,
   Frost-blackened, from the roadside wall.
(II, 72)

Even in his early criticisms of other writers, Whittier consistently condemned "straining for effect" or affectedness and praised "simple, natural thoughts . . . expressed in simple and perfectly transparent language" ("Mirth and Medicine," VII, 378). What he most appreciated was the "simple speech of Bible days" ("Mabel Martin," I, 198) and "Plain language telling a plain story."[16] And most of his own poems are just that.

Two of the most common devices he used to simplify and clarify his poems are contrast and parable. Snow-Bound immediately comes to mind as a poem built around contrasts: fire light versus winter light, faith versus despair, Eternal Love versus indifferent nature, memory versus death, and the true prophet versus the fanatic. Another striking example of Whittier's skillful use of contrast is

"Worship," in which he contrasts cruel pagan rituals and creed-centered religions with the loving and simple religion taught by Christ through the inner light. Following are a few exceptional lines from this poem:

> Red altars, kindling through that night of error,
> Smoked with warm blood beneath the cruel eye
> Of lawless Power and sanguinary Terror,
> Throned on the circle of a pitiless sky;
> . . . . . .
> Then through great temples swelled the dismal moaning
> Of dirge-like music and sepulchral prayer;
> Pale wizard priests, o'er occult symbols droning,
> Swung their white censers in the burdened air:
> . . . . . .
> Feet red from war-fields trod the church aisles holy,
> With trembling reverence: and the oppressor there,
> Kneeling before his priest, abased and lowly,
> Crushed human hearts beneath his knee of prayer.
> . . . . . .
> Not such the service the benignant Father
> Requireth at His earthly children's hands:
> Not the poor offering of vain rites, but rather
> The simple duty man from man demands.
> . . . . . .
> For he whom Jesus loved hath truly spoken:
> The holier worship which he deigns to bless
> Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
> And feeds the widow and the fatherless!
> . . . . . .
> O brother man! fold to thy heart thy brother;
> Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there;
> To worship rightly is to love each other,
> Each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.
> (II, 228-229)

In Among The Hills he contrasts the way country life really is with the way it should be:

> And call to mind old homesteads, where no flower
> Told that the spring had come, but evil weeds,
> Nightshade and rough-leaved burdock in the place
> Of the sweet doorway greeting of the rose
> And honeysuckle, where the house walls seemed
> Blistering in sun, without a tree or vine
> To cast the tremulous shadow of its leaves

Across the curtainless windows, from whose panes
Fluttered the signal rags of shiftlessness.
Within, the cluttered kitchen-floor, unwashed
(Broom-clean I think they called it); the best room
Stifling with cellar damp, shut from the air
In hot midsummer, bookless, pictureless
Save the inevitable sampler hunt
Over the fireplace, or a mourning piece,
A green-haired woman, peony-cheeked, beneath
Impossible willows; the wide-throated hearth
Bristling with faded pine-boughs half concealing
The piled-up rubbish at the chimney's back;
And, in sad keeping with all things about them,
Shrill, querulous women, sour and sullen men,
Untidy, loveless, old before their time,
With scarce a human interest save their own
Monotonous round of small economies,
Or the poor scandal of the neighborhood;
Blind to the beauty everwhere revealed,
Treading the May-flowers with regardless feet;
For them the song-sparrow and the bobolink
Sang not, nor winds made music in the leaves;
For them in vain October's holocaust
Burned, gold and crimson, over all the hills,
The sacramental mystery of the woods.
Church-goers, fearful of the unseen Powers,
But grumbling over pulpit-tax and pew-rent,
Saving, as shrewd economists, their souls
And winter pork with the least possible outlay
Of salt and sanctity; in daily life
Showing as little actual comprehension
Of Christian charity and love and duty,
As if the Sermon on the Mount had been
Outdated like last year's almanac:
Rich in broad woodlands and in half-tilled fields,
And yet so pinched and bare and comfortless,
The veriest straggler limping on his rounds,
The sun and air his sole inheritance,
Laughed at a poverty that paid its taxes,
And hugged his rags in self-complacency!
. . . . . .
Not such should be the homesteads of a land
Where whoso wisely wills and acts may dwell
As king and lawgiver, in broad-acred state,
With beauty, art, taste, culture, books, to make
His hour of leisure richer than a life
Of fourscore to the barons of old time,
Our yeoman should be equal to his home
Set in the fair, green valleys, purple walled,
A man to match his mountains, not to creep
Dwarfed and abased below them.

(I, 262-263)

Numerous other examples of this device could be cited from the reform poems as well as from the popular poems.

Whittier was certainly not alone in his love of writing parables or sermonic poems, for this was an extremely popular art form during his lifetime. By parable I mean a simply worded, musical poem which tells a pleasant, homely story, then explains the story's moral meaning, and finally calls the reader to act out the message in his everyday life. Examples of this type of poem, enjoyed in Sabbath Schools or around hearths, are Whittier's "The Robin," "The Garrison of Cape Ann," "The Pressed Gentian," "The Light That Is Felt," and "The Common Question." Even Snow-Bound can be read as a parable, for it, like the shorter poems just listed, portrays a common nineteenth-century scene and gives a moral which the reader should accept--"That Life is ever lord of Death, / And Love can never lose its own!" (II, 142). "The Common Question" deserves reprinting here, because it reveals, perhaps better than any of his other poems, the good-humored earnestness so typical of the nineteenth century.

Behind us at our evening meal
The gray bird* ate his fill,
Swung downward by a single claw,
And wiped his hooked bill.

He shook his wings and crimson tail,
And set his head aslant,
And, in his sharp, impatient way,
Asked, "What does Charlie want?"

"Fie, silly bird!" I answered, "tuck
Your head beneath your wing,
And go to sleep;"--but o'er and o'er
He asked the self-same thing.

*Whittier's pet parrot.

Then, smiling, to myself I said:
   How like are men and birds!
We all are saying what he says,
   In action or in words.

The boy with whip and top and drum,
   The girl with hoop and doll,
And men with lands and houses, ask
   The question of Poor Poll.

However full, with something more
   We fain the bag would cram;
We sigh above our crowded nets
   For fish that never swam.

No bounty of indulgent Heaven
   The vague desire can stay;
Self-love is still a Tartar mill
   For grinding prayers alway.

The dear God hears and pities all;
   He knoweth all our wants;
And what we blindly ask of Him
   His love withholds or grants.

And so I sometimes think our prayers
   Might well be merged in one;
And nest and perch and hearth and church
   Repeat, "Thy will be done."
                              (II, 271-272)

Modern readers generally dislike poems which emphasize a moral lesson, but the nineteenth-century audience remembered these thoughts from Matthew 13:13-15 which explain the necessity not only of telling a clear story but also of interpreting the moral for the reader.

> "This is why I [Jesus] speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says:
>
> 'You shall indeed hear but never
> understand,
> and you shall indeed see but
> never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown
dull,
and their ears are heavy of
hearing,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should perceive with their
eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their heart,
and turn for me to heal them.'"

It is important to note that critics frequently compared the simplicity of Whittier's style with the simplicity of childhood. This type of criticism was, of course, meant to be complimentary, since the nineteenth century equated childhood and poetic genius. One reviewer claimed that "Mr. Whittier's simplicity was that of childhood itself," and another stated that "His language was simple as a child's and unadorned with superfluous words."[17] In 1863 Jessie Frémont penned this sketch of Whittier in which she refers to his child-like personality:

> Those luminous eyes! So direct, such unmixed a look of simple questioning inquiry, with no touch of self-consciousness, or offense given or taken, such lively refreshing absense of the usual conventional expressions toward a visitor, I had never seen except in very young children; it was the naked truth, habitual, and above all small disguises.[18]

Undoubtedly Whittier appreciated such tributes, for he remembered how deeply "the Divine Teacher" admired "the reverence, love, and grateful trust, so natural and beautiful" in children.[19] Further evidence of Whittier's agreement with the nineteenth-century's romantic-religious view of childhood appears in these lines from "Child-Songs" and in his "Preface" to Child-Life in Prose:

We need love's tender lessons taught
  As only weakness can;
God hath His small interpreters;
  The child must teach the man.

We wander wide through evil years,
  Our eyes of faith grow dim;
But he is freshest from His hands
  And nearest unto Him!

And haply, pleading long with Him
  For sin-sick hearts and cold,
The angels of our childhood still
  The Father's face behold.

Of such the kingdom!--Teach Thou us,
  O Master most divine,
To feel the deep significance
  Of these wise words of Thine!

The haughty eye shall seek in vain
  What innocence beholds;
No cunning finds the key of heaven,
  No strength its gate unfolds.

Alone to guilelessness and love
  That gate shall open fall;
The mind of pride is nothingness,
  The childlike heart is all!
(II, 307-308)

> It may be well to admit, in the onset, that the book is as much for child-lovers, who have not outgrown their child-heartedness in becoming men and women, as for children themselves; that it is as much about childhood, as for it. If not the wisest, it appears to me that the happiest people in the world are those who still retain something of the child's creative faculty of imagination. . . .[20]

Whittier expressed identical sentiments in "The Barefoot Boy," in "The Hermit of the Thebaid," and in his portrayal of Sachem's daughter in "The Bridal of Pennacook."

These feelings help explain why Whittier, who knew that many Quakers frowned on fanciful delights, sometimes excused or disguised his own poetic nature descriptions by pretending to be writing from

the point of view of a boy. In "An Outdoor Reception," a poem included in his last book, At Sundown, he says he has written not only "harsher songs of evil times" and "graver themes in minor keys / Of life's and death's solemnities," but has also penned "Some verse of lighter, happier kind,-- / Hints of the boyhood of the man" (IV, 296).

Whittier's view of childhood also explains his life-long interest in children's literature. In 1830 he published "Christ in the Tempest" in Emerson's First Class Reader.[21] This poem was followed by many more stories and poems, and in 1871 and 1873 he and Lucy Larcom co-edited Child Life: A Collection of Poems and Child-Life in Prose. Nineteenth-century children treasured Whittier's juvenilia, and when they thanked him through letters and visits, he was always deeply moved.

Whittier also believed the popular theory that only a sweetly worded poem could convey the truth, since the truth was naturally sweet and calm. In 1844 he praised the poet of "Rydal Mount" for his "sweet songs, / Simple and beautiful as Truth and Nature" ("The Bridal of Pennacook," I, 84), and during the War years he wrote this apology in "Amy Wentworth," a "Rhythmic and sweet" poem which contains "household melodies" and "pleasant pictures":

> I know it has been said our times require
> No play of art, nor dalliance with the lyre,
> No weak essay with Fancy's chloroform
> To calm the hot, mad pulses of the storm,
> But the stern war-blast rather, such as sets
> The battle's teeth of serried bayonets,
> And pictures grim as Vernet's. Yet with these
> Some softer tints may blend, and milder keys
> Relieve the storm-stunned ear. Let us keep sweet.

> If so we may, our hearts, even while we eat
> The bitter harvest of our own device
> And half a century's moral cowardice.
> . . . . . .
> . . . I try
> To time a simple legend to the sounds
> Of winds in the woods, and waves on pebbled
> bounds,
> A song for oars to chime with, such as might
> Be sung by tired sea-painters, who at night
> Look from their hemlock camps, by quiet cove
> Or beach, moon-lighted, on the waves they love.
> (I, 248-250)

Moreover, after reading Sarah Orne Jewett's Deephaven "over half a dozen times," he praised it for being "simple, pure, and so true to nature."[22] Similarly, he enjoyed Charles Eastman's Poems, because "all is plain, quiet, and genial."[23] Andrew Marvell, he believed, wrote "some of the sweetest and tenderest lines in the English tongue" ("John Woolman's Journal," VII, 319), and George Herbert's "First Day" brought the poet, who was seriously afflicted by an inability to sleep, "soothing religious associations" and "the assurance of physical comfort" ("First Day in Lowell," V, 368). On the other hand, he thoroughly disliked Robert Browning's "Men And Women":

> . . . it is not exactly comfortable reading. It seemed to me like a galvanic battery in full play. Its spasmodic utterances and intense passion made me feel as if I had been taking a bath among electric eels.[24]

Whittier's belief in the sweetness and inner-light quietness of truth can be seen in these lines from "In Peace" and in these stanzas from his autobiographical poem, "My Namesake":

A track of moonlight on a quiet lake,
   Whose small waves on a silver-sanded shore
Whisper of peace, and with the low winds make
Such harmonies as keep the woods awake,
And listening all night long for their sweet sake;
   A green-waved slope of meadow, hovered o'er
By angel-troops of lilies, swaying light
On viewless stems, with folded wings of white;
A slumberous stretch of mountain-land, far seen
Where the low westering day, with gold and green,
Purple and amber, softly blended, fills
The wooded vales, and melts among the hills;
A vine-fringed river, winding to its rest
   On the calm bosom of a stormless sea,
Bearing alike upon its placid breast,
With earthly flowers and heavenly stars impressed,
   The hues of time and of eternity:
(IV, 69)

"On all his sad or restless moods
   The patient peace of Nature stole;
The quiet of the fields and woods
   Sank deep into his soul.

"He worshipped as his fathers did,
   And kept the faith of childish days,
And, howsoe'er he strayed or slid,
   He loved the good old ways.

"The simple tastes, the kindly traits,
   The tranquil air, and gentle speech,
The silence of the soul that waits
   For more than man to teach."
(II, 119-120)

To make his poems sweet and relaxing, Whittier relied heavily upon rhyme and metre. As early as 1827, in his review of Grenville Mellen's poetry, he called "imperfect rhymes . . . a glaring fault," and claimed that because Mellen's verses lacked "smoothness and regularity," they were "about as pleasing to the ear" when "read aloud" as "a Sawmill or a Steam engine."[25] Whittier felt verse should be "tuneful" and have a "naturalness of song"[26] and a "melodious flow of . . . versification" ("Marvell," VI, 96). Moreover,

he knew that rhyme and metre would simplify the memorization of a poem's spiritual lesson. Here again, a knowledge of hymn metres is essential, because most of Whittier's poems are strictly metred. For example, "Sunset on the Bearcamp" is written in Common Metre, and "In School-Days" is in 8 & 7's Metre.

Whittier, of course, understood that the popular muse of his time was "a free but profoundly reverent inquirer." While editing Songs of Three Centuries, therefore, he carefully avoided including any poem "which seemed liable to the charge of irreverence or questionable morality," and attempted to make "a thoroughly readable book" which contained "purity of thought and language."[27] This same sensitivity led him to call Walden "very wicked and heathenish" and to label Byron "a wretched infidel."[28] Although Whittier, along with most of his contemporaries, admired the religious poets of Milton's age, he angrily pointed out that the poets from Dryden to Durfey "polluted their pages" with "the most shameless indecency" ("England Under James II," VI, 351). He even criticized his boyhood hero, Burns, for writing "ribald" lines and for kissing "the maddening lips of wine / Or wanton ones of beauty." But because "The Bible at his Cotter's hearth" made his own "more holy," Whittier forgave the "evil strain" that sometimes flawed "the sweet refrain / Of pure and healthful feeling" characteristic of Burns' poetry ("Burns," IV, 95-96).

Whittier's own poems are consistently religious and pure. He thought of the Bible, which he had evidently memorized, not only as a sourcebook for whatever allusions fitted his themes and as an

inspiring example of "simple and noble thoughts expressed in simple and noble words," but also as "the controlling image in his life."[29] Religious and biblical thoughts occupied his entire being, as can be seen from these remarks he made about himself in an early review, in an 1876 letter, in his "My Namesake," and in his "Questions of Life":

> Genius--the pride of genius--what is there in it, after all, to take the precedence of virtue?[30]
>
> The awful mysteries of life and nature sometimes almost overwhelm me. 'What, Where, Whither?' These questions sometimes hold me breathless.[31]
>
> "The cant of party, school, and sect,
> Provoked at times his honest scorn,
> And Folly, in its gray respect,
> He tossed on satire's horn.
>
> "But still his heart was full of awe
> And reverence for all sacred things;
> And, brooding over form and law,
> He saw the Spirit's wings!
>
> "Life's mystery wrapt him like a cloud;
> He heard far voices mock his own,
> The sweep of wings unseen, the loud,
> Long roll of waves unknown."
> (II, 120)
>
> I am: how little more I know!
> Whence came I? Whither do I go?
> A centred self, which feels and is;
> A cry between the silences;
> A shadow-birth of clouds at strife
> With sunshine on the hills of life;
> A shaft from Nature's quiver cast
> Into the Future from the Past;
> Between the cradle and the shroud,
> A meteor's flight from cloud to cloud.
> . . . . . .
> Do bird and blossom feel, like me,
> Life's many-folded mystery,--
> The wonder which it is to be?
> Or stand I severed and distinct,
> From Nature's chain of life unlinked?
> Allied to all, yet not the less

Prisoned in separate consciousness,
Alone o'erburdened with a sense
Of life, and cause, and consequence?
(II, 236-238)

Whatever the subject, whether political, historical, or personal, Whittier felt compelled to discuss it from a Christian perspective. Even nature he saw as either a mindless enemy or as an emblem of God's eternal goodness. The following lines from Snow-Bound, "Revelation," "The Lakeside," and "The Chapel of the Hermits" show his biblical view of nature.

No church-bell lent its Christian tone
To the savage air, no social smoke
Curled over woods of snow-hung oak.
A solitude made more intense
By dreary-voiced elements,
The shrieking of the mindless wind,
The moaning tree-boughs swaying blind,
And on the glass the unmeaning beat
Of ghostly finger-tips of sleet.
(II, 138-139)

Takes Nature thought for such as we,
What place her human atom fills,
The weed-drift of her careless sea,
The mist on her unheeding hills?
What recks she of our helpless wills?

Strange God of Force, with fear, not love,
Its trembling worshipper! Can prayer
Reach the shut ear of Fate, or move
Unpitying Energy to spare?
What doth the cosmic Vastness care?
(II, 342)

Thanks, O our Father! that, like him,
Thy tender love I see,
In radiant hill and woodland dim,
And tinted sunset sea.
For not in mockery dost Thou fill
Our earth with light and grace;
Thou hid'st no dark and cruel will
Behind Thy smiling face!
(II, 19)

"O friend! we need nor rock nor sand,
Nor storied stream of Morning-Land;
The heavens are glassed in Merrimac,--
What more could Jordan render back?"
(I, 129)

Similarly, his poem "Over-Heart," which clearly begins by alluding to and describing the romantic idea of oversoul, must, in the end, be called a religious rather than a romantic poem. Whittier's sonnet "Requirement" summarizes the poet's religious beliefs, beliefs rooted in kindness, sanity, and optimism which endeared him to thousands of readers.

We live by Faith; but Faith is not the slave
   Of text and legend. Reason's voice and God's,
   Nature's and Duty's, never are at odds.
What asks our Father of His children, save
Justice and mercy and humility,
   A reasonable service of good deeds,
   Pure living, tenderness to human needs,
Reverence and trust, and prayer for light to see
The Master's footprints in our daily ways?
   No knotted scourge nor sacrificial knife,
   But the clam beauty of an ordered life
Whose very breathing is unworded praise!--
A life that stands as all true lives have stood,
Firm-rooted in the faith that God is Good.
(II, 327, 328)

After studying nearly three hundred of Whittier's poems, James S. Stevens wrote, "I have found the wealth of illustrations which Whittier has drawn from the Bible very much beyond my expectations, and the reverent manner in which he handled this material has challenged my admiration." In these poems, Stevens found eight hundred and eleven direct and indirect references to the Bible. Moreover, these references were not to a few favorite passages: he alluded to fifty-eight of the sixty-six books of the Old and New

Testaments and to five books of the Apocrypha.[32] Whittier's "Our Master" alludes to ten different books of the Bible, and "The Chapel of the Hermits" refers to thirteen different books of the Bible.[33] The following lines from "Andrew Rykman's Prayer" seem quite simple:

> Not for me the crowns of gold,
> Palms, and harpings manifold;
> Not for erring eye and feet
> Jasper wall and golden street.
> (II, 263)

Yet they allude to Luke 18:13, Revelations 4:4, 5:8, 7:9, 21:18, and 21:21.[34] Numerous similar examples could be given of poems that contain depths which only a reader familiar with the Bible could appreciate. Whittier's first published poem was a versification of an Old Testament scene, and for many years thereafter, he skillfully wove biblical themes and allusions into his poetry.[35] It is little wonder that he became known as "the poet of the moral sentiment and of the heart and faith of the people of America."[36]

Although Whittier admitted that he knew "nothing of music" and that he therefore did not consider himself a "hymn writer," he did state that "a good hymn is the best use to which poetry can be devoted."[37] And because most of his poems are clear, sane, sweet, musical, and biblical, many hymns were composed from them. At least sixty of his poems provided words for more than one hundred hymns, and his "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" now ranks as one of the three best known and finest hymns in the world. "The Great Miracle," a sixty-two page Easter Cantata for Soli, Chorus, and Organ was composed during the early 1900's by C. Hugo Grimm using Whittier's

poetry.[38] Because of the "depth of his religious insights, the transparent sincerity of their expression," and the ability of his hymns to appeal to all Christian sects, Whittier has been called "the greatest American hymn writer" and "Poet Laureate of American Hymnists."[39] He is undoubtedly "one of the most frequently used authors in modern hymnals."[40] Even during our times, as during his century, Whittier's hymn-poems have gained numerous admirers. He demonstrated his own love of hymns by collecting "the best hymns in our language" into his Songs of Three Centuries.[41] Furthermore, as the table of contents in his Works shows, he wrote many hymns for special occasions. One example of an occasional hymn is his "Hymn For The House of Worship at Georgetown Erected in Memory of a Mother." His hymn-poem "At Last" was read aloud at his bedside as he died.[42]

> Some humble door among Thy many mansions,
> Some sheltering shade where sin and striving cease,
> And flows forever through heaven's green expansions
> The river of Thy peace.
> (II, 334)

Besides his religious effusions, readers enjoyed his sentimental poems about nature, death, boyhood, and faith--works such as "The River Path," "Gone," "Lines Written on the Death of an Infant," "To My Friend on the Death of His Sister," "The Barefoot Boy," "Our Master," and "Vesta." "Vesta," a poem about the death of a little girl, is the only Whittier poem reprinted in The Oxford Book of English Verse.[43] Evidently, Whittier was partial to child-death poems, as shown by this comment he made in 1847 about Burleigh's "Our Bessie":

> The death of a child is a trite subject; but the following lines will not fail to commend themselves to the hearts of all bereaved ones, as both beautiful and true.[44]

Whittier's "Vesta" deserves similar praise for its artless appeal to the sentiments, memory, and faith of sorrowing parents:

> O Christ of God! whose life and death
> Our own have reconciled,
> Most quietly, most tenderly
> Take home Thy star-named child!
>
> Thy grace is in her patient eyes,
> Thy words are on her tongue;
> The very silence round her seems
> As if the angels sung.
>
> Her smile is as a listening child's
> Who hears its mother call;
> The lilies of Thy perfect peace
> About her pillow fall.
>
> She leans from out our clinging arms
> To rest herself in Thine;
> Alone to Thee, dear Lord, can we
> Our well-beloved resign!
>
> Oh, less for her than for ourselves
> We bow our heads and pray;
> Her setting star, like Bethlehem's,
> To Thee shall point the way!
> (II, 305-306)

Two examples of the kind of praise Whittier received for his sentimental nature poems are these excerpts from two letters, the first by Oliver Wendell Holmes and the other by Harriet Prescott Spofford:

> But I am especially pleased with your kind note, because it gives me the opportunity to speak of your own lines, which for grace and infinite tenderness, you have never surpassed. . . . I mean the lines, "In School Days." . . . It melted my soul within me to read these lovely verses. . . . I hardly think I dared read them aloud. My eyes fill with tears just

> looking at them in my scrapbook, now, while I am writing. . . . Many noble, many lovely verses you have written; none that go to the heart more surely and sweetly than these.[45]
>
> When I came to "June on the Merrimack," I fairly cried! Dear Mr. Whittier, you have handed me down to a posterity [memory] there, that I shall never reach in any other way.[46]

Undoubtedly, when Tennyson called Whittier's "My Platmate" "a perfect poem,"[47] he was not thinking of the poem's stylistic qualities but of its power to bring back treasured memories.

Of course, it is extremely difficult for us to appreciate nineteenth-century sentimental verses, mainly because the scenes or occasions they describe are gone forever. "In School-Days" will not recall fond memories for someone who has not attended a country schoolhouse enveloped by blackberry vines and sumach. And surely, poems which describe nature as God's book of revelation will make no sense to someone looking at a slum or polluted landscape. Lake Erie would hardly be the place to recite these lines from "Summer by the Lakeside":

> Lake of the Northland! keep thy dower
> Of beauty still, and while above
> Thy solemn mountains speak of power,
> Be thou the mirror of God's love.
> (II, 31)

In other words, as nature is destroyed, so are the sentimental poems of the Cambridge poets. The ecological concern of these lines, penned in 1837 by Whittier, make them relevant today:

Naked lay, in sunshine glowing,
   Hills that once had stood
Down their sides the shadows throwing
   Of a mighty wood,
Where the deer his covert kept,
And the eagle's pinion swept!

Where the birch canoe had glided
   Down the swift Powow,
Dark and gloomy bridges strided
   Those clear waters now;
And where once the beaver swam,
Jarred the wheel and frowned the dam.

For the wood-bird's merry singing,
   And the hunter's cheer,
Iron clang and hammer's ringing
   Smote upon his ear;
And the thick and sullen smoke
From the blackened forges broke.

Could it be his fathers ever
   Loved to linger here?
These bare hills, this conquered river,--
   Could they hold them dear,
With their native loveliness
Tamed and tortured into this?

Sadly, as the shades of even
   Gathered o'er the hill,
While the western half of heaven
   Blushed with sunset still,
From the fountain's mossy seat
Turned the Indian's weary feet.
(I, 32-33)

Another important aspect of Whittier's popularity was his involvement, early and late, in the national literature movement. In his 1829 article "American Genius," he wrote that "The promise" of America's "childhood is like that of the infant Hercules," and three years later in "American Writers," he stated, "As an American, I am proud of the many gifted spirits who have laid their offerings upon the altar of our national literature."[48] Similar sentiments can be found in his preface to Songs of Three Centuries.[49] He made

one of his cleatest appeals for a truly American literature while reviewing the poems of Robert Dinsmore. In this review (which shares some passages with his 1847 article about William Burleigh's poetry) he lamented that "American domestic life has never been hallowed and beautified by the sweet and graceful and tender associations of Poetry" and that "we have no Yankee pastorals" (VI, 245). He then suggested ways poets could fill the lack:

> Do they [young poets who believe poetry and philosophy are the same] find nothing to their purpose in our apple-bees, huskings, berry-pickings, summer picnics, and winter sleigh-rides? . . . Who shall say that we have not all the essentials of the poetry of human life and simple nature, of the hearth and the farm-field? Here, then, is a mine unworked, a harvest ungathered.
>
> (VI, 248)

To conclude these thoughts, Whittier warned "the mere dilettante and the amateur ruralist" (VI, 248) to stay away from the "harvest ungathered" and called for a very special kind of rural poet.

> . . . one who has grown strong admist its [New England's] healthful influences, familiar with all its details, and capable of detecting whatever of beauty, humor, or pathos pertain to it,--one who has added to his book-lore the large experience of an active participation in the rugged toil, the hearty amusements, the trials, and the pleasures he describes.
>
> (VI, 248)

In this sketch of the true American poet, Whittier was, of course, describing himself. After all, he was a New England farmboy with a knack for rhyming and an eye for spiritual meanings in common life. Surely his poems, as well as his editorials and reviews, show him to be a "historian of American taste" who had a "steady view of

popular rather than profound criticism."[50] Even his earliest critics realized that "There is no decided imitation in his style."[51] Indeed, it was the homely authenticity and child-like naturalness of his craft that encouraged his readers to rate him above Longfellow. While Longfellow studied books and literary styles for inspiration, Whittier recorded as simply and as accurately as he could the activities and sentiments of humble people around him.[52] He always tried to write "the sort of verse which appealed, first of all, to his neighbors."[53] To give his poems "the savor of the soil"[54] he sometimes used "archaic regional pronunciation"[55] to make rhymes. The following lines, as rustic as they are touching, prove that Whittier heeded his own advice to Lucy Larcom to avoid "the poor niceties of aristocratic exclusiveness":[56]

> And, round and round, over valley and hill,
> Old roads winding, as old roads will,
> Here to a ferry, and there to a mill;
> And glimpses of chimneys and gabled eaves,
> Through green elm arches and maple leaves,--
> Old homesteads sacred to all that can
> Gladden or sadden the heart of man,
> Over whose thresholds of oak and stone
> Life and Death have come and gone!
> (I, 213)
>
> Since we parted, a month had passed,--
> To love, a year;
> Down through the beeches I looked at last
> On the little red gate and the well-sweep near.
>
> I can see it all now,--the slantwise rain
> Of light through the leaves,
> The sundown's blaze on her window-pane,
> The bloom of her roses under the eaves.
>
> Just the same as a month before,--
> The house and the trees,
> The barn's brown gable, the vine by the door,--
> Nothing changed but the hives of bees.
> (I, 187)

Then, as he mused, he heard along his path
A sound as of an old man's staff among
The dry, dead linden-leaves; and, looking up,
He saw a stranger, weak, and poor, and old.
(I, 141)

While, through the window, frosty-starred,
Against the sunset purple barred,
We saw the sombre crow flap by,
The hawk's grey fleck along the sky,
The crested blue-fay flitting swift,
The squirrel poising on the drift,
Erect, alert, his broad gray tail
Set to the north wind like a sail.
(II, 166-167)

Besides his fine renditions of American landscapes, legends, and customs, Whittier wrote hundreds of poems praising and defining the basic constitutional rights of American citizens. "Democracy" and "The Poor Voter on Election Day" are but two examples of many that could be cited. During the Civil War he wrote "To Englishmen" in an attempt to bolster America's image abroad. Furthermore, he composed numerous poems about important political figures of the day and about such diverse events as the Inauguration of George Washington and the great Chicago fire of 1871. In 1883 he called "Our Country" "The best and dearest spot on earth" (III, 368), and more than thirty years earlier he praised America for her "stubborn strength of Pilgrim Rock," and explained that the school and church standing together are the cornerstone of democracy (III, 334). Perhaps the following lines best summarize Whittier's deep feelings about America and particularly about New England:

Then ask not why to these bleak hills
I cling, as clings the tufted moss,
To bear the winter's lingering chills,
The mocking spring's perpetual loss.
I dream of lands where summer smiles,
And soft winds blow from spicy isles,
But scarce would Ceylon's breath of flowers be sweet,
Could I not feel thy soil, New England, at my feet!
(II, 43)

When set alongside of Whittier's many heart-felt stanzas about America, one has to doubt the validity of Mamoru Ohmori's statement that although Whittier longed "for the true American national literature . . . and showed faint signs of the coming of it," his "gentility . . . supported by Quakerism prevented him from composing and recognizing true American poems like those of Walt Whitman."[57] It was Whittier's poetry, not Whitman's, that stirred and strengthened the patriotism of thousands of soldiers and civilians during the difficult years of abolition and War. It was Whittier's poetry, not Whitman's, that reshaped and reflected popular opinions, beliefs, and literary theories during the nineteenth century. For more than sixty years, Whittier's clear, sane, musical verses entertained, comforted, edified, and defined American society.

NOTES--CHAPTER IV

[1]Pray, Apprenticeship, p. 148.

[2]Ibid., pp. 29, 32, 46, 51, 59, 82.

[3]Ibid., p. 228.

[4]Ibid., p. 164.

[5]Ibid., pp. 141-142.

[6]Ibid., pp. 234-235. Currier, Bibliography, p. 492 cites the July, 1830 edition of J. T. Buckingham's Boston Courier which admonishes Whittier not to waste his talents by writing sentimental verse. E. M. Tilton, "Making Whittier Definitive," New England Quarterly, 12 (January, 1939), 306.

[7]Pray, Apprenticeship, p. 71.

[8]Ibid., pp. 125, 236-238. As can be seen in his review of Holmes' Poems, "Mirth and Medicine," VII, 374-382, Whittier appreciated "the wholesome alternative of a hearty laugh."

[9]Pray, Apprenticeship, pp. 31, 36, 137-139, 150-152, 200-201.

[10]Cheshire Pastoral Association, Christian Hymns for Public and Private Worship (37th edition; Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1853), pp. 434-435, 436.

[11]Kennedy, Poet of Freedom, p. 110.

[12]Lowell, "Whittier's In War Time," p. 291.

[13]Weeks, "Criticism," pp. 161-162.

[14]Whittier spent much time reading. Whittier, On Writers reveals the range of his studies. Moreover, his allusions to what he read were skillfully done. Hawthorne praised Whittier's work with American legends. Randall Stewart, "Two uncollected Reviews by Hawthorne," New England Quarterly, 9 (September, 1936), 504-507.

[15]Weeks, "Criticism," p. 181.

[16]Whittier, On Writers, p. 64.

[17]Rantoul, "Reminiscences," p. 131. Claflin, "Whittier," p. 68.

[18]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 461.

[19]Whittier, On Writers, p. 196.

[20]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 592.

[21]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 90. Whittier's anthology of children's poetry, Child Life, is undoubtedly one of the most beautifully illustrated books of the nineteenth century. Volume V of his Works contains two stories for children: "David Matson" and "The Fish I Didn't Catch." Both were printed in popular children's magazines.

[22]C. J. Weber, "Whittier and Sarah Orne Jewett," New England Quarterly, 18 (September, 1945), 402.

[23]Whittier, On Writers, p. 148.

[24]Anderson, "Library," p. 33.

[25]Whittier, On Writers, p. 63.

[26]Pray, Apprenticeship, p. 128. Higginson, Whittier, p. 152.

[27]John Greenleaf Whittier, ed., Songs of Three Centuries (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1877), p. v.

[28]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 359. Whittier, On Writers, p. 39.

[29]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 42. P. C. Moon, "Observations on the Religious Philosophy and Method of Whittier in Voices of Freedom," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 93 (1957), 252. Stoddard, "Whittier," p. 434. Waggoner, "Another Look," p. 35.

[30]Whittier, On Writers, p. 105.

[31]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 625. Whittier's religious sensitivity is also evident in his essays "The Agency of Evil" (VII, 249-266), "Dora Greenwell" (VII, 284-304), and "The Better Land" (VII, 280-283).

[32]Stevens, "Bible," pp. 3, 5.

[33]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[34]Ibid., p. 55.

[35]Underwood, Whittier, p. 353. See also Pray, Apprenticeship, pp. 113, 115-116, 128, 133.

[36]Higginson, Whittier, p. 153.

[37]Marks, Hymnody, p. 180.

[38]C. M. Taylor, "Whittier Set to Music," Essex Institute Historical Collections, 88 (1952), 24. Jefferson, Hymns, p. 247. Higginson, Whittier, pp. 162-163.

[39]Bailey, Gospel, p. 534. Marks, Hymnody, p. 30.

[40]Cadbury, "Religion," p. 167. W. T. Scott, "Poetry in America: A New Consideration of Whittier's Verse," New England Quarterly, 7 (January, 1934), 273.

[41]Whittier, Songs of Three Centuries, p. vi.

[42]Bailey, Gospel, p. 542.

[43]Alwin Thaler, "Tennyson and Whittier," Philology Quarterly, 28 (October, 1949), 519.

[44]Whittier, On Writers, p. 123. Mrs. James T. Fields, Whittier: Notes of His Life and of His Friendships, Harper's Black and White Series (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), p. 52.

[45]Anderson, "Library," p. 14.

[46]Ibid., p. 23.

[47]Thaler, "Tennyson," p. 518.

[48]Whittier, On Writers, pp. 100, 106.

[49]Whittier, Songs of Three Centuries, p. iv.

[50]Whittier, On Writers, p. 1.

[51]Currier, Bibliography, p. 490 quotes the Boston Statesman of 1828.

[52]Scott, "Whittier's Verse," pp. 259, 275.

[53]Perry, "Today," p. 855.

[54]Rantoul, "Reminiscences," p. 135.

[55]Kathryn Anderson McEuen, "Whittier's Rhymes," American Speech, 20 (February, 1945), 53-54. See also Whittier's thoughts about Nathaniel P. Rogers' use of "the common, simple dialect of the people" (VI, 221).

[56]Whittier, On Writers, p. 137.

[57]Ohmori, "National Literature," pp. 231-232.

CHAPTER V

TWO DRIFT-WOOD FIRES: HOW PERSONALITY AFFECTS FORM IN POETRY

One popular nineteenth-century theory which must be understood before reading the poetry of that time stated that because poetry was supposed to teach a moral or religious lesson, it was impossible for a bad person to write a good poem or even to be a poet. Only a moral person could create poetry worth reading. In other words, the poet's personality was not separated from his poems. The following extracts clarify this theory. The first three concern Longfellow, and the other two describe Whittier. All, except the last one, are from nineteenth-century reviews.

> The selfish man cannot be a poet. To charm the eye and fascinate the ear of those who know him not; to cause the selfish and indifferent to forget the reality, and to regard the phantoms of his imagination as living and breathing things; to touch the hearts of the cold, the callous, and the vain, and to transfer to them the light of that inspiration which kindled his own soul,--this is the province of the poet. And, to do this, it requires that he should himself possess the most boundless sympathy with human weakness and human suffering.[1]

> The accord between the character and life of Mr. Longfellow and his poems was complete. His poetry touched the hearts of his readers because it was the sincere expression of his own. The sweetness, the gentleness, the grace, the purity, the humanity, of his verse were the image of his own soul.[2]

> We, for our part, have so often seen his kindly face in his charming poems, and we may add, his poetry in his kindly face, that the associations therewith are among the last that we should part with.[3]

> Behind all his work appears the character of the man, which may be called more attractive than the work itself.[4]

> Everywhere in Whittier the poet and the poems seem one. A beautiful character shines through them. Their warm, gracious humanity was in the heart of the man by whom they were written.[5]

The similarities between these tributes should not lead one to think that Longfellow and Whittier had twin personalities. Whittier, like his father, was a direct, decisive person, while Longfellow had a more retiring nature. The Reverend T. T. Munger early emphasized this difference between the poets in his article, "The Influence of Longfellow on American Life":

> In a restless age he [Longfellow] has given us an example of quiet, and breathed not a little of it into our lives. No one ever reads a line of this poet without feeling rested. . . . He takes off your burden, instead of adding to it: he does not withdraw the lesson he sets before you, but he soothes you while you fulfil it. He is pre-eminently the poet of peace and repose. In Whittier we feel the pressure of an over-acute moral nature: his lash of duty drives us to our tasks again (a very useful thing to do), but at the same time we need a little rest in a less rasping air. . . . I think this is the main reason we love him. We need him, as a tired child needs a soothing nurse.[6]

But what the tributes do suggest is that engraved portrait frontispieces and schoolroom photographs had a more important function than mere decoration. Nineteenth-century readers enjoyed making comparisons between a poet's facial features (gravity, kindness, cheerfulness) and the characteristics of his verses. The tributes also

suggest that since the poet's personality determined his poem's content and form, a poem should reveal much of the poet's personality. For example, the thematic and stylistic differences between Longfellow's "The Fire of Drift-Wood" and Whittier's "Burning Drift-Wood" should reflect very accurately the differences between the personalities of the two poets. And, this is true. Moreover, an analysis of "The Fire of Drift-Wood" (a poem Whittier highly praised)[7] and "Burning Drift-Wood" will show that although they are simply-worded and clear, they are skillfully and intricately constructed poems.*

Longfellow's poem is certainly easy to read and understand. The following stanza conveys the melodious smoothness and naturalness of expression which satisfied the taste of the times.

> We spake of many a vanished scene,
> Of what we once had thought and said,
> Of what had been, and might have been,
> And who was changed, and who was dead.

Furthermore, the poem's Long Metre and rhyme (abab cdcd) made it easy to memorize and sing.

Yet, the adjectives natural and simple are misleading when applied to "The Fire of Drift-Wood." It reads easily only because Longfellow endowed it with a flawless organization which balances variety and unity. A drowsy, dark, peaceful, somewhat melancholy mood fills the first seven stanzas. They portray an old farm-house, an old town, an old fort, old friends, and old times. Although unified by rather common images of oldness and mutability, these stanzas are

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*Both poems are reprinted at the end of this chapter.

anything but stagnant simplicity. Through his subtle description of nightfall, Longfellow skillfully draws his readers away from sights and sounds into a dark, contemplative quietness. In other words, as the stanzas progress, language which appeals to the emotions replaces language which appeals to the senses. The first two stanzas describe the sea-breeze which filters into the room and also the landscape the friends see through the window. But by the end of the third stanza, night fills the little room making the landscape and even their faces fade from sight. Only their voices break the gloom. In the next two stanzas, darkness shifts the poem's focus to the realm of memory; vanished scenes, what had been, who had changed, and who had died. Even the friends' voices are muffled at the end of the seventh stanza. Longfellow says that "words are powerless" to describe that "first slight swerving of the heart" which foretells the end of a friendship. Thus far the gloomy silence of the poem artfully bewitches its reader into reflective loneliness. The poet's use of assonance (third stanza) and alliteration ("s" in the sixth stanza) intensifies this hushed tone. All that remains is "a mournful rustling in the dark." This brilliant movement from sound to near silence, sight to darkness, landscape to memory seems to be a simple feat, because Longfellow does not use poetic devices to excess.

The eighth stanza marks a transition in the poem, because, after it, the darkness is dispelled by "bickering flames," quiet memories are replaced by images of shipwrecks, the gentle sea-breeze becomes a "gusty blast," and the silence is broken by the rattling window and roaring ocean. The drift-wood fire, which according to

the eighth stanza is "built of the wreck of stranded ships," suddenly flares up and startles the reader. The poet, of course, used the wrecked ships which "were hailed / And sent no answer back again" (stanza nine) to symbolize "The Long-lost ventures of the heart, / That send send no answers back again" (stanza eleven). These storm-filled lines also echo the calmer thoughts of the fifth stanza:

> And all that fills the hearts of friends,
> When first they feel, with secret pain,
> Their lives thenceforth have separate ends,
> And never can be one again;

Thus, the two sections of the poem are bound together. Moreover, the repetition of "burned" and "glowed" in the last stanza greatly strengthens the implied meaning of the poem: even as the fire burns drift-wood, so the hearts of the friends glow and burn with thoughts of buried fancies and lost friendships (the wrecks of time). One could say that the first stanzas glow while the last four burn. Dr. O. W. Holmes explained that "Although Longfellow was not fond of metrical contortions and acrobatic achievements, he well know the effects of . . . well-managed refrains or repetitions."[8] "The Fire of Drift-Wood" beautifully illustrates how this knowledge enabled Longfellow to create unity out of contrasts through the medium of common words and images.

Like "The Fire of Drift-Wood," John Greenleaf Whittier's "Burning Drift-Wood" is easy to read and memorize, and is written in the same hymn metre and rhyme. And again, like Longfellow's poem, it is a minor masterpiece of organization and style camouflaged by simplicity. Of course, by pointing out these general similarities,

I am not suggesting the poems are twins. They certainly are not. Whittier used some of the same images and symbols as Longfellow did, but he used them to embody an entirely different meaning--or personality.

One of the first qualities discernible in Whittier's "Burning Drift-Wood" is directness. Ten out of the twelve stanzas of Longfellow's poem do little more than create mood through description. Whittier's poem, on the other hand, is built around message rather than mood, declaration rather than description. The poem's theme is given already in the first stanza.

> Before my drift-wood fire I set
> And see, with every waif I burn,
> Old dreams and fancies coloring it,
> And folly's unlaid ghosts return.

Longfellow's fire symbolizes the hearts of old friends glowing over thoughts of what "might have been," but Whittier's fire represents the just destruction of foolish dreams and selfish fancies.

The rest of the poem, which develops this theme, can be divided into three sections: in stanzas two through six, he asks questions about the fate of the "gallant ships, that sailed" across the "enchanted sea" "On blind Adventure's errand sent"; in stanzas seven through fourteen, he shows the failure of those ships and suggests that mariners search for "the sober gounds of truth" rather than for the "Sea of Dreams" and "the haven of Content"; and in stanzas fifteen through twenty-two, he sings a hymn praising the physical and spiritual rewards gained by sailing the "Eternal Sea." Can personality affect the form of a poem? These three sections of

"Burning Drift-Wood" are three different facets of Whittier's personality: the romantic dreamer, the abolitionist, and the believer in Eternal Love. What Whittier is doing in this poem is looking back upon his life from the vantage point of eighty-three years, and pointing out to his readers which aspects of his life he feels are of permanent value. The organization of this poem is the organization of Whittier's personality.

In the first section of the poem. Whittier alludes to several Utopian ideas which were being discussed in the nineteenth century. "Arcadia's vales," for example, refers to St. Pierre's Arcadia. Many of the allusions made in this part of the poem can be traced to Whittier's essay "Utopian Schemes and Political Theorists" (VII, 199-208) published in 1848. In this essay, he rejects all Utopian plans, because they are inconsistent with the Christian faith, on which man should place his hope. He makes a similar rejection in the second section of the poem. The tenth and twelfth stanzas are simple, direct, and sincere--all qualities common to Whittier's best poetry:

> Take with you, on your Sea of Dreams,
> The fair, fond fancies dear to youth.
> I turn from all that only seems,
> And seek the sober grounds of truth.
> . . . . . .
> The wrecks of passion and desire,
> The castles I no more rebuild,
> May fitly feed my drift-wood fire,
> And warm the hands that age has chilled.

Many of his most impressive lines deal with rejecting the realm of dreams for the difficult realm of truth. Of course, the anti-slavery

movement is that venture "Which Love had freighted." The sincerity of these poetic sentiments is supported by the fact that when Longfellow visited Whittier in the summer of 1873, "Mr. Whittier brought out and exhibited . . . an anti-slavery document he had signed some forty years before."[9]

Thus far, the poem is very tense; the first section asks pointed questions, and the second section has a shouting tone.

> What matter that it is not May,
> That birds have flown, and trees are bare,
> That darker grows the shortening day,
> And colder blows the wintry air!

But stanzas thirteen and fourteen begin a softening of the poem's tone. Stanza thirteen ("I only know the best remains") anticipates the marching optimism of stanzas fifteen and sixteen in which Whittier pictures the physical goods gained by fighting for the truth.

> Far more than all I dared to dream,
> Unsought before my door I see;
> On wings of fire and steeds of steam
> The world's great wonders come to me,
>
> And holier signs, unmarked before,
> Of Love to seek and Power to save,--
> The righting of the wronged and poor,
> The man evolving from the slave;

And stanza fourteen introduces a religious image ("evening sacrifice") which prepares the reader for the rolling solemnity of the poem's last six stanzas. What Whittier is saying through the poem's various tones is that the "enchanted sea" only raises disturbing questions, while the "sober grounds of truth" eventually bring hope and contentment. The "Sea of Dreams" is full of turmoil and doubts,

but the "Eternal Sea" whispers words of peace. Structurally, the poem moves from passion to serenity.

> I know the solemn monotone
> Of waters calling unto me;
> I know from whence the airs have blown
> That whisper of the Eternal Sea.
>
> As low my fires of drift-wood burn,
> I hear that sea's deep sounds increase,
> And, fair in sunset light, discern
> Its mirage-lifted Isles of Peace.

These lines bring to mind Whittier's hymn, "The Eternal Goodness," which also reveals the peace the poet experienced especially while thinking about death.

In summary, Longfellow's "The Fire of Drift-Wood" quietly describes mutability, while Whittier's "Burning Drift-Wood" surges towards permanence. And this is also the difference between the personalities of the poets. When Whittier asked Longfellow to join the anti-slavery movement, Longfellow replied that although he rejoiced "in freedom from slavery of all kinds," he could not be an abolitionist, because "Partisan warfare" was "too violent, too vindictive" for his "taste."[10] In 1844 Longfellow wrote the soothing poem "The Day Is Done," but Whittier shocked the nation (and probably himself) by composing "The Sentence of John L. Brown." Few poems of equal intensity can be found in American nineteenth-century literature. Yet both poets experienced peace during their lifetimes. Apparently Longfellow was born with peace in his spirit. Whittier fought for his, as can be seen in the form and content of his drift-wood fire poem.

THE FIRE OF DRIFT-WOOD (1848)

Devereaux Farm, Near Marblehead

1. We sat within the farm-house old,
   Whose windows, looking o'er the bay,
Gave to the sea-breeze damp and cold
   An easy entrance, night and day.

2. Not far away we saw the port,
   The strange, old-fashioned, silent town,
The lighthouse, the dismantled fort,
   The wooden houses, quaint and brown.

3. We sat and talked until the night,
   Descending, filled the little room;
Our faces faded from the sight,
   Our voices only broke the gloom.

4. We spake of many a vanished scene,
   Of what we once had thought and said,
Of what had been, and might have been,
   And who was changed, and who was dead;

5. And all that fills the hearts of friends,
   When first they feel, with secret pain,
Their lives thenceforth have separate ends,
   And never can be one again;

6. The first slight swerving of the heart,
   That words are powerless to express,
And leave it still unsaid in part,
   Or say it in too great excess.

7. The very tones in which we spake
   Had something strange, I could but mark;
The leaves of memory seemed to make
   A mournful rustling in the dark.

8. Oft died the words upon our lips,
   As suddenly, from out the fire
Built of the wreck of stranded ships,
   The glames would leap and then expire.

9. And, as their splendor flashed and failed,
   We thought of wrecks upon the main,
Of ships dismasted, that were hailed
   And sent no answer back again.

10. The windows, rattling in their frames,
  The ocean, roaring up the beach,
The gusty blast, the bickering flames,
  All mingled vaguely in our speech;

11. Until they made themselves a part
  Of fancies floating through the brain,
The long lost ventures of the heart,
  That send no answers back again.

12. O flames that glowed! O hearts that yearned!
  They were indeed too much akin,
The driftwood fire without that burned,
  The thoughts that burned and glowed within.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

BURNING DRIFT-WOOD (1890)

1. Before my drift-wood fire I sit,
   And see, with every waif I burn,
Old dreams and fancies coloring it,
   And folly's unlaid ghosts return.

2. O ships of mine, whose swift keels cleft
   The enchanted sea on which they sailed,
Are these poor fragments only left
   Of vain desires and hopes that failed?

3. Did I not watch from them the light
   Of sunset on my towers in Spain,
And see, far off, uploom in sight
   The Fortunate Isles I might not gain?

4. Did sudden lift of fog reveal
   Arcadia's vales of song and spring,
And did I pass, with grazing keel,
   The rocks whereon the sirens sing?

5. Have I not drifted hard upon
   The unmapped regions lost to man,
The cloud-pitched tends of Prester John,
   The palace domes of Kubla Khan?

6. Did land winds blow from jasmine flowers,
   Where Youth the ageless Fountain fills?
Did Love make sign from rose blown bowers,
   And gold from Eldorado's hills?

7. Alas! the gallant ships, that sailed
   On blind Adventure's errand sent,
Howe'er they laid their courses, failed
   To reach the haven of Content.

8. And of my ventures, those alone
   Which Love had freighted, safely sped,
Seeking a good beyond my own,
   By clear-eyed Duty piloted.

9. O mariners, hoping still to meet
   The luck Arabian voyagers met,
And find in Bagdad's moonlit street,
   Haroun al Rasehid walking yet,

10. Take with you, on your Sea of Dreams,
   The fair, fond fancies dear to youth.
I turn from all that only seems,
   And seek the sober grounds of truth.

11. What matter that it is not May,
That birds have flown, and trees are bare,
That darker grows the shortening day,
And colder blows the wintry air!

12. The wrecks of passion and desire,
The castles I no more rebuild,
May fitly feed my drift-wood fire,
And warm the hands that age has chilled.

13. Whatever perished with my ships,
I only know the best remains;
A song of praise is on my lips
For losses which are now my gains.

14. Heap high my hearth! No worth is lost;
No wisdom with the folly dies.
Burn on, poor shreds, your holocaust
Shall be my evening sacrifice!

15. Far more than all I dared to dream,
Unsought before my door I see;
On wings of fire and steeds of steam
The world's great wonders come to me,

16. And holier signs, unmarked before,
Of Love to seek and Power to save,--
The righting of the wronged and poor,
The man evolving from the slave;

17. And life, no longer chance or fate,
Safe in the gracious Fatherhood.
I fold o'er-wearied hands and wait,
In full assurance of the good.

18. And well the waiting time must be,
Though brief or long its granted days,
If Faith and Hope and Charity
Sit by my evening hearth-fire's blaze.

19. And with them, friends whom Heaven has spared,
Whose love my heart has comforted,
And sharing all my joys, has shared
My tender memories of the dead,--

20. Dear souls who left us lonely here,
Bound on their last, long voyage, to whom
We, day by day, are drawing near,
Where every bark has sailing room.

21. I know the solemn monotone
Of waters calling unto me;
I know from whence the airs have blown
That whisper of the Eternal Sea.

22. As low my fires of drift-wood burn,
I hear that sea's deep sounds increase,
And, fair in sunset light, discern
Its mirage-lifted Isles of Peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier

NOTES--CHAPTER V

[1]William Sloane Kennedy, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston: Moses King, 1882), pp. 283-284.

[2]Kennedy, Longfellow, pp. 300-301.

[3]Ibid., p. 291.

[4]Richardson, American Literature, p. 176.

[5]Jefferson, Hymns, p. 250.

[6]Kennedy, Longfellow, pp. 280-281.

[7]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 346.

[8]Kennedy, Longfellow, p. 293.

[9]Ibid., p. 199.

[10]Pollard, Friend of Man, p. 213.

CHAPTER VI

WHITTIER'S POETRY AND THE BIBLICAL PROPHETIC TRADITION

Nowadays the word "prophet" often brings to mind a picture of a stern preacher who can divine the future. This picture, however, hardly does justice to the prophetic tradition. R. B. Y. Scott's The Relevance of the Prophets gives this telling description of the Old Testament Hebrew prophets:

> They were . . . not merely foretellers, though they did express upon occasion their moral certainty of what God was about to do. They were not moral philosophers, for they had no systematized scheme of the world, and their apprehension of reality was intuitive rather than rational. They might be called preachers, but not preachers "like the scribes" who were exponents of a revelation received from tradition; they themselves were media of a divine self-disclosure. They were mystics (in the best sense), but men of action and of the world as well; moralists as well as poets; social radicals because (again, in the best sense) they were religious conservatives; markedly individual, but representative of and identified with their people. They were spokesmen of God to their nation, and to men of all ages who will listen to their words. In very truth they were the servants and envoys of the Living God, instruments of his creative purpose in the realm of spirit.[1]

As mentioned earlier, Whittier encouraged his critics to compare him with the Old Testament prophets. Since many of these critics were ministers, and since any well-schooled nineteenth-century reader had studied the Bible thoroughly,[2] the Whittier-prophet

comparisons were not made lightly or ignorantly. In fact, a study of Whittier's prose and especially of his poetry will reveal many important parallels with the writings of the Old Testament prophets, parallels in theme and in artistic theory which could not be accidental. Whittier did, after all, write in old age that "the moral and spiritual beauty of the holy lives . . . in the Bible and other good books" deeply affected him "with a sense of . . . falling short and longing for a better state."[3] Then too, his "whole life . . . felt the influence . . . of Milton's prose."[4] And he considered Milton a prophet figure.

Aaron Kramer, in The Prophetic Tradition in American Poetry, 1835-1900, agrees with Edwin Markham's statement that Whittier was "the incarnation of Biblical heroism."[5] But Kramer, while concentrating on Whittier's political "heroism," does not thoroughly explain the "Biblical" part of Markham's compliment. Although there are differences between Whittier and the Hebrew prophets and between the Isreal nation and nineteenth-century America, and although Whittier's verse seldom reaches the sublime level of Ezekiel's poetry, the similarities between their callings, messages, days, and views of God, man, and nature deserve serious attention.

Prediction really has very little to do with prophecy. In fact Isaiah (2:6) strongly condemned divination. The word "prophet" is derived from the Greek word prophētēs, which means "one who speaks on behalf of someone else."[6] The Hebrew prophets were called by God to speak on His behalf. Whittier most definitely thought he was called by God, as this letter he wrote to Godkin reveals:

> The simple fact is that I cannot be sufficiently grateful to the Divine Providence that so early called my attention to the great interests of humanity, saving me from the poor ambitions and miserable jealousies of a selfish pursuit of literary reputation.[7]

Similar sentiments appear in "Looking Backward" where he rejected the "selfish aims of power and fame" and exclaimed "Thy will, oh Father!"[8] In an 1879 letter, he confessed how he always tried to bring his "imaginative poetic temperament into true subjection" to "holy and pure ideals."[9] With such statements in mind, Wasson claimed Whittier was "organically a poem of the Will," and Savage believed that "It was as a son of God that he became a reformer and an Abolitionist."[10]

The prophet's "mission was not of his own choosing" and often seemed "a hopeless and impossible task."[11] It seemed prudent to keep silent and not give the divine word utterance. This feeling prompted Moses, Elijah, and Jonah to try to reject or escape their callings. Although Whittier felt honored by his calling, he too was frequently uneasy about it, as can be seen in "Ritner" (III, 49), "The Sentence of John L. Brown" (III, 93), "What of the Day?" (III, 191), "Overrulled" (III, 311), "Ego" (II, 102), and in these lines from "The Panorama":

> Oh, not of choice, for themes of public wrong
> I leave the green and pleasant paths of song,
> The mild, sweet words which soften and adorn,
> For sharp rebuke and bitter laugh of scorn.
> (III, 210)

"The Summons" begins with a description of beautiful, restful summer sounds, but later on the poet says,

> Another sound my spirit hears,
> A deeper sound that drowns them all;
> A voice of pleading choked with tears,
> The call of human hopes and fears,
> The Macedonian cry to Paul!
> (III, 213-214)

It is important to remember that although God commanded the prophet to speak, the prophet "was not a puppet, but a conscious instrument."[12] Like the Hebrew prophets, Whittier kept his sense of individuality and acted out of free will, even though he knew "His life was not his own" (II, 181). In "The Panorama" he encouraged the abolitionists to use their individual talents.

> True to yourselves, feed Freedom's altar-flame
> With what you have; let others do the same.
> (III, 207)

While the prophet was expected to make full use of his particular talents, God did demand humility of him. The prophet's difficult duties left no time for selfish pride or self gratification.[13] The prophet Isaiah certainly showed humility during his calling (6:1-8).

> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord
> sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and
> his train filled the temple. Above him stood the
> seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered
> his face, and with two he covered his feet, and
> with two he flew. And one called to another and
> said:
> "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
> the whole earth is full of his glory."
> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at
> the voice of him who called, and the house was
> filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me!
> For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,
> and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean
> lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord
> of hosts!"

Whittier often stressed a sense of weakness in his reform poems, for he too knew of God's power.

> I will not dream in vain despair
> The steps of progress wait for me:
> The puny leverage of a hair
> The planet's impulse well may spare,
> A drop of dew the tided sea
> (II, 133)

It is interesting that the image of Isaiah's lips being touched by the burning coals is one of Whittier's favorite allusions. He thought of reform poetry as "A voice from lips whereon the coal from Freedom's shrine hath been" (III, 84). Two other of his favorite devices were to equate Israel's "Ark of old" and the reformer's "Bible" (III, 177) and to equate the American "hearth" and God's "holy altar" (III, 101). In "The Relic" he compared his cane, which had been carved from the charred remains of Pennsylvania Hall, to "that mystic rod" of Moses "which opened, in the strength of God, / A pathway for the salve" (III, 72).

The days in which the prophet spoke were "charged with eternal issues determining destiny." They were days of decision. During such times, "the prophet, not the priest or the teacher" disclosed "the moral crisis" which other men could not recognize."[14] In his book, Aaron Kramer emphasized the "unblinding, discomposing role of prophecy."[15] The Hebrew prophets, therefore, not only had to be clear sighted, they also had to be brave, because their times were crue and evil, as Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 make clear:

> Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had

> no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive; but better than both is he who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

Whittier prefaced his 1838 anti-slavery Poems with Coleridge's interpretation of these verses, and he echoed the Preacher's fiery words in these stanzas from "Lines" and from "For Righteousness' Sake":

Speak through him words of power and fear,
As through Thy prophet bards of old,
And let a scornful people hear
Once more Thy Sinai-thunders rolled.

For lying lips Thy blessing seek,
And hands of blood are raised to Thee,
And on Thy children, crushed and weak,
The oppressor plants his kneeling knee.
(III, 122)

The age is dull and mean. Men creep,
Not walk; with blood too pale and tame
To pay the debt they owe to shame;
Buy cheap, sell dear; eat, drink, and sleep
Down-pillowed, deaf to moaning want;
Pay tithes for soul-insurance; keep
Six days to Mammon, one to Cant.

In such a time, give thanks to God,
That somewhat of the holy rage
With which the prophets in their age
On all its decent seemings trod,
Has set your feet upon the lie,
That man and ox and soul and clod
Are market stock to sell and buy!
(III, 175)

Yet Whittier recognized that this "dark and evil time" (III, 93) was a "Valley of Decision" (III, 191). He believed that the anti-slavery conflict was a "great Providential movement in God's controversy with oppression."[16] And although he, like the first prophets,[17] was

severely limited by physical handicaps, he still bravely denounced the wickedness of nineteenth-century American society. He called for a decision.

In keeping, then, with the prophetic tradition, Whittier believed he was especially called by God during a time of social crisis to deliver God's message and to move people to make a decision. Before discussing the content of the prophetic message, its style should be examined. The Hebrew prophets did not make "vague accusations in general terms." Instead they filled their verses with "vivid realism" and "concrete and specific" imagery meant to "arouse resentment among the powerful, and a class-feeling among the victims of injustice and exploitation."[18] These lines composed by Micah (3:1-3) illustrate how powerfully provoking prophetic poetry could be:

> And I said:
> Hear, you heads of Jacob
> and rulers of the house of Israel!
> Is it not for you to know justice?--
> you who hate the good and love the evil,
> who tear the skin from off my people,
> and their flesh from off their bones;
> who eat the flesh of my people,
> and flay their skin from off them,
> and break their bones in pieces,
> and chop them up like meat in a kettle,
> like flesh in a caldron.

Notice that Micah's language is clear and simple. If it were frenzied[19] or obscure, his audience would have missed his meaning. The prophets, therefore, used imagery having to do with sowing and reaping, with battles and fortifications, with festivals or religious ceremonies, or with other things the common person would have experienced. Isaiah, for instance, used animal imagery (11) and farming

imagery (27) in his proclamations. This tradition of simple though vivid poetry was, of course, carried on by Christ in His parables (Mark 3). The prophets also clarified their messages by sharply contrasting what should be done or what the people thought they were doing with what actually was taking place.

Then too, even though their messages were "novel" and "even startling,"[20] the prophets used traditional imagery and often identified themselves with an older prophet and his message. Elijah started a social revolution "in the name of the 'old-time religion.'"[21] The prophets were social radicals, because they were "religious conservatives, seeking to revive the essential ethics . . . of historic Yahwism."[22] Furthermore, since the prophetic word was passed on through singing and chanting, it had to be easy to memorize, which meant it had to display certain traditional poetic conventions, such as parallelism of meaning and particular line lengths.[23]

Whittier's poetry, like that of the Hebrew prophets, was certainly not art for art's sake. It was intended to make people act. In "The Panorama" (III, 210) he exclaimed, "Forget the poet, but his warning heed, / And shame his poor word with your nobler deed." To make sure his audience understood him, he wrote simple, clear, homely poetry. He surely kept the educational level of his readers in mind while composing.[24] Of course, his reform poems, unlike his popular verses, were not meant to entertain or comfort, even though they have stylistic and thematic elements in common. Like Micah, Whittier startled his nation into action by revealing the full horror of political corruption in vivid imagery. There is nothing mild

about the following "Lines on the Portrait of A celebrated Publisher" which denounce a publisher for his pro-slavery attitude:

> A moony breadth of virgin face,
> By thought unviolated;
> A patient mouth, to take from scorn
> The hook with bank-notes baited!
> Its self-complacent sleekness shows
> How thrift goes with the fawner;
> An unctuous unconcern for all
> Which nice folks call dishonor!
> . . . . . .
> Thy likeness here is doubtless well,
> But higher honor's due it;
> On auction-block and negro-jail
> Admiring eyes should view it.
> Or, hung aloft, it well might grace
> The nation's senate-chamber--
> A greedy Northern bottle-fly
> Preserved in Slavery's amber!
> (III, 153, 154-155)

Such lines were meant to enrage the oppressors and to enhearten the oppressed.

Again, like the Hebrew bards, Whittier relied heavily on imagery drawn from common occupations and events. The following lines resemble the tone and style of Jeremiah 25:34:

> And weep and howl, ye evil priests and mighty men of wrong,
> The Lord shall smite the proud, and lay His hand upon the strong
> Woe to the wicked rulers in His avenging hour!
> Woe to the wolves who seek the flocks to raven and devour!
> But let the humble ones arise, the poor in heart be glad,
> And let the mourning ones again with robes of praise be clad.
> For He who cooled the furnace, and smoothed the stormy wave,
> And tamed the Chaldean lions, is mighty still to save!
> (I, 74-75)

In "Clerical Oppressors" he compared hypocritical preachers with "locusts" (III, 39), and in "The New Year" he called Northern politicians who supported slavery to get votes "mules / Just braying

through their purchased throats" (III, 66). In numerous other poems Whittier called God the sunshine, the prophet the sower, Truth the seed to be planted, and Love the climate which would permit it to grow. Only the draught and thorns of hatred would cause an evil harvest. Whittier also used contrast effectively to clarify his message.

> What! preach, and kidnap men?
> Give thanks, and rob thy own afflicted poor?
> Talk of thy glorious liberty, and then
> Bolt hard the captive's door?
> (III, 38)

As shown earlier, his poems are filled with biblical allusions. He attacked slavery from a conservative Christian point of view. In "The Men of Old" he wrote, "But to rebuke the age's popular crime, / We need the souls of fire, the hearts of that old time" (III, 328), and in "The Problem" he claimed that there was no solution to the "home-pressed question of the age . . . Save in the Golden Rule of Christ alone" (III, 367). Quite often Whittier identified with the Hebrew prophets, Christ, the Quaker martyrs, Milton, or with other religious heroes. In "Ezekiel" he traced his own lineage back to that prophet.[25] Although Whittier seldom reached the stylistic heights of Ezekiel's prophecy, the Quaker poet was remembered long after the abolitionist orators were forgotten, because his "musical arrow" pierced "the heart of the whole people."[26]

In his clearly worded message, the prophet was to speak for oppressed people against errant political and religious powers, to redefine sin, to make God real again, to intercede for the oppressor,

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to warn the nation against God's wrath, to draw his sin-divided nation back together again, to give comfort during hard times, to remind the people of prophetic succession, and always to convince his audience of his sincerity. First, then, the prophet-poet was not only a spokesman for God, but also a "clear-eyed and full-throated sentry, eternally denouncing Sceptred Evil at the mountain-pass and summoning his people to resist."[27] Since he encouraged social revolution, one of his "prime targets" was "the enslavement of man by man."[28] One idol which a number of Old Testament prophets thundered against was Baal. The name Baal means owner.[29] In the following passages Isaiah (58:6-7) and Jeremiah (34:15-17) cried out against slavery and political oppression:

> Is not this the fast that I choose:
> to loose the bonds of wickedness,
> to undo the thongs of the yoke,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> and to break every yoke?
> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
> and bring the homeless poor into your house;
> when you see the naked, to cover him,
> and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
>
> You recently repented and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty, each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name; but then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves. Therefore, thus says the Lord: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, says the Lord. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Whittier's poem "The World's Convention" is remarkably similar to the passage from Jeremiah. In this poem, he wrote that America pleased God by her Constitution, but then turned around and angered God by worshiping the idol slavery. According to Whittier, America's punishment for this wickedness would be war, loss of natural beauty, and dishonor in the eyes of other nations (III, 77). Like the Hebrew bards, Whittier identified wholeheartedly with and fought valiantly for "Earth's drooping poor" (III, 74) who had been denied "the Rights of Man" (III, 61).

> To all who dumbly suffered
> His tongue and pen he offered;
> (II, 181)

Very often he used the biblical idol Moloch (a relative of Baal whose name means reigning one) as a symbol for slavery. In "Ritner" he complained, "the Moloch of Slavery sitteth on high, / And the words which he utters, are--Worship, of die!" (III, 48).

But slavery was not the only oppressor Whittier battled. Especially after the Civil War, he sought to deliver men from the bondage of stifling creeds and chaotic religious fanaticisms which made people hate each other. In other words, following 1865, his prophecy became more New Testament in emphasis and allusion. This does not mean that he neglected the evil influence of creeds during the abolition years. In "Ritner" he urged his readers to forsake "the cavil of creeds" and to "unite / Once again for the poor in defence of the Right" (III, 49). Snow-Bound and the hymn-poems amplify these sentiments, while performing the prophetic duty of

reuniting the divided nation. Certainly Whittier's deep hatred of creeds and fanaticism drew inspiration and strength from the great prophets.[30] Although the early days of Israel have lost their meaning to all but historians, the words of the Hebrew prophets still ring true today, because "the truth they declare is permanently valid" and "has the timeless quality and compelling power of authentic spiritual utterance."[31] The same can be said of many of Whittier's utterances.

> Better than self-indulgent years
> The outflung heart of youth,
> Than pleasant songs in idle ears
> The tumult of the truth.
> (II, 165)

> If still, as Freedom's rallying sign,
> Upon the young heart's altars shine
> The very fires they caught from mine;
>
> If words my lips once uttered still,
> In the calm faith and steadfast will
> Of other hearts, their work fulfil;
>
> Perchance with joy the soul may learn
> These tokens, and its eye discern
> The fires which on those altars burn;
>
> A marvellous joy that even then,
> The spirit hath its life again,
> In the strong hearts of mortal men.
> (II, 105-106)

Before the prophets could stop oppression, they had to break through ecclesiastical facades which equated sin with breaking ceremonial religious laws. They redefined sin as a "concrete way of life" and told arrogant leaders and suffering commoners that they had a "responsibility not only to the neighbor next door but to all . . . neighbors."[32] They argued that since all men are within God's covenant, sins against any man are sins against God. Once sin was

recognized as acts people did to each other in their daily rounds, real conversion from sin and real social reform could occur.

One of Whittier's major prophetic characteristics was his redefinition of sin. To the amazement of pious church goers, who had reduced the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount to a series of abstractions, he called slavery a sin, and claimed that the best praise man can give God is to act kindly and humbly towards all people--blacks included. Whittier once wrote, "Better heresy of doctrine, than heresy of heart," and confessed, "The only orthodoxy I am interested in is that of life and practice."[33] In his own life he practiced Fox's adjuration to "Walk cheerfully over the earth, speaking to that of God in every man."[34] It is little wonder that Whittier shuddered to see churches support slavery.

> As for the Church, there is little hope of her; she will and ought to perish in her unnatural embrace of Slavery. And who will mourn?[35]

By redefining sin as part of everyday life, Whittier naturally made his audience feel that God also was near and real rather than just a distant diety dwelling in catechism books. In his 1868 poem "The Meeting" he spoke of God's nearness:

> I reverence old-time faith and men,
> But God is near us now as then;
> His force of love is still unspent,
> His hate of sin is imminent.
> (II, 283)

Two decades earlier, he said that his God was "a present Savior" who could be found "in the task-field" and "in the prison shadows dim"

(III, 113). One reviewer wrote that Whittier "accepted the continuity of God's communication to men, so that the theophanies of the Bible were types of contemporary experience."[36] Whittier reasoned that if God was real, the Bible, His Word, must also be relevant truth. Another contemporary compared Whittier with "the prophets" because, like them, "he took the accepted moralities, the familiar religious formulas of his day, and through his own fervor breathed into them life and passion."[37] That Whittier's main intention was to make God real again in nineteenth-century American life cannot be doubted after reading "The Sentence of John L. Brown," where he exclaimed, "Speak out in words of power and awe / That God is living yet!" (III, 92). God's ever-present power was to the poet a source of much optimism. Since God is "Love which outlives / All sin and wrong" (II, 169), and since God called him, how could he fail in his prophetic mission? "For Righteousness' Sake" reveals Whittier's optimistic reliance on God:

> God's ways seem dark, but, soon or late,
> They touch the shining hills of day;
> The evil cannot brook delay,
> The good can well afford to wait.
> Give ermined knaves their hour of crime;
> Ye have the future grand and great,
> The safe appeal of Truth to Time.
> (III, 176)

Whittier's emphasis on the nearness of God and his faith that Truth's triumph was inevitable definitely link him with the prophetic tradition, for the Old Testament prophets, while admitting that Yahweh is "immeasurably exalted," still pictured him as present "in the turmoil of men's ordinary social life."[38] Jeremiah's (23:23) God was

"a God at hand . . . and not a God afar off." This nearness was always a source of strength. Yahweh called the prophet, and "Yahweh's purpose to disclose his goodness and to finish creating a faithful people is not easily defeated."[39] Isaiah (40:28-19) sang of God's sustaining power.

> The Lord is the everlasting God,
> the Creator of the ends of the earth.
> He does not faint or grow weary,
> his understanding is unsearchable.
> He gives power to the faint,
> and to him who has no might he increases strength.

To summarize, Whittier, like the Hebrew bards, thought of "man's social (as well as his individual) life as the arena of the moral judgments of God, and the course of history, with all its relativity and ambiguities, as ultimately conforming to the Will of God."[40]

Whittier's reform stanzas are prophetic in their urgent tone, biblical imagery, concrete clarity, redefinition of sin, and emphasis on God's nearness. Another quality which strikingly separates him from the low mimetic (to borrow Northrup Frye's terminology)[41] or romantic poets is his view of nature, which is high mimetic or prophetic. The biblical prophets thought of nature as God's second book of revelation. God was present not only in history, but also in nature. Sin, therefore, was considered unnatural and chaotic.[42] Jeremiah (8:7) revealed the unnaturalness of sin when he said the storks know their migration times, but man does not remember "the ordinance of the Lord," and Amos (7:8) believed that the disobedience of God's Law was as much of a perversion as a plumb-line that disobeyed nature's laws.

Also, nature was thought to support the prophets in their work. If the people sinned, God punished them through nature (storms, floods, famines, and diseases). Nature revealed God's displeasure. Jeremiah (12:4) and Hosea (4:1-3) lamented sin's withering effect on nature:

> How long will the land mourn,
> and the grass of every field wither?
> For the wickedness of those who dwell in it
> the beasts and the birds are swept away,
> because men said, "He will not see our latter end."
>
> Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
> for the Lord has a controversy with the
> inhabitants of the land.
> There is no faithfulness or kindness,
> and no knowledge of God in the land;
> there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing,
> and committing adultery;
> they break all bounds and murder follows murder.
> Therefore the land mourns,
> and all who dwell in it languish,
> and also the beasts of the field,
> and the birds of the air;
> and even the fish of the sea are taken away.

Whittier too believed that sin (slavery) spoiled landscapes. The following excerpts from "Leggett" and "Justice And Expediency" mirror the passages from Jeremiah and Hosea:

> Slavery is such an evil that it withers what it touches. Where it is once securely established the land becomes desolate . . . (VI, 203)
>
> The once fertile fields are wasted and tenantless, for the curse of slavery, the improvidence of that labor whose hire is kept back by fraud, has been there, poisoning the very earth beyond the reviving influence of the early and the latter rain. A moral mildew mingles with and blasts the economy of nature. It is as if the finger of the everlasting God had written upon the soil of the slave-holder the language of His displeasure.
>
> (VII, 33)

Identical sentiments appear over and over in his anti-slavery poems. Two examples are "Toussaint L'Ouverture" and "Texas, Voice of New England":

> It was as if the crimes of years--
> The unrequited toil, the tears,
> The shame and hate, which liken well
> Earth's garden to the nether hell--
> Had found in nature's self a tongue,
> On which the gathered horror hung;
> (III, 13)

> "And the curse of unpaid toil
> Downward through your generous soil
> Like a fire shall burn and spoil.
>
> "Our bleak hills shall bud and blow,
> Vines our rocks shall overgrow,
> Plenty in our valleys flow;--
>
> "And when vengeance clouds your skies,
> Hither shall ye turn your eyes,
> As the lost on Paradise!"
> (III, 97)

Furthermore, in "Burial of Barber" he exclaimed, "On our side are nature's laws" (III, 182), and in "The Christian Slave" and in "Expostulation" he portrayed the "vile South Sodom" (III, 88) ignoring the storms, plagues, and earthquakes which the prophet said would occur unless the people forsoke "the shrine of Moloch" (III, 28). Whittier obviously must have learned these themes from the Hebrew prophets.

One should not confuse the predictive element of prophecy with divination of the future. Fortune tellers foretell specific events which will inevitably occur in the future. But the ancient prophets were not specific in their forecasts, and their predictions did not inevitably occur. In fact, the prophets sometimes withdrew

or modified their predictions.[43] Moreover, their predictions were divided. That is, they foretold "doom in the one case and deliverance in the other." The doom or deliverance would befall the people to whom the prophet was speaking as "an immediate consequence of their moral and spiritual condition."[44] Isaiah (1:19-20) divided his prophetic prediction.

> "If you are willing and obedient,
> you shall eat the good of the land;
> But if you refuse and rebel,
> You shall be devoured by the sword;
> for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Such predictions were "not glimpses of a predetermined future" but were "morally conditioned by" and "integrally related to the spiritual situation" of the audience. Because what would happen was "the necessary consequence of a moral situation," the people could avoid the predicted punishment by renouncing their evil ways.[45]

In 1857 Whittier composed a poem predicting the outbreak of the Civil War as God's punishment for America's corruption. Underwood recorded that the poem's "powerful imagery and . . . prophetic tone attracted general attention."[46] Whittier's "The Crisis" (III, 148-152) is also prophetic in its double prediction. It warns that America will not reap a good harvest unless she rejects the moral and political evils which offend man and God. Of the many other poems which could be cited, his "The Panorama" (III, 193-210) best exemplifies prophetic prediction. Whittier wrote that he received this remarkable poem in a vision.

> Before my soul a voice and vision passed,
> Such as might Milton's jarring trump require,
> Or glooms of Dante fringed with lurid fire.

Whittier surely meant the poem's main character, "the Showman," with his "loose hair" and "look / Of one who felt . . . the presence of the age" to be a prophet figure.

After the Showman displays beautiful paintings of the American West, which he calls "the new Canaan of our Israel," he is asked by a "shrewd on-looker" to reveal what the West will be like when "The twentieth century rounds a new decade." At this point the Showman, or Whittier himself, makes it clear that he is not a mystic who can predict the future. He can only give the prophet's double prediction based on his knowledge of God's will and the people's way of life. If the people obey God's law of love, a good harvest will follow, but if they bring slavery into the West, a terrible harvest will occur.

> Then said the Showman, sadly: "He who grieves
> Over the scattering of the sibyl's leaves
> Unwisely mourns. Suffice it, that we know
> What needs must ripen from the seed we sow;
> That present time is but the mould wherein
> We cast the shapes of holiness and sin.

First the Showman reveals what the West will be like if the people who migrate there are true Christians. The painting shows "a land / Fair as God's garden," a land of plenty "Where live again, around the Western hearth, / The homely old-time virtues of the North." The people of this new land will be well-educated, industrious, and charitable. Next the Showman predicts "Fate's reverse":

A village straggling in loose disarray
Of vulgar newness, premature decay;
A tavern, crazy with its whiskey brawls,
With "Slaves at Auction!" garnishing its walls;
. . . . . .
Without, loose-scattered like a wreck adrift,
Signs of misrule and tokens of unthrift;
Within, profusion to discomfort joined,
The listless body and the vacant mind;
The fear, the hate, the theft and falsehood, born
In menial hearts of toil, and stripes, and scorn!

When the audience charges that the South is to blame for this horrible vision of the future, the Showman warns them that evil dwells in every heart, not just in the hearts of slave-holders. The Showman then lists a number of prophets who gave their all to turn mankind from evil, and calls for more prophets, more "heroes" and "men of antique mold," to fight for Christian virtues and political freedom during the years of westward expansion. In closing, the Showman humorously and seriously warns his listeners against false prophets.

The double quality of the prophet's prediction stems from the fact that God called the prophets to intercede or pray for wicked people as well as to speak out against their sins. Although the prophet was "often forced to stand alone," he nonetheless felt responsible for "the spiritual condition of his people."[47] Only the "true prophet" had the "power of intercession."[48] Two examples of prophets who petitioned God to forgive their evil nations are Jeremiah (14:7-9) and Amos (7:1-6). Because of Amos' pleas for mercy, God repented of the locust plague and fire He had threatened to send. Part of the reason why the prophet interceded for his nation was because he, like his audience, had a strong "social consciousness" and thought of his people as a "family."[49] Thus, when

Micah (1:8 ff.) wept over Israel's doom, he wept over his own, and Isaiah (1:8, 21 ff. and 6:5) called himself an unclean person among unclean people. Since the prophets did not put themselves above their people but instead identified with them, it is little wonder they hoped God would forgive rather than curse Israel.

Aaron Kramer argued that the prophet had to display "martial power" in order to be "a formidable adversary." Without this power, the prophet would be "no more than embarrassing and irksome."[50] Lowell, and nearly every critic after him, has emphasized Whittier's "fire of warlike patriotism . . . that burns all the more intensely that it is smothered by his creed."[51] But Whittier, like the Old Testament prophets, also interceded for his enemies. Unlike Garrison, Whittier, while hurling prophetic invective at slavery, pitied the slave holder. The poet saw sin in every heart and longed to see forgiveness rather than punishment cover America. In "Justice And Expediency" and later in Snow-Bound, Whittier pictured his country as a family. Garrison and his group, however, acted as though they did not want to preserve the union. Like Jeremiah, Whittier realized that the punishment for slavery would affect everyone in the nation. Therefore, he prayed for forgiveness. Three nineteenth-century critics, Fields, King, and Pickard, praised Whittier's balance of martial power and prophetic intercession:

> "The fire and fury of the brain" were his indeed; a spirit was in him to redeem the land; he was one of God's interpreters; but there was also the tenderness of divine humanity, the love and patience of those who dwell in the courts of the Lord.[52]

> Better than any of our liberal poets, you know how to combine the truths of the two great utterances in the written word: "God is Love," and "Our God is a Consuming Fire." . . . God keep you out of Heaven for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, as long as possible, and keep your pen dipped in fire and tears, for the good of Man and the cause of Christ.[53]

> With all the indignation of the Hebrew prophets, . . . he never lost sight of that love of God and love of man, which tempers even the hatred of evil.[54]

Of course, these two facets of Whittier's prophecy shine clearly in poems such as "The Panorama" and "The Call of the Christian." This stanza from his autobiographical poem "My Namesake" is typical:

> "For, awed by Sinai's Mount of Law,
> The trembling faith alone sufficed,
> That, through its cloud and flame, he saw
> The sweet, sad face of Christ!"
> (II, 121)

In 1844 Whittier described "that angel's voice sublime, / Heard above a world of crime, / Crying of the end of time" (III, 95), and in 1861 the end, the War, began. God's justice, as Whittier realized, demanded that Americans experience the "chastening of war."[55] All the saddened poet could do was remind his people that "the wrath of man is praise" to God (III, 256) and that "the gospel of freedom" was being "preached, even if by strife."[56]

Whittier thought of the War as a time of Apocalypse. The apocalyptic books of the Bible (Daniel, Revelation, and part of Ezekiel) "are dominated by the conviction that evil is increasing, and is approaching a climax which will bring the catastrophic intervention of God and the end of the age."[57] Whittier's "What of the Day?" surely predicted that the Civil War would be the time of

climax when Good would finally overthrow Evil and end the age of chattel slavery (III, 191-192), and in his "A Word for the Hour" he compared the "black eclipse" of the War to "the dream of the Apocalypse" (III, 218) recorded in Revelation 8.

Although Whittier's writings do not contain the "visionary symbolism" which characterizes the biblical revelation books, many of his poems do picture "a reality lying beyond sense experience" and do speak of the "breaking in of the supernatural into the natural order" --themes common the apocalyptic literature of the Bible.[58] The Old and New Testament bards meant their apocalyptic poetry "to provide, for people suffering adversity and persecution, the consolation of a great hope in the God who works behind the scenes of history."[59] By emphasizing that freedom would overcome slavery and by recording his visions of the City of God, Whittier comforted his black and white readers.

Whether his City of God was to be of earthly or of heavenly origin is difficult to assert. In "Curse of the Charter-Breakers" he implied that the City would come to earth from heaven.

> Like the seer of Patmos gazing,
> On the glory downward blazing;
> Till upon Earth's grateful sod
> Rests the City of our God!
> (III, 146)

In "My Triumph," however, he described "man and woman / Diviner but still human, / Solving the riddle old, /Shaping the Age of Gold" (II, 161). Similarly, in "The Crisis" he equated the "Christian Age of Gold" with a future time of peace and freedom on earth (III,

150). Two of his letters, one composed in 1843 and the other in 1881, also strongly suggest the coming or evolution of an earthly City of God:

> I have a strong faith--it seems almost like prophecy--that the result will be, ere the lapse of two centuries, a complete and permanent change in the entire Christian world. . . . Love will take the place of fast, penance, long prayers, and heathenish sacrifices; altar, church, priest, and ritual will pass away; but the human heart will be the Holy of Holies . . .[60]
>
> The world is growing better; the Lord reigns; our old planet is wheeling slowly into fuller light. I despair of nothing good.[61]

But regardless of when or how Whittier thought the City of God would appear, the two important points to remember which link him with the Bible are first, that he recognized a reality beyond sense impression, and secondly, that he believed this supernatural reality could break into the natural order, sometimes in the form of judgment (War) and ultimately in the transformation of the wicked world into the City of God.

While the poet drew encouragement from apocalyptic visions, he gained mighty optimism from the tradition of prophetic succession, which simply put means that God will never be without a spokesman, because the "torch kindled by Moses from the flames of Sinai" will be "passed from hand to hand by the prophetic leaders and makers-of-history throughout the generations."[62] The prophet believed that each age would produce its own prophets. The Truth, therefore, would be spoken forever, even though individual prophets died.[63]

One of the clearest prophetic elements in Whittier's poetry is his joyful emphasis on succession. He never once doubted that

"Freedom's holy Pentecost" (III, 173) would occur, because God would always call "A glorious remnant" (III, 53) to preach freedom's message. In 1833 Whittier composed a famous "Hymn" which links the American pilgrims with Moses.

> O Thou, whose presence went before
> Our fathers in their weary way,
> As with thy chosen moved of yore
> The fire by night, the cloud by day!
> (III, 29)

And in 1870, he asserted that new prophets would be called to take his place when he died.

> Others shall sing the song,
> Others shall right the wrong,--
> Finish what I begin,
> And all I fail of win.
>
> What matter, I or they?
> Mine or another's day,
> So the right word be said
> And life the sweeter made?
>
> Hail to the coming singers!
> Hail to the brave light-bringers!
> Forward I reach and share
> All that they sing and dare.
> (II, 161)

Three other major hallmarks of the true prophet which have not been discussed yet are the prophet's seriousness about his art, his purity of life, and his consistency of message.[64] Surely Whittier took his calling and art very seriously. The Christian Examiner of 1849 stated that "there is probably no living writer of equal ability who has written so seldom with a merely literary purpose."[65] This was certainly a compliment during the nineteenth

century, when many poets "lived culture and not life" and wrote "cowardly" poems which were merely ornamental escapes from "time and place."[66] But Whittier rejected the "tinsel of classical honors" and chose "self-discipline" over "artistic pride."[67] His "frequent withdrawals to nature were always at once means of communion with God and preparations for a return to man."[68] Moreover, he rejected "mere fancies, however popular" as distortions of his calling and message.[69] His realization that words were not "cheap" to the Hebrew prophets led him to imitate their high seriousness in lines like the following from "The World's Convention":

> The pen along its page shall burn
> With all intolerable scorn;
> An eloquent rebuke shall go
> On all the winds that Southward blow;
> From priestly lips, now sealed and dumb,
> Warning and dread appeal shall come,
> Like those which Israel heard from him,
> The Prophet of the Cherubim;
> Or those which sad Esaias hurled
> Against a sin-accursed world!
> Its wizard leaves the Press shall fling
> Unceasing from its iron wing,
> With characters inscribed thereon,
> As fearful in the despot's hall
> As to the pomp of Babylon
> The fire-sign on the palace wall!
> (III, 79)

Whittier, unlike Garrison, was constantly on guard against the splintering haughtiness of fanaticism. In his essay "The Scottish Reformers" he warned against the "danger of failing to discriminate between a rational philanthropy, with its adaptation of means to ends, and that spiritual knight-errantry which undertakes the championship of every novel project of reform, scouring the world

in search of distressed schemes held in durance by common sense and vagaries happily spellbound by ridicule" (VI, 427). To combat this evil, he suggested that the reformer practice "Patience, hope, charity, and watchfulness unto prayer," because "To the reformer, in an especial manner comes home the truth that whoso ruleth his own spirit is greater than he who taketh a city" (VI, 428). Early in life, Whittier admitted that Milton's "high and spirit-rousing lays" encouraged him to seek a "high unsullied purity" in his own life.[70] Only "a pure conscience," he believed, could experience "the mystery of faith" (VII, 49). As early as 1833, Whittier had formulated his ideal for a pure, holy life in the character of "the Preacher" from his tale "The Proselytes" (V, 312). Even during years of international fame, he continued to pattern his life after his early heroes--the biblical prophets, the Quaker martyrs, Milton, Marvell, and (as shown later) Herbert.

A life as noble and pure as Whittier's almost naturally had to result in consistency of purpose. And John Greenleaf Whittier was above all else consistent. Reform sentiments and allusions to the prophets break in everywhere in his poetry, even in fanciful poems. Moreover, as late as 1883, he was still writing articles to commemorate the Anti-Slavery Convention of 1833. And while other poets consented to omit poems from their editions which might have offended Southern readers, Whittier doggedly included even his fiercest protests in his collected volumes.[71] Furthermore, some of his angriest pronouncements against creeds and shallow living were penned after Snow-Bound. Savage compared the "Prelude" of "Among the Hills" with

the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah, and in 1880 Bright praised Whittier for his prophetic vitality.[72] Aaron Kramer's book reveals in great detail how all of the other major and minor nineteenth-century poets fell amazingly short of being true prophets, either through weakness of artistic talent, lack of seriousness, blatant inconsistencies, or lapses into racism and prejudice.[73] But after reviewing Whittier's slightly flawed record[74] as a prophet-reformer, Kramer wrote, "No other poet of reputation comes close to matching that record; and along with the emotional comes a heightening of the artistic power."[75]

To summarize, Whittier consciously aligned himself with the prophetic tradition and imitated the writings of the Old Testament prophets. His calling, view of his times, style of message, redefinition of sin, sense of God's nearness, view of nature, divided predictions, intercessions for the wicked, identification with his nation, vision of apocalypse, belief in prophetic succession, and purity and consistency of purpose clearly link him with the biblical bards he idolized. Even as Ezekiel, his favorite prophet,[76] called the valley of dry bones back to life, so he resurrected America to confront her with the evils of slavery and creeds. These stanzas from his "Ezekiel" give a concise summary of Whittier's thoughts on prophecy and of his place in the prophetic tradition:

And thus, O Prophet-bard of old,
Hast thou thy tale of sorrow told!
The same which earth's unwelcome seers
Have felt in all succeeding years.
Sport of the changeful multitude,
Nor calmly heard nor understood,
Their song has seemed a trick of art,
Their warnings but the actor's part.
With bonds, and scorn, and evil will,
The world requites its prophets still.

So was it when the Holy One
The garments of the flesh put on!
Men followed where the Highest led
For common gifts of daily bread,
And gross of ear, of vision dim,
Owned not the Godlike power of Him.
Vain as a dreamer's words to them
His wail above Jerusalem,
And meaningless the watch He kept
Through which His weak disciples slept.

Yet shrink not thou, whoe'er thou art,
For God's great purpose set apart,
Before whose far-discerning eyes,
The Future as the Present lies!
Beyond a narrow-bounded age
Stretches thy prophet-heritage,
Through Heaven's vast spaces angel-trod,
And through the eternal years of God!
Thy audience, worlds!--all things to be
The witness of the Truth in thee!
(II, 212-213)

NOTES--CHAPTER VI

[1]R. B. Y. Scott, The Relevance of the Prophets (Revised edition; New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 40-41.

[2]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, pp. 15-17.

[3]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 26.

[4]Ibid., volume 2, p. 506.

[5]Edwin Markham, ed., The Book of American Poetry (New York: n.p., 1934), p. 51.

[6]Scott, Prophets, p. 2.

[7]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 513.

[8]Mordell, Militant, pp. 119-120. See also Whittier's Justice and Expediency (VII, 49, 60-61, 97-98).

[9]Flower, Whittier, pp. 155-156.

[10]Linton, Whittier, p. 186. Savage, "Whittier's Religion," p. 81.

[11]Scott, Prophets, p. 11.

[12]Ibid., p. 162.

[13]Ibid., pp. 93, 124, 129.

[14]Ibid., p. 13.

[15]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, pp. 350, 10.

[16]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 549.

[17]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, pp. 351-352.

[18]Scott, Prophets, pp. 181, 186.

[19]Ibid., p. 15.

[20]Ibid., p. 106.

[21]Ibid., pp. 38, 6.

[22]Ibid., p. 185.

[23]For an excellent discussion of the structure of Hebrew poetry see Sanford Calvin Yoder, Poetry of the Old Testament (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1948), pp. 3-26.

[24]Moon, "Observations," p. 252. See also Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 10.

[25]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 37.

[26]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 726.

[27]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, pp. 14-15.

[28]Ibid., p. 41.

[29]Scott, Prophets, pp. 28-29.

[30]Ibid., pp. 15, 93. See also Whittier's "Fanaticism" (VII, 391-395).

[31]Scott, Prophets, p. 15.

[32]Ibid., pp. 136, 219, 134, 135, 172.

[33]Cadbury, "Religion," p. 167.

[34]Moon, "Observations," p. 249.

[35]Anderson, "Library," p. 73.

[36]Cadbury, "Religion," p. 167. See also Savage, "Whittier's Religion," p. 88 where Whittier says, "I believe just so far in the Bible as it believes in me."

[37]Perry, "Today," p. 857. See also Fields, Whittier, p. 76. As Stevens, "Bible," pp. 36-38, 42, 82 points out, Whittier's favorite allusions were to texts which speak of God's nearness and goodness.

[38]Scott, Prophets, pp. 121, 16, 114-119, 223-224.

[39]Ibid., pp. 133, 231.

[40]Ibid., pp. 147-165.

[41]After studying Northrup Frye's "modes" as explained in his Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), I find that Whittier fits into the high mimetic mode, along with Milton, Herbert, and the biblical prophets. Whittier really has little in common with the low mimetic or romantic poets. See especially pages 5, 14, 20, 53-58, 60-66, 74, 85-86, 153.

[42]Scott, Prophets, pp. 168, 225.

[43]Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[44]Ibid., p. 10.

[45]Ibid., pp. 10-12.

[46]Underwood, Whittier, p. 403.

[47]Scott, Prophets, p. 96.

[48]Ibid., p. 97.

[49]Ibid., pp. 123-124.

[50]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 32.

[51]Lowell, "Whittier's In War Time," p. 291.

[52]Fields, Whittier, p. 21.

[53]Anderson, "Library," p. 16.

[54]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 358.

[55]Ibid., volume 2, p. 449.

[56]Ibid., p. 603.

[57]Scott, Prophets, pp. 4-5.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid., p. 5.

[60]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 280.

[61]Flower, Whittier, p. 121.

[62]Scott, Prophets, p. 53.

[63]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 39.

[64]Scott, Prophets, pp. 101-104.

[65]Anonymous, "Review," The Christian Examiner, 46 (1849), 149-150.

[66]Scott, "Whittier's Verse," p. 270. Scott, Prophets, p. 348.

[67]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 71. McAleer, "Humility," p. 32.

[68]Waggoner, "Another Look," pp. 37-38.

[69]Whittier, On Writers, p. 9. See also Anderson, "Library," p. 37. I disagree with Desmond Powell's statement in "Whittier," American Literature, 9 (November, 1937), 338 that "Whittier pledged himself to the theory of art as escape from life."

[70]Pray, Apprenticeship, pp. 27-28. See also Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 1, p. 60.

[71]Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 501.

[72]Savage, "Whittier's Religion," pp. 84-85. Pickard, Life and Letters, volume 2, p. 705.

[73]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition points out the flaws which prevented the minor and major poets of Whittier's time from becoming true prophet figures. Following is a list of these poets and the pages in Kramer's book which discuss them: the early or minor poets, pp. 100, 333-334; Bryant, pp. 29, 74, 131, 152, 261-262; Lowell, pp. 149, 151-152, 265; Longfellow, p. 263; Emerson, pp. 152, 265, 269; Thoreau, pp. 152, 268; Holmes, pp. 152, 262; Whitman, pp. 152, 265-266.

[74]For Whittier's minor inconsistencies see Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, pp. 186, 262-263.

[75]Kramer, Prophetic Tradition, p. 148.

[76]Stevens, "Bible," p. 13. Scott, Prophets, pp. 85-89.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER AND GEORGE HERBERT: A STUDY OF SIMILARITIES

Critics agree now that the picture of Whittier as America's uneducated farm-boy poet, which Putnam's Magazine,[1] among other publications, presented to its readers, is a false picture. Whittier was a "major literary critic" and "professional writer" who read numerous books and thought seriously about them.[2] His anthology Songs of Three Centuries alone contains works by more than three hundred different poets. Moreover, his critical articles, historical papers, biographical sketches, and poems refer to hundreds of authors, politicians, and religious leaders.

One fact becomes strikingly obvious while studying Whittier's poetry and especially his prose: he was naturally and wholeheartedly attracted to seventeenth-century British history and literature.[3] His prose sketches deal mainly with seventeenth-century religious heroes, poets, and reformers, and he clearly enjoyed reading Bunyan, Herbert, Vaughan, Marvell, and Milton. The major writings of these poets were available to the nineteenth-century public, either in British and American anthologies, or as they were reprinted in popular magazines.[4] Thus, when Whittier called "the English

revolution of the seventeenth century . . . the golden age of England" ("John Bunyan," VI, 35), he was sharpening an interest already felt by other readers. For instance, one cannot miss the similarities between Whittier's sketch of Marvell and the British critic Mary Mitford's article which praised Marvell's "incorruptible patriotism" and "felicity of phrase."[5] Yet Whittier's interest in Milton, the early Quakers, and the metaphysical poets was far more intense than the interest expressed by his contemporaries, largely because he identified with Milton's prophet image, the courage of the religious reformers, and with the popular clarity and sweetness of poetry by Herbert, Marvell, and Vaughan. He simply could not forget England's impressive contributions to his three greatest interests: the prophetic tradition, popular religious poetry, and the founding of America. Sometimes he even imitated (perhaps unintentionally) the diction and pronunciation of seventeenth-century English. In 1849 the Lady's Book made this comment while reviewing Leaves From Margaret Smith's Journal, in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, 1678-1679, a book with a seventeenth-century style title page:

> We have seen this very interesting work ascribed to the pen of Mr. Whittier, the poet; and there can be little doubt of the truth of this surmise. The story bears sufficient evidence of his particular opinions and tastes; and the ancient, quaint style suits admirably with his genius.[6]

The reasons why Whittier admired the British reformers are not difficult to understand. But what drew him to the poetry of meek Herbert? A brief comparison of their personalities, theologies, and poetry will reveal the answer. According to Margaret Bottrall,

Herbert's character was marked by a "real holiness" and an "unmistakable goodness" which were "immediately attractive to all kinds of people."[7] He was most certainly courteous, kindhearted, and humane. Whittier's critics have given (and will continue to give) him similar compliments, because his gentle humaneness also earned him the love of multitudes. Although Herbert was a "naturally proud man," his poetry is filled with notes of "humility, compassion and responsiveness to the love of God"--notes that Milton "too rarely sounds."[8] Herbert's humility was not a "creeping submissiveness" or a perverse despondency, for it was based on "sober self-knowledge" and issued from a reliance on God's love.[9] Whittier's humility and child-like faith in Eternal Love were very similar to Herbert's, especially since both men were sorely tempted by ambition; Herbert before he became a country parson and Whittier during his pre-abolition years in Sigourney's circle. Furthermore, although each man was physically weak, temperate, frugal, and obsessed with the conscientious use of time,[10] neither was morbid. In her biography of Herbert, Bottrall often praised his cheerfulness:

> The tranquillity that does, in spite of many poems of distress, underlie the writings of Herbert springs from his conviction that God, by condescending to man's estate, hallowed the whole of human life, and by suffering on man's behalf made even pain intelligible. This certainly saved him from narrowness of sympathy towards his fellow-men and from morbidity in his own spiritual life. . . . Although he imposed upon himself, at Bemerton, strict rules of mortification, there is no sign whatever of a kill-joy puritan spirit.[11]

And surely Whittier expressed his own feelings in this description of Jesus Christ:

> The life of the divine Teacher affords no countenance to this sullen and gloomy saintliness, shutting up the heart against the sweet influences of human sympathy and the blessed ministrations of Nature. To the horror and clothes-rending astonishment of blind Pharisees He uttered the significant truth, that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." From the close air of crowded cities, from thronged temples and synagogues,--where priest and Levite kept up a show of worship, drumming upon hollow ceremonials the more loudly for their emptiness of life, as the husk rustles the more the grain is gone,--He led His disciples out into the country stillness, under clear Eastern heavens, on the breezy tops of mountains, in the shade of fruit-trees, by the side of fountains, and through yellow harvest-fields, enforcing the lessons of His divine morality by comparisons and parables suggested by the objects around Him or the cheerful incidents of social humanity, --the vineyard, the field-lily, the sparrow in the air, the sower in the seed-field, the feast and the marriage. Thus gently, thus sweetly kind and cheerful, fell from His lips the gospel of humanity; love the fulfilling of every law; our love for one another measuring and manifesting our love of Him. . . . He frowned upon none of life's simple pleasures. The burden of His Gospel was love; and in life and word He taught evermore the divided and scattered children of one great family that only as they drew near each other could they approach Him who was their common centre; and that while no ostentation of prayer nor rigid observance of ceremonies could elevate man to heaven, the simple exercise of love, in thought and action, could bring heaven down to man. To weary and restless spirits He taught the great truth, that happiness consists in making others happy. ("First Day In Lowell," V, 372-374)

In religious matters, Herbert was not a rebel. He reverently followed the teachings of the Anglican Church and of the Book of Common Prayer, and placed supreme importance on his private devotions and public worship.[12] In fact, Herbert was so much a natural Christian that Bottrall doubts whether he experienced conversion.

> This beauty, naturally, was the fruit of his whole life, not the result of a sudden conversion. It may indeed be doubted whether Herbert was a "twice-born" man. The effect of his decision was to strengthen and stabilize the relationship between himself and his divine Master of which he had been conscious since boyhood.[13]

His religious life was as quiet as it was ancient, for he avoided theological controversy, even though his contemporaries bitterly attacked one another over minor points of doctrine. To be sure, Herbert was "constantly concerned with the relation between the finite and the infinite, between the human and the divine," for he had studied divinity himself for years. Yet he forsook the realm of theological subtleties and devoted his energy to the practical duties of Christian living, duties he welcomed as a rural priest.[14] Neither did any abnormal raptures or mystical glimpses of hidden truths intrude on his life as a "practicing Christian." He was essentially a man of action rather than of contemplation.[15]

Whittier, like Herbert, was not a religious rebel; he accepted the faith of his ancestors, and, except for a brief time during the anti-slavery conflict, he attended the Quaker meeting house in his home town. Although, as the popular periodicals attest, the nineteenth century was a time of theological debate, Whittier avoided religious arguments. The larger questions concerning man's relation to God and to his fellow men interested him.

> Not Thine the bigot's partial plea,
> Nor Thine the zealot's ban;
> Thou well canst spare a love of Thee
> Which ends in hate of man.
> ("Our Master," II, 277)

> "He dared not mock the Dervish whirl,
> The Brahmin's rite, the Lama's spell;
> God knew the heart; Devotion's pearl
> Might sanctify the shell."
> ("My Namesake," II, 121)

One writer praised his "perfect freedom of thought in theological matters," and another reviewer called him "the last lineal expression in our literature of the primitive faith, the last authentic echo of the spiritual democracy of the seventeenth century."[16]

Another aspect which links Whittier's religious life with that of Herbert is his emphasis on the practical. He was deeply moved by Herbert's poem "The Elixir," because it showed "How grace and toil may well agree."[17] One of Whittier's most consistent themes is that man can serve God through common, daily work.

> And woman, in her daily round
> Of duty, walks on holy ground.
> ("The Last Walk In Autumn," II, 45)
>
> How reverent in our midst she stood,
> Or knelt in grateful praise!
> What grace of Christian womanhood
> Was in her household ways!
>
> For still her holy living meant
> No duty left undone;
> The heavenly and the human blent
> Their kindred loves in one.
> . . . . . .
> The dear Lord's best interpreters
> Are humble human souls;
> The Gospel of a life like hers
> Is more than books or scrolls.
>
> From scheme and creed the light goes out,
> The saintly fact survives;
> The blessed Master none can doubt
> Revealed in holy lifes.
> ("The Friend's Burial," II, 303)

Whittier's religious inspirations, like Herberts, resulted in practical action rather than in mysticism or meditation. He meant his abolition poems to be religious calls to action and his popular Christian lyrics to be practical guides for humane, gentle living.

What he sought in himself and in others was "the calm beauty of an ordered life" ("Requirement," II, 328). "The Brewing of Soma" contains this prayer which is typical of Whittier's religious ideals:

> And let our ordered lives confess
> The beauty of Thy peace.
> (II, 294)

Surely Whittier, like Herbert, believed that "Man is capable, as the creatures are not, of entering into a personal relationship with God, a relationship of love."[18] In "Man" Herbert pictures man as a "Palace" built by God, and asks God to dwell in it "That it may dwell with thee at last!" Whittier's "The Hermit of the Thebaid" presents a similar image of man:

> For man the living temple is:
> The mercy-seat and cherubim,
> And all the holy mysteries,
> He bears with him.
> (I, 144)

Of course, both poets realized to their sadness that man does sin in spite of his exalted place in God's plan. Even a priest sins in Herbert's "Unkindness." But only one sin is unforgivable; the rejection of Jesus, the Word made flesh. Whittier, in "The Word," stated, "the unpardonable sin / Is to deny the Word of God within" (II, 327), and Herbert gave this similar definition:

> All may certainly conclude that God loves them, till either they despise that Love, or despaire of his Mercy: not any sin else, but is within his Love: but the despising of Love must needs be without it. The thrusting away of his arme makes us onely not embraced.[19]

It is important to note that, although both poets were well aware of man's stubborn sinfulness, neither one wrote much about hell. Herbert "ignored" the "regional idea of hell" and never speculated "on the origin of evil."[20] Similarly, Whittier never wrote about eternal damnation except to make the point that God could not have created such a terrible place as hell.

"Has saintly ease no pitying care?
   Has faith no work, and love no prayer?
While sin remains, and souls in darkness dwell,
Can heaven itself be heaven, and look unmoved on hell?"
("Divine Compassion," II, 288)

No immortal selfishness
Plays the game of curse and bless:
Heaven and earth are witnesses
That Thy glory goodness is.
. . . . . .
Never yet in darkest mood
Doubted I that Thou wast good,
Nor mistook my will for fate,
Pain of sin for heavenly hate,--
Never dreamed that the gates of pearl
Rise from out the burning marl,
Or that good can only live
Of the bad conservative,
And through counterpoise of hell
Heaven alone be possible.
("Andrew Rykman's Prayer," II, 260-261)

   Thy tender love I see,
In radiant hill and woodland dim
   And tinted sunset sea.
For not in mockery dost Thou fill
   Our earth with light and grace;
Thou hid'st no dark and cruel will
   Behind Thy smiling face!
("The Lakeside," II, 19)

Although Herbert "had too vivid an apprehension of the relationship in this world between God and the soul to dwell upon any doctrine of rewards and punishments," he "was conscious enough of the hell that

alienation from God involves."[21] Hellish agony is evident in poems such as "Longing" and "The Crosse." Whittier too placed heaven and hell in the human heart.

> Alone, O Love ineffable!
> Thy saving name is given;
> To turn aside from Thee is hell,
> To walk with Thee is heaven!
> ("Our Master," II, 277)
>
> "The sterm behest of duty,
> The doom-book open thrown,
> The heaven ye seek, the hell ye fear,
> Are with yourselves alone."
> ("The Vision of Echard," II, 321)

The quality which most attracted Whittier to Herbert's works, however, was neither the delightful personality which shone through the verses nor the theological thoughts expressed in them, but rather their optimistic emphasis on Christ's "redemptive love" and "God's sustaining love."[22] This comforting emphasis is especially clear in Herbert's "Redemption," "Discipline," and in his "Dialogue" where he claims that his "Sweetest Savior" loves him in spite of "stains" which make his soul hardly "worth the having." As can be seen in Herbert's "Providence," he was "not so sentimental as to consider the Divine Love as operating only in the intimate spiritual relationship between God and the individual soul; he also believed that it transcended all personal experience, and was in truth the force upholding the whole scheme of existence."[23] God's Love could also be seen in nature, the second book of God's revelation. Obviously, Whittier thrilled to Herbert's Eternal Love themes, for he too believed that Mercy rather than Wrath controlled life and death.

Yet, in the maddening maze of things,
And tossed by storm and flood,
To one fixed trust my spirit clings;
I know that God is Good!
("The Eternal Goodness," II, 269)

Over two hundred years earlier, Herbert penned similar sentiments in "The Temper I":

Whether I fly with angels, fall with dust,
Thy hands made both, and I am there:
Thy power and love, my love and trust
Make one place ev'rywhere.

As shown in the preceding chapter, Herbert and Whittier felt they were called by God to use their talents for the good of mankind. Herbert requested that The Temple be printed only if the editor thought "it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul." Like Whittier, he put "the immortality promised to every Christian soul" above "a poet's immortality."[24]

I lay the critic's glass aside,
I tread upon my lettered pride,
And, lowest-seated testify
To the oneness of humanity;
Confess the universal want,
And share whatever Heaven may grant.
He findeth not who seeks his own,
The soul is lost that's saved alone.
("The Meeting," II, 284)

Yea more, the assurance strong
That love, which fails of perfect utterance here,
Lives on to fill the heavenly atmosphere
With its immortal song.
("A Legacy," II, 187)

Since poetic talent was seen as a divine gift to be used in God's service, Herbert and Whittier were very serious about what they wrote.

They felt "morally bound to avoid insincerity" and "faked emotions."[25] In 1830 Whittier echoed Herbert's poem "Jordan I" which criticized the extravagances of secular love-lyrics.

> We are weary--disgusted--and ill-natured in contemplation of the subject before us.--This eternal rhyming to cheek and eye and head-gear--this mawkish affectation of sentiment--this profanation of the holiness of love . . . is enough to drive one . . . into absolute madness.[26]

The following stanzas reveal just how serious Whittier was about poetry. The first two passages, which were penned nearly forty-five years apart, question whether or not poetry can convey Truth. Certainly these sentiments have a high mimetic tone. The last poem quoted is serious and also is reminiscent of Herbert's easy, talking style.

Thou, whom my soul, midst doubt and gloom,
   Adoreth with a fervent flame,--
Mysterious spirit! unto whom
   Pertain nor sign nor name!
. . . . . .
Seldom upon lips of mine,
Father! rests that name of Thine;
Deep within my inmost breast,
In the secret place of mind,
Like an awful presence shrined,
Doth the dread idea rest!
Hushed and holy dwells it there,
Prompter of the silent prayer,
Lifting up my spirit's eye
And its faint, but earnest cry,
From its dark and cold abode,
Unto Thee, my Guide and God!
     ("Hymns From The French of Lamartine,"
                II, 200 and 204-205)

But what avail inadequate words to reach
   The innermost of Truth? Who shall essay,
   Blinded and weak, to point and lead the way,
Or solve the mystery in familiar speech?
Yet, if it be that something not thy own,
   Some shadow of the Thought to which our schemes,
   Creeds, cult, and ritual are at best but dreams,
Is even to thy unworthiness made known,
Thou mayst not hide what yet thou shouldst not dare
   To utter lightly, lest on lips of thine
   The real seem false, the beauty undivine.
So weighing duty in the scale of prayer,
Give what seems given thee. It may prove a seed
Of goodness dropped in fallow-grounds of need.
                        ("Utterance," II, 329)

   What hast thou done, O soul of mine,
      That thou tremblest so?
   Hast thou wrought His task, and kept the line
      He bade thee go?

   What, silent all! art sad of cheer?
      Art fearful now?
   When God seemed far and men were near,
      How brave wert thou!

   Aha! thou tremblest!--well I see
      Thou'rt craven grown.
   Is it so hard with God and me
      To stand alone?
   . . . . . .
   "I call on the souls who have left the light
      To reveal their lot;
   I bend mine ear to that wall of night,
      And they answer not.

   "But I hear around me sighs of pain
      And the cry of fear,
   And a sound like the slow sad dropping of rain,
      Each drop a tear!

   "Ah, the cloud is dark, and day by day
      I am moving thither:
   I must pass beneath it on my way--
      God pity me!--whither?"
           ("My Soul And I," II, 221 and 224)

Of course, Herbert was the better artist of the two. Margaret Bottrall made these comments about his skill:

> His command of the right tone and manner for whatever occasion never fails him; and his fastidious taste prevents his religious verse from lapsing into mawkishness or contorting itself into ill-judged extravagances. His was a disciplined mind and a finely tempered spirit; and with this inner integrity went an extreme sensitiveness.[27]

> Even the slightest of the lyrics in The Temple is well-shaped, sinewy and apt. Herbert was a master of economy; where one word will do he does not use more. He seldom strikes off a phrase so brilliant that it lives in isolation, but his poems are wholes; single lines or stanzas suffer when detached from their context, and this is an indication of Herbert's architectonic skill. No poem in The Temple is so long that it cannot be rapidly read in its entirety and enjoyed as a well-proportioned structure.[28]

But if Herbert was a great artist, Whittier was a great popular artist and prophet figure. He frequently sacrificed artfulness so that his readers could understand his poetry quickly and completely. Yet a surprising number of his verses are complex--complex in the same ways Herbert's verses are. Whether he consciously imitated Herbert's use of pun, paradox, and wit is unimportant; but the fact that he did use these devices to create some clever poems is important. Following are a few examples of Whittier's metaphysical style. His use of pun:

> We turn us from the light, and find
> Our spectral shapes before us thrown,
> As they who leave the sun behind
> Walk in the shadows of themselves alone.
> ("The Shadow And The Light," II, 254)

> "As yonder tower outstretches to the earth
> The dark triangle of its shade alone
> When the clear day is shining on its top,
> So, darkness in the pathway of Man's life
> Is but the shadow of God's providence,
> By the great Sun of Wisdom cast thereon;
> And what is dark below is light in Heaven."
> ("Tauler," I, 143-144)

The doubts we vainly week to solve,
The truths we know, are one;
The known and nameless stars revolve
Around the Central Sun.
("The Old Burying-Ground," II, 51)

Faith shares the future's promise. Love's
Self offering is a triumph won;
And each good thought or action moves
The dark world nearer to the sun.[29]

His use of paradox:

Thy healing pains, a keen distress
Thy tender light shines in;
Thy sweetness is the bitterness,
Thy grace the pang of sin.
. . . . . .
No pride of self Thy service hath,
No place for me and mine;
Our human strength is weakness, death
Our life, apart from Thine.

Apart from Thee all gain is loss,
All labor vainly done;
The solemn shadow of Thy Cross
Is better than the sun.
("Our Master," II, 275-276)

In vain remorse and fear and hate
Beat with bruised hands against a fate
Whose walls of iron only move
And open to the touch of love.
He only feels his burdens fall
Who, taught by suffering, pities all.
("The Prayer-Seeker," II, 290-291)

"Self-ease is pain; thy only rest
Is labor for a worthy end;"
("The Voices," III, 347)

I bow myself beneath His hand:
That pain itself was wisely planned
I feel, and partly understand.

The joy that comes in sorrow's guise,
The sweet pains of self-sacrifice,
I would not have them otherwise.

And what were life and death if sin
Knew not the dread rebuke within,
The pang of merciful discipline?

Not with thy proud despair of old,
Crowned stoic of Rome's noblest mould!
Pleasure and pain alike I hold.

I suffer with no vain pretence
Of triumph over flesh and sense,
Yet trust the grievous providence,

How dark soe'er it seems, may tend,
By ways I cannot comprehend,
To some unguessed benignant end

That every loss and lapse may gain
The clear-aired heights by steps of pain,
And never cross is borne in vain.
("My Trust," II, 175-176)

And if we reap as we have sown,
And take the dole we deal,
The law of pain is love alone,
The wounding is to heal.
("The Old Burying-Ground," II, 51)

His will be done whose darkest ways
To light and life are leading!
("St. Martin's Summer," II, 84)

"His love all love exceeding
The heart must needs recall,
Its self-surrendering freedom,
Its loss that gaineth all.
. . . . . .
"The eye shall fail that searches
For me the hollow sky;
The far is even as the near,
The low is as the high."
("The Vision of Echard," II, 319)

In poems such as "The Over-Heart" and "The Shadow and the Light" he used alchemy imagery to give his poetry a seventeenth-century flavor. A clever or witty use of imagery appears in "The Story of Ida," "Hazel Blossoms," "The First Flowers," "Inscription On A Sun-Dial," and in other poems.

In summary, although Whittier was not the artist that Herbert was, the themes of the two poet are very similar. Furthermore, Whittier occasionally used metaphysical devices in his poetry. Surely George Herbert was one of the major literary lights that attracted Whittier to the literature of seventeenth-century England.

NOTES--CHAPTER VII

[1]H. W. Boynton, "John Greenleaf Whittier, an Appreciation," Putnam's, 3 (December, 1907), 274-278.

[2]Whittier, On Writers, p. 1. Alwin Thaler, "Whittier and the English Poets," New England Quarterly, 24 (1951), 57, 59.

[3]Pollard, Friend of Man, p. 336. Thaler, "English Poets," pp. 58-59.

[4]Two nineteenth-century books which contain selections of seventeenth-century English poetry are these: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, ed., The Estray: A Collection of Poems (Boston: W. D. Ticknor and Company, 1847). Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Art, Literature, and the Drama (Boston: Brown, Taggard and Chase, 1859)--a unique anthology which contains dramatic sketches of various authors speaking to one another about important topics, their own works supplying the dialogue. The conversation between George Herbert and Lord Herbert is interesting.

[5]Mitford, Recollections, p. 532.

[6]Anonymous, "Editors' Book Table," Godey's Lady's Book, 38 (1849), 367. For further comments see McEuen, "Whittier's Rhymes," pp. 53, 55.

[7]Margaret Bottrall, George Herbert (London: John Murray, 1954), pp. 31, 139.

[8]Bottrall, Herbert, pp. 32, 98.

[9]Ibid., pp. 98, 32, 48, 92.

[10]Ibid., pp. 43-44.

[11]Ibid., pp. 140, 142, 97, 141.

[12]Bottrall, Herbert, pp. 39, 71-72, 83.

[13]Ibid., p. 32.

[14]Ibid., pp. 71, 134, 140.

[15]Ibid., p. 66.

[16]Stoddard, "Whittier," p. 434. Parrington, Romantic Revolution, p. 362. Underwood, Whittier, pp. 23-24.

[17]Currier, Bibliography, p. 207. Currier quotes a seven-line album verse for a chambermaid at the Asquam House, Holderness written by Whittier.

[18]Bottrall, Herbert, p. 88.

[19]Ibid., p. 79.

[20]Ibid., pp. 89, 91-92.

[21]Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[22]Ibid., p. 88.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., p. 40.

[25]Ibid., p. 139.

[26]Whittier, On Writers, pp. 51-52.

[27]Bottrall, Herbert, p. 4.

[28]Ibid., p. 99.

[29]Christopher Coffin Hussey, "Some Personal Reminiscences of Whittier," in Personal Recollections of English and American Poets, ed. by Manley Woodbury Kilgore and George Frank Woodbury (n.p., 1935), p. 73.

CHAPTER VIII

SNOW-BOUND'S MEANING: A STUDY OF POPULAR NINETEENTH-CENTURY THEMES

On the day Snow-Bound was published, a snow storm enveloped Boston. Following that day, a blizzard of praise surrounded the poem. Its first reviewers, while blind to the poem's complicated artistic structure, emphasized its popular sentimental qualities.

> We are again indebted to Mr. Whittier, as we have been so often before, for a very real and a very refined pleasure. The little volume before us has all his most characteristic merits. It is true to Nature and in local coloring, pure in sentiment, quietly deep in feeling, and full of those simple touches which show the poetic eye and the trained hand. . . . There is in this poem a warmth of affectionate memory and religious faith as touching as it is uncommon, and which would be altogether delightful if it did not remind us that the poet was growing old.[1]

> "Snow-Bound" is a rare bit of realistic art, and yet the reader is never quite sure that he is in Haverhill and not in some rural district of heaven . . . No man can exactly tell where Essex County ends and soul-land begins. Has not our poet shown himself a true seer by revealing to us that it is all soul-land, here and there alike? . . . More than any other of our singers he makes heaven a true home-land, where real people dwell and where friends can find each other and find life good . . .[2]

Modern critics, on the other hand, have measured the work's artistic merits but have largely ignored the popular elements. Robert Penn Warren linked Snow-Bound's theme to the writings of Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and Faulkner. Snow-Bound, like the

other important American works, asks the question, "what does the past mean to an American?" According to Warren, Whittier "came to see that man's fate is that he must learn to accept and use his past completely, knowingly, rather than to permit himself to be used, ignorantly, by it."[3] John B. Pickard's convincing examination of Snow-Bound's symbolism, use of contrasts, musical language, and color, sound, and temperature imagery is both detailed and readable.[4]

But do such literary criticisms explain why Whittier's "picture of his own home was welcomed in thousands of other homes from one end of America to the other"?[5] Again, I assert that one must get into the "very atmosphere" of nineteenth-century culture in order to understand Snow-Bound's fantastic appeal--an appeal which makes it one of the four best-known long poems in American literature, along with Longfellow's Evangeline, Hiawatha, and The Courtship of Miles Standish. Kenneth T. Reed has returned to the simpler kind of interpretation favored by nineteenth-century reviewers in his article "The Pleasant Circle Broke," which traces Whittier's use of the circle image to organize Snow-Bound (the family circle, the circle of fire light, the swirl of snow, the clock, the sun and its path through the sky, and the blood's circulation through the body).[6] Unfortunately, Reed insists that the poem illustrates how the circles of consciousness and experience must inevitably be broken. I sincerely doubt that Whittier was this pessimistic, because the poem obviously emphasizes the unifying powers of faith and memory. As I show later, Whittier's audience would not have thought of Snow-Bound as a pessimistic poem, because they were showered with lyrics which

praised the unbroken circle. The family circle and the life circle cannot be broken if one has faith in God and a memory of loved ones.

A few seemingly obvious comments should be made to explain Snow-Bound's popularity. First of all, poetic descriptions of the family gathered around the hearth were a popular art form long before Whittier wrote his poem. Since thousands of these effusions were published in magazines, the people were ready for Whittier's glowing masterpiece. Two examples of hearth poems are Sarah Hale's "Winter Pictures," 1843, and Alaric Watts' "My Own Fireside," which was included in his popular book Lyrics of the Heart, 1852. Following are excerpts from these poems which are reminiscent of Snow-Bound.

Even when the winds, like warring hosts,
The dark night fill with dread,
Still love may trim the genial fire,
The mind's rich banquet spread.
And as life's storms of sorrow draw
Kind hearts more kindly near,
So nature's cold stern frowns will make
Dear home, more deeply dear--
Thus Faith, and Hope, and Love are given
In Winter Pictures, limned by heaven.[7]

My own fire-side! Those simple words
Can bid the sweetest dreams arise;
Awaken feeling's tenderest chords,
And fill with tears of joy mine eyes.
What is there my wild heart can prize
That doth not in thy sphere abid;
Haunt of my home-bred sympathies.
My own--my own fire-side!
. . . . . .
What care I for the sullen roar
Of winds without, that ravage earth;
It doth but bid me prize the more
The shelter of thy hallowed hearth;--
To thoughts of quiet bliss give birth;
Then let the churlish tempest chide,
It cannot check the blameless mirth
That glads my own fire-side!

My refuge ever from the storm
  Of this world's passion, strife, and care;
Though thunder-clouds the skies deform,
  Their fury cannot reach me there;
There all is cheerful, calm, and fair;
  Wrath, Envy, Malice, Strife, or Pride,
Hath never made its hated lair,
  By thee--my own fire-side!

Thy precincts are a charmed ring,
  Where no harsh feeling dares intrude;
Where life's vexations lose their sting;
  Where even grief is half subdued;
And Peace, the halcyon, loves to brood.
  Then, let the world's proud fool deride;
I'll pay my debt of gratitude
  To thee--my own fire-side!

Shrine of my household deities;
  Bright scene of home's unsullied joys;
To thee my burthened spirit flies,
  When Fortune frowns, or Care annoys!
Thine is the bliss that never cloys;
  The smile whose truth hath oft been tried;--
What, then, are this world's tinsel toys,
  To thee--my own fire-side!

Oh, may the yearnings, fond and sweet,
  That bid my thoughts be all of thee,
Thus ever guide my wandering feet
  To thy heart-soothing sanctuary!
Whate'er my future years may be,
  Let joy or grief my fate betide;
Be still an Eden bright to me,
  My own--my own fire-side![8]

As early as 1830, in "The Frost Spirit," Whittier had formed many of the images he used later in Snow-Bound. Related themes, sentiments, and devices also appear in "The Pressed Gentian," "To My Sister," "The Eternal Goodness," "A Dream of Summer," and "Autumn Thoughts." In his prose work "Charms and Fairy Faith," he justified telling folk legends around a fireplace. These thoughts penned a decade before his winter idyl clarify the poem's appealing references to the supernatural:

> But in many a green valley of rural New England there are children yet; boys and girls are still to be found not quite overtaken by the march of mind. There, too, are huskings, and applebees, and quilting parties, and huge old-fashioned fire-places piled with crackling walnut, flinging its rosy light over happy countenances of youth and scarcely less happy age. If it be true that, according to Cornelius Agrippa, "a wood fire doth drive away dark spirits," it is, nevertheless, also true that around it the simple superstititions of our ancestors still love to linger; and there the half-sportful, half-serious charms of which I have spoken are oftenest resorted to. It would be altogether out of place to think of them by our black, unsightly stoves, or in the dull and dark monotony of our furnace-heated rooms. Within the circle of the light of the open fire safely might the young conjurers question destiny; for none but kindly and gentle messengers from wonderland could venture among them. And who of us, looking back to those long autumnal evenings of childhood when the glow of the kitchen-fire rested on the beloved faces of home, does not feel that there is truth and beauty in what the quaint old author just quoted affirms? "As the spirits of darkness grow stronger in the dark, so good spirits, which are angels of light, are multiplied and strengthened, not only by the divine light of the sun and stars, but also by the light of our common wood-fires." Even Lord Bacon, in condemning the superstitious beliefs of his day, admits that they might serve for winter talk around the fireside.
>
> (V, 388-389)

A third element in Snow-Bound which modern readers are apt to skim over but which nineteenth-century readers must have enjoyed, is Whittier's allusion to "These Flemish pictures of old says" (II, 159). It appears, after reading the discussion questions early text books asked students about Snow-Bound, that even children had seen Flemish paintings of the seventeenth century. For instance, one article, "How To Study Whittier's 'Snow-Bound,'" contains these questions:

> Did you ever see a Flemish picture? For example, a Flemish "interior"? What is characteristic of both poem and picture?[9]

The implied answers are, yes, we have seen Flemish paintings of interiors, and their homely detail, warmth of colors, and loving

realism relate them to Snow-Bound's description of the Whittier homestead. Certainly there are Flemish or Dutch aspects to Snow-Bound--aspects which must have been intentional. Vermeer's paintings of well-known rooms, with their emphasis on stillness and mystical rapture with light, are reminiscent of Snow-Bound's comforting theme, quiet depths, descriptions of familiar rooms, and skillful use of light imagery. It is interesting that the Quietist or Quaker religion began during Vermeer's time and was inspired by Quietist paintings. The idyl also gives a democratic sense of the individuality of each person gathered around the hearth, a sense essential also to the group scenes painted by Frans Hals. Furthermore, Whittier, like Rembrandt, was obsessed with the belief that the Bible can best be interpreted in the light of common human experience. Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether Rembrandt's paintings depict seventeenth-century peasants or biblical characters. Whittier too met prophets and saints along the Merrimac.

It is also likely that the nineteenth century read Snow-Bound as a poem about memory, because it is dedicated "To The Memory Of The Household It Describes" (II, 134) and because it centers itself around the poet's memories of "The dear home faces whereupon / That fitful firelight paled and sore" (II, 141). Furthermore, the public was exposed to numerous other poems about memory; this was a very popular art form. One example is "Sonnet To Memory," which was published in an 1838 issue of the Lady's Book.

SPIRIT! Whose quick and kindling glance is cast
  Over the dim and silent realm of death:
  Who mak'st and warm'st, with thy etherial breath,
The throbless bosom of the shrouded past;
Who roam'st through childhood's far and fairy clime,
  Its wither'd buds reviving 'neath thy tread;[10]

Simply put, Snow-Bound's theme is this: death loses its horrible aura of finality, when one's memory of people who have died is combined with the faith (warmth of the wood fire) that God is good. Surely Snow-Bound's blizzard symbolizes those "'Spirits of Darkness'" which Agrippa claims are "'stronger in the dark'" (wicked doubts about God's providence), and the "'Fire of Vvood'" in the homestead hearth symbolizes that "'Celestial Fire'" (faith that the circle cannot be broken) which "'drives away dark spirits'" (II, 135). In other words, Snow-Bound's "Angel of the backward look" can conquer "Time and Change" even as Agrippa's "'Angels of Light'" can destroy the powers of Satan and Death (II, 158, 141, 135). When a blizzard of evil doubts ("How strange it seems, with so much gone / Of life and love, to still live on!") hides the power of the Son ("The sun . . . darkly circled"), a small wood fire of faith and a few memories of former summer days ("Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust") will protect one from the "dreary-voiced elements" and the "ghostly finger-tips of sleet" (II, 141, 135, 142, 138, 139). Memory and faith tell man that he is immortal; the faculty of memory, then, is an indication of man's immortality. The following lines from the idyl deal with Whittier's warm memories of his sister:

As one who held herself a part
Of all she saw, and let her heart
  Against the household bosom lean,
Upon the motley-braided mat
Our youngest and our dearest sat,
Lifting her large, sweet, asking eyes,
  Now bathed in the unfading green
And holy peace of Paradise.
Oh, looking from some heavenly hill,
  Or from the shade of saintly palms,
  Or silver reach of river calms,
Do those large eyes behold me still?
With me one little year ago:--
The chill weight of the winter snow
  For months upon her grave has lain;
And now, when summer south-winds blow
  And brier and harebell bloom again,
I tread the pleasant paths we trod,
I see the violet-sprinkled sod
Whereon she leaned, too frail and weak
The hillside flowers she loved to seek,
Yet following me where'er I went
With dark eyes full of love's content.
The birds are glad; the brier-rose fills
The air with sweetness; all the hills
Stretch green to June's unclouded sky;
But still I wait with ear and eye
For something gone which should be nigh,
A loss in all familiar things,
In flower that blooms, and bird that sings.
And yet, dear heart! remembering thee,
  Am I not richer than of old?
Safe in thy immortality,
  What change can reach the wealth I hold?
  What chance can mar the pearl and gold
Thy love hath left in trust with me?
And while in life's late afternoon,
  Where cool and long the shadows grow,
I walk to meet the night that soon
  Shall shape and shadow overflow,
I cannot feel that thou art far,
Since near at need the angels are;
And when the sunset gates unbar,
  Shall I not see thee waiting stand,
And, white against the evening star,
  The welcome of thy beckoning hand?
(II, 148-149)

Earlier in the poem, Whittier lamented that some sorrowing people will not feel the warmth of breaking day and will always be prisoners of mortality. Their memory of lost loved ones will never be relieved by faith in God's Son.

> Alas for him who never sees
> The stars shine through his cypress-trees!
> Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
> Nor looks to see the breaking day
> Across the mournful marbles play!
> Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,
> The truth to flesh and sense unknown,
> That Life is ever lord of Death,
> And Love can never lose its own!
> (II, 142)

Given this interpretation of the poem, nineteenth-century readers must have welcomed Whittier's closing invitation to

> Sit with me by the homestead hearth,
> And stretch the hands of memory forth
> To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze!
> (II, 159)

One early poem in which Whittier described the faculty of memory as a proof of man's immortality is "The Norsemen."

> Yet, for this vision of the Past,
> This glance upon its darkness cast,
> My spirit bows in gratitude
> Before the Giver of all good,
> Who fashioned so the human mind,
> That, from the waste of Time behind,
> A simple stone, or mound of earth,
> Can summon the departed forth;
> Quicken the Past to life again,
> The Present lose in what hath been,
> And in their primal freshness show
> The buried forms of long ago.
> As if a portion of that Thought
> By which the Eternal will is wrought,
> Whose inpulse fills anew with breath

The frozen solitude of Death,
To mortal mind were sometimes lent,
To mortal musings sometimes sent,
To whisper--even when it seems
But Memory's fantasy of dreams--
Through the mind's waste of woe and sin,
Of an immortal origin!
(I, 40)

An exceptional prose interpretation of Snow-Bound's meaning can be found in Whittier's "My Summer with Dr. Singletary." A lengthy section of this work deserves reprinting here, because it reveals the poet's beliefs about memory, the same subject he was to grapple with fifteen years later in Snow-Bound. This excerpt also contains identical images to those in Snow-Bound. It is clearly the type of interpretation nineteenth-century readers gave the poem--an optimistic religious interpretation.

"How gladly would we forego the golden streets and gates of pearl, the thrones, temples, and harps, for the sunset lights of our native valleys; the woodpaths, whose moss carpets are woven with violets and wild flowers; the songs of birds, the low of cattle, the hum of bees in the apple-blossom,--the sweet, familiar voices of human life and nature! In the place of strange splendors and unknown music, should we not welcome rather whatever reminded us of the common sights and sounds of our old home?"

"You touch a sad chord, Doctor," said I. "Would that we could feel assured of the eternity of all we love!"

"And have I not an assurance of it at this very moment?" returned the Doctor. "My outward ear fails me; yet I seem to hear as formerly the sound of the wind in the pines. I close my eyes; and the picture of my home is still before me. I see the green hill slope and meadows; the white shaft of the village steeple springing up from the midst of maples and elms; the river all afire with sunshine; the broad, dark belt of woodland; and, away beyond, all the blue level of the ocean. And now, by a single effort of will, I can call before me a winter picture of the same scene. It is morning as now; but how different! All night has the white meteor fallen, in broad flake or minutest crystal, the sport and plaything of winds that have wrought it into a thousand shapes of wild beauty. Hill and valley, tree and fence, woodshed and well-sweep, barn and pigsty, fishing-smacks frozen up at the wharf, ribbed monsters of dismantled

> hulks scattered along the river-side,--all lie transfigured in the white glory and sunshine. The eye, wherever it turns, aches with the cold brilliance, unrelieved save where the blue smoke of morning fires curls lazily up from the Parian roofs, or where the main channel of the river, as yet unfrozen, shows its long winding line of dark water glistening like a snake in the sun. Thus you perceive that the spirit sees and hears without the aid of bodily organs; and why may it not be so hereafter? Grant but memory to us, and we can lose nothing by death. The scenes now passing before us will live in eternal reproduction, created anew at will. We assuredly shall not love heaven the less that it is separated by no impassable gulf from this fair and goodly earth, and that the pleasant pictures of time linger like sunset clouds along the horizon of eternity. When I was younger, I used to be greatly troubled by the insecure tenure by which my senses held the beauty and harmony of the outward world. When I looked at the moonlight on the water, or the cloud-shadows on the hills, or the sunset sky, with the tall, black tree-boles and waving foliage relieved against it, or when I heard a mellow gush of music from the brown-breasted fife-bird in the summer woods, or the merry quaver of the bobolink in the corn land, the thought of an eternal loss of these familiar sights and sounds would sometimes thrill through me with a sharp and bitter pain. I have reason to thank God that this fear no longer troubles me. Nothing that is really valuable and necessary for us can ever be lost. The present will live hereafter; memory will bridge over the gulf between the two worlds; for only on the condition of their intimate union can we preserve our identity and personal consciousness. Blot out the memory of this world, and what would heaven or hell be to us? Nothing whatever. Death would be simple annihilation of our actual selves, and the substitution therefor of a new creation, in which we should have no more interest than in an inhabitant of Jupiter or the fixed star."
>
> (V, 236-238)

Snow-Bound's first audience also must have contrasted the poem with Whittier's earlier reform verses. Whereas the anti-slavery poems called fire down upon a sinful nation, the idyl gathered people around a fire. The prophet's weapon became a source of comfort.

> That ruddy blaze, reflected from contented human faces, is symbolical of Whittier's poetry. There is always something warm, hearty, wholesome about it, which makes us echo Isaiah's rapturous exclamation, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!"[11]

> Another suggestion from the fire in Snow-Bound is the broad humanity of Whittier's work. As all men, being at heart primitive, love an open fire and drop all false distinctions when they gather about it, so do they appreciate the plain manhood and womanhood which Whittier's fire reveals.[12]

Indeed, the prophet himself sat around the fire now! Since the prophet, like the hearth or home influence, was supposed to spiritualize or improve society, the young teacher-prophet naturally was welcomed around the family hearth.

It is important to remember that Snow-Bound was written shortly after the Civil War. In 1866, the horrible physical and spiritual wounds inflicted by the War were just beginning to heal, and scenes like the following were still fresh in every mind.

> Gray-haired men went to their lecture-rooms with bowed heads, the morning papers shaking in their hands. The accuracy of the Hebrew verb did not matter so much as it did last term. . . . Young eyes looked up at their instructors mistily, for the dawn of utter sacrifice was in them. . . . Then comes a morning when the professors cannot read the papers for the news they bring; but cover streaming eyes with trembling hands, and turn their faces. For the black day of the defeat at Bull Run has darkened the summer sky.[13]

> . . . we heard of the bones of sons and brothers, fallen in defence of freedom and law, dug up and wrought into ornaments for the wrists and bosoms of slave-holding women; we looked into the open hell of Andersonville, upon the deliberate, systematic starvation of helpless prisoners; we heard of Libby Prison underlaid with gunpowder, for the purpose of destroying thousands of Union prisoners in case of the occupation of Richmond by our army.
>
> ("The Lesson And Our Duty," VII, 149)

It might well be that Whittier intended his home, with its sorrow, to symbolize War-divided America. Even as Whittier lamented the loss of his family and friends, so too the whole country mourned the deaths of loved ones. The War, like a blizzard, forced people

to gather around the fire of religion and to find the assurance there that although the union circle seemed to be broken, faith could make it complete again. As early as 1838, when Whittier warned that "A day of revolution must come," he called Americans "children of one family" ("Justice And Expediency," VII, 11 and 54). The Revolution occurred, and Whittier realized his activities and poetry had encouraged its coming. But in 1865, while composing Snow-Bound, he, "Lincoln-like, . . . desired forgiveness all around."[14] What better way to draw people back together than to write a comforting poem about a snow-bound family gathered around a hearth? Only the hearth of faith could keep the snows of hatred back. Snow-Bound, like the popular sentimental death poems printed in magazines, comforted grieving Civil War families, and, because it emphasized Love and Life, it helped heal deep national wounds. It restored "not only a way of life but a sense of living."[15]

> . . . its deep religious faith which has brought and will bring its consolations to multitudes of souls in sorrow.[16]
>
> Home is as narrow as the ancestral walls, but as broad as humanity; and here is a work both local and general,--of the kind which tends to make the whole world kin.[17]

Aside from its artistic structure, Snow-Bound undoubtedly derives its peculiar charm from the fact that it is Whittier. The popular and biblical themes and styles scattered throughout his minor poems and prose pieces are, in this one poem about a country blizzard and his family's hearth, collected and made immortal. The fire-lit idyl is Whittier's soul, because in its music he interprets and embodies the popular and prophetic traditions of literature.

NOTES--CHAPTER VIII

[1]James R. Lowell, "Whittier's Snow-Bound," The North American Review, 102 (1866), 631.

[2]Savage, "Whittier's Religion," pp. 93-94.

[3]Robert Penn Warren, John Greenleaf Whittier's Poetry, An Appraisal and A Selection (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 56.

[4]Pickard, Whittier, entire section devoted to the poem.

[5]William J. Long, American Literature (New York: Ginn and Company, 1913), p. 315.

[6]Review of "The Pleasant Circle Broke: A Reading of Whittier's Snow-Bound," by Kenneth T. Reed, in the Whittier Newsletter, 9 (Fall, 1971).

[7]Sarah J. Hale, "Winter Pictures," Godey's Lady's Book, 26 (1843), 84.

[8]Alaric A. Watts, Lyrics of the Heart: With Other Poems (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1852), pp. 41-44.

[9]Helen Clarke and Charlotte Porter, eds., "A School of Literature: How To Study Whittier's Snow-Bound," Poet-Lore, 6 (1894), 103.

[10]Anonymous, "Sonnet to Memory," Godey's Lady's Book, 17 (1838), 259.

[11]Long, American Literature, p. 302.

[12]Long, American Literature, p. 302.

[13]Phelps, A Life, pp. 72-73.

[14]Scott, Exiles, pp. 37-38. See also Richardson, American Literature, p. 180.

[15]Scott, Exiles, p. 39. See also Richardson, American Literature, p. 175.

[16]John Greenleaf Whittier, Snow-Bound, with an introduction by Frances Campbell Sparhawk (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Company, 1908), p. xxv from Sparhawk's introduction. See also Richardson, American Literature, p. 185.

[17]Richardson, American Literature, p. 183.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

POST-WAR POPULAR CULTURE

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Following is the "Introduction" to Mary C. Barrett Brown's book, Poems And Charades, posthumously published in 1888 by E. P. Dutton and Company of New York. I have two reasons for reprinting the "Introduction" here. First, my copy of Poems And Charades comes from Whittier's library. As the Xerox copy of the flyleaf shows, Judge Addison Brown, Mary's husband, sent the book to Whittier as a gift. The book is beautifully bound, and Whittier's autograph is glued in below Judge Brown's inscription.

But most importantly, I am using the "Introduction" as an appendix to Chapter II, because, by revealing post-War literary theories, it completes the study of popular culture begun in Chapter II. Generally, what the "Introduction" proves is that popular poetic taste did not change much after the Civil War. If anything, the need increased for sweet, calm, simple poetry which could provide family entertainment and grave-side comfort. And more specifically, it describes the life of one poetess, tells what types of poetry she enjoyed reading, and discusses her reasons for composing verses. Neither her way of life nor literary preferences were eccentric; they were typical of her century.

Mary C. Barrett Brown appreciated the cultural advantages of city life, but "longed for the greater freedom of the country, where every scene and every season had its own immeasurable charm." And, of course, she loved small animals and native birds, and so admired the beauty of flowers that "To the last she could never cut a stem without misgiving." Once she asked Whittier to compose a poem that would capture the hemlock's "grace and elegance, and its pathetic voices." Although he thought her praises of the tree were "'well deserved'" and was intrigued by her request, he pleasantly turned the idea down.

Although an invalid most of her life, she was happy, mainly because of the pleasures she derived from "fancy and imagination" and from reflection and meditation. In the solitude of her life, "Poetry became a necessity, a daily food, a solace in trouble, a refuge in affliction." Her favorite poets were, besides Whittier, Milton, Mrs. Hemans, Longfellow, and other popular poets. She remembered well how Whittier's poems circulated in the newspapers during her childhood and "presented a new ideal of vigor and beauty in American verse." But the Bible was always her favorite book:

> Among all other works, none, in her estimation, could rival in poetic beauty, in pathos, in elevation, power and grandeur, the collection of that Book of books.

Her deep faith led her to request that hymns be sung around her death bed, and that one of her own religious poems be placed in her tomb.

Although she dealt mainly with "spiritual analogy" and with the "ideal," her Yankee practicality made her demand that fancy and "vigorous common sense" balance one another. Furthermore, she felt that the rosy light of imagination should not blind the poet "to the real and the genuine" or to the "suffering in man and brute."

Because she possessed the usual amount of poetic humility, "she never made any pretension . . . to the gifts of a poet." Yet this "self-distrust" did not prevent her from writing numerous poems or from holding firm convictions about the proper styles and subjects for poetry. She believed that poetry should show "the beauty of the simple and the common, which by virtue of their universality speak to the imaginative ear with more multitudinous voices." As might be expected, religious subjects met with her ready approval. The following sentiments are very Whittier-like:

> Prophet, Priest and Poet are of one ministry, to the exaltation of the ideal, the abnegation of self, the purification and consecration of the spirit; and thereby to that final reconciliation, which is found in the conscious, intelligent union of the human Will with the Divine.

Her thoughts about rhyme and metre were also the same as those theories expressed decades before the War in the Lady's Book and in The Christian Examiner. She "had little liking for unmusical verse," and "preferred the simplest forms" of metres, "such as are most easily retained in memory." Surely Walt Whitman's poetry would have offended her.

> She neither enjoyed, nor retained in memory, the rugged metres that, however much in vogue at times, seemed to her to lack the essential element of true poetry, beauty of form.

INTRODUCTION

Mary Chadwick Barrett, the wife of Hon. Addison Brown, was the only child of Dr. Dustin Barrett of Hudson, N. H., where she was born Dec. 24, 1827. Her father was a descendant of the first settlers of that region, and died at the age of 36, in her fourth year. He was so esteemed and beloved for his skill as a surgeon and physician, and for his genial personal qualities, that after nearly sixty years he is still spoken of with affection in the community where he lived and practiced; and the sweetness of his fine, benevolent nature had impressed itself fully even upon her childish memory. After his death she removed with her mother to the home of her grandfather, Joseph Chadwick, Esq.,--a country farm-house in Bradford, Mass., where she lived until the death of her mother, in her nineteenth year. Through her maternal grandmother, Mary Parker, she was a descendant of Parson Balch, the first minister of the East Parish of Bradford.

After her mother's death, she became for a time a member of the family of Benjamin Greenleaf, Esq., for whom she always retained a great affection. In 1849 she graduated at Bradford Academy, in which a few years before her death, she established a scholarship in memory of her grandfather, one of the founders of the Institution. After her graduation, two years were spent in teaching; first in Hudson, the Mecca of her affection; afterwards at the Academy in Greenland, N. H., and at Newbury, Mass. In the midst of her zeal in this work, appeared the first decisive failure of the delicate and unstable nervous organization, inherited from her maternal grandmother, that was to prove the bodily affliction of her life,--the

"Mordecai in the gate" of her future (p. 160). After three years of invalidism she had measurably recovered; and in 1856 she was married to Judge Addison Brown of New York, where she resided until her death, April 26th, 1887. She was buried at Woodlawn Cemetery.

Her last illness was brief, and without suffering. The day before her death she calmly said: "Do not be troubled; if it must come now, it is as well; I have faced this thing for years." No immediate danger, however, was apprehended. The next day she desired some favorite hymns to be read to her, and while listening to them--among others, "Nearer My God to Thee,"--she passed imperceptibly into unconsciousness, as into the gentlest sleep, and in a few moments ceased to breathe. It was a translation "upon joyful wing," rather than the death that human nature fears.

Twenty years ago her earlier verses were printed in a little volume to make a pleasant surprise for her as a Christmas and birth-day gift. A few copies were distributed among friends, who since her decease have desired that her later poems might be added. She never made any pretension, however, to the gifts of a poet; and in her self-distrust and invalid condition, she never attempted serious and elaborate composition, such as her evident poetic feeling and imagination might, perhaps, have warranted her in undertaking. With the exception of the two campaign songs of 1856, nothing that she wrote was designed for publication. All grew out of special occasions; and nearly all of her verses were addressed to correspondents in the interchanges of friendship. They are printed, in the

from in which they were sent, as a memorial of their author to those who loved her, and who would cherish her memory.

After her first prostration, she never regained firm health. She scarcely knew a day free from suffering. Seasons of illness and partial recovery succeeded each other in varying alternations. During two-thirds of her married life she was chiefly confined to the house, and during most of that time to her room; often in such distress that death was a wished-for relief. Her life was an almost incessant struggle with debility and suffering; a vain quest for some remedy; a never-ending study of the causes of that constitutional malady which eluded the physicians' art, and which was for long periods so pressing as to exclude all other thoughts. The most effective relief was found in fresh air, and in physical exercise when she could bear it; when she could not, only mental occupation remained; and upon that, quick fatigue set narrow limits.

It was in these depressing circumstances, to which her patient and heroic spirit never succumbed, and amid the cares of the household, the direction of which she never surrendered, that most of these verses were written; partly as an agreeable mental occupation, an intellectual diversion and pastime in the solitude of invalid life; and partly from affection for her correspondents, whom she invested with something of an ideal atmosphere, and with whom she loved to communicate in other than the ordinary forms. Her best poetic work was all inspired by some personal feeling. "Looking Back," breathes the pathos of love for another's happy home by one who had known what it was to have none. "My Flower,"

was addressed to a loved sister-in-law, upon the birth of her first born. "To Violet," was composed for a very dear newly found cousin. "Alpine Flowers," for a life-long friend. The motive of the "Grammatical Charade" is found in the last two lines. All of the acrostic charades, and most of the other charades, were carefully prepared as anniversary messages on Christmas and Lady day, for the correspondent whose place in her heart is shown in the song "When the bright bouvardias flame." "Pansies" was composed for a very early and revered friend, and is an expansion of the few lines on the same subject at p. 138. "Many Sails," was written in acknowledgment of a profusion of richly colored and varied Sweet Peas.

A number of minor pieces, such as brief stanzas written on postal cards to her correspondents in lieu of letters, announcing a departure to the country, or a return; and many other trifles of little or no literary merit, conveying some acknowledgment, or brief message, have been included; because they illustrate her habits, and her fondness for rhythmical expression, as well also as that natural gayety of temper which was so great a relief to her through years of invalidism. Illustrative of the latter trait is the following note, which accompanied a copy of "Many Sails,"--a poem in which sweet peas are enigmatically treated.

My Dear A.:

> This little addition to your Thanksgiving dinner I hope will not prove unwelcome. It came into being this summer, while I was in Litchfield. It was not intended as a charade; but you can look upon it as such, if it is not too transparent. If it will not serve that purpose, I beg you to consider it a Bouquet. Should you find it neither fair nor sweet enough for that, perhaps it may furnish material for soup! But if too thin for that, and fit for nothing else, as a last resort you

> can parch it; and if there is truth in an old saying, that will at least make it lively.
>
> Perhaps to most people that have passed the morning and the high noon of life, there is always more or less of a "by-the-rivers-of-Babylon" feeling that saddens all holidays and anniversaries; and no ships, alas, can ever bear us back to the happy and careless days of childhood, or to the joyous New England Thanksgiving as we knew it in the olden times.
>
> Hoping that each of my little ships will bear you a kindly Thanksgiving greeting, and that none of them may be wrecked on the voyage,
>
> I am yours, etc.

Fancy and imagination were large elements of her intellectual nature, and gave charm and color to all her verse. She was naturally meditative and reflective, and her enjoyments were largely in the ideal. She loved to linger in contemplation of beautiful objects; not for themselves only, but for the suggestions they awakened, in which thought and fancy traveled far away in the realms of historic association, or of spiritual analogy. If her fancy seemed at times to become fanciful, it but enwreathed some subtle thought, or delicately touched in symbol some question of the spiritual life. There was, however, nothing unreal or visionary about her. None was more genuine in all her ways and thoughts; none more practical, none of more vigorous common sense, or sounder in judgment; none stood more firmly on the solid ground of truth and fact; and few observed more closely, or had a firmer grasp of the broad facts of life and experience. From youth up, devotion to the real and the genuine, abhorrence of equivocation and deceit, and sturdy fidelity to the truth, were dominant traits. As a living force she stood through life, and in all things, emphatically for thoroughness, faithfulness, and truth. Even in the most subtle and fanciful of these

poems, accurate knowledge of her subject, and perfect fidelity in description, attest the clear uprightness of her mind. Hers was one of those many-sided natures in which opposite characteristics impart richness and vigor to the whole.

Similar contrasts existed in her sympathetic and emotional nature.

With a vivid sense of the just and the unjust, her heart sank, and her faith trembled, before the vast panorama that life unfolds of suffering in man and brute. It was the enigma never solved of

"the weary and the heavy weight
Of all this unintelligible world."

The cloud never lifted. Mrs. Browning's lines were often on her lips"

"In all your music my pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross."

Yet she had a "spirit gay as rose-crowned June," ever bursting into fresh bloom through all the environments of sorrow; full of jest and humorous anecdote, and quick in witty repartee.

In the stanzas "To Violet" she depicts some of her own traits in the common "heritage of joys and pains."

"The quivering nerve, the steadfast will,
The self-distrust, the silent pride:
Life's jubilant and minor chords
In each were stirring side by side.

Through all the long effacing years
No change the constant type had known;
Still inward turned the pondering gaze,
And still the spirit dwelt alone."

A class-mate, in writing of her, refers especially to "her truthfulness; her exquisite carefulness for the truth in the smallest details of school life." She continues:

> She never allowed herself any evasion, but brought every word and deed up to the standard of exact truth. . . . Her use of text books was, for a school girl, rather singular. She seemed to use them, not so much for what they actually contained, as for what they suggested, and for the thought they stimulated. . . . Not that she was in the least careless about facts, for I well remember an incident that has had great influence on me since. A lesson in Ancient Geography contained an unusually long list of unpronounceable Oriental names, and I said I should learn but one or two of them, and let the rest go. She replied: "S., there is no danger of learning too much; let us not skip anything."
>
> Her fondness for poetry, her love of flowers, more particularly of wild flowers; her sympathy for dumb animals, and her kindness to them, were as marked characteristics of her girlhood as of her later years. I should say that through life one of her strongest mental characteristics was introspection. She looked inwardly upon her own thoughts and feelings. She asked for proof of many things from what she had thought and experienced herself. In her later years, as in her school days, she seemed to me never able to accept any teaching or theory on any subject, from the trivial affairs of every-day life up to the highest religious themes, without first having thought it out within herself. Always retiring in her disposition, both mentally and outwardly, those who really knew her will always remember her for her ready wit, her love of the beautiful, and her loyalty to the truth.

Her verses are full of thought, yet melodious in rhythm. Great as was her love of poetry, she had little liking for unmusical verse. She never enjoyed, nor retained in memory, the rugged metres that, however, much in vogue at times, seemed to her to lack the essential element of true poetry, beauty of form. The magnificent sweep in thought and rhythm of such poems as Browning's "Saul" was her delight. Milton, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Moore, Mrs. Browning, Mrs. Hemans, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes,

were her chief favorites. Her memory was an inexhaustible store-house of the best poetry, drawn, not from these authors only, but from all miscellaneous and anonymous sources; gathered up and retained without effort from her early days, when the poems of Whittier, and Bryant and Longfellow, circulating in newspapers, presented a new ideal of vigor and beauty in American verse. For her own use she preferred the simplest forms, such as are most easily retained in memory. Yet some of the best of the charades are framed in more stately and more difficult metres.

The reflective and introspective side of her mind, though less marked in her verses than in her conversation and correspondence, are apparent in such pieces as "Looking Back," "To Violet," "Many Sails," "Pansies," and in many of the charades. She had "That inner eye which is the bliss of solitude," and that imagination which is "the master light of all our seeing."

This disposition was inborn, early developed, and scarcely even increased by the confinement that fostered it; so that though none enjoyed more than she the stimulus of other minds, rarely was any one less dependent upon others for mental incitement. Her mind was active; her interests wide; her memory exact and retentive. She read moderately, but thought more; and what she got from others was in thought worked out anew. These qualities, with a strong individuality in thought and expression, gave to her conversation and correspondence a substance and a flavor of originality that formed their special charm.

Nature in all its forms was a never-failing inspiration and joy. Flowers were always at her side, both in invalid days and in

days of health. They were cultivated, indoors and out, with sedulous care. In her latter years she was much interested in our native birds; and by merely watching their movements from her window, or from her couch upon the piazza, she was able to recognize and identify many species. She was long a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and deeply interested in that humane work. The aid obtained for this cause in Philadelphia a few years ago by the publication of some of these charades with others, gave her great pleasure. All animals alike enjoyed her sympathy. At the Central Park, at one time, there was a friendly mouse, that during a whole season came at the usual hour to the common rendezvous to receive from her hand his daily portion.

Among trees the hemlock was her favorite evergreen. So touched was she by its grace and elegance, and its pathetic voices, which she could not define or express, that she wrote to Whittier a few years ago, hoping that he would treat it more fully than he had yet done. But only Poets Laureate write to order; and her request had no other immediate result than the following pleasant reply:

Danvers, 2d Mo. 7, 1884

Dear Friend:

I have read thy letter with great interest. Thy praises of the hemlock are well deserved. The hemlocks of East Haverhill about half a mile from my old home were a great delight to me in boyhood. We used to bring home branches for brooms. When dry we threw them on the blazing wood fire, and the crackling fusillade suggested a great battle. On our lawn here are several fine trees.

I would like to do what thee suggests, but I greatly doubt if my verse would be as poetical as thy prose description.

In the troubles of her young days, her chief solace was in rambles by the neighboring lake, or on the hill-sides, or in the woods. Later in life, the city, much as she enjoyed, when well, its intellectual and aesthetic resources, became, in her invalid condition, in a double sense a "pent-up Utica." She longed for the greater freedom of the country, where every scene and every season had its own immeasurable charm. She never wearied of dwelling on the delights of her summer home at Litchfield.

Of a temperament meditative, imaginative, and impressible, she early felt that sympathy with the life of Nature, as if it were permeated with human consciousness and sensibility, which is often expressed in her verses.

> "Our early feeling's finer thrill hath more,
> Perchance, of Nature's lore
> Than all our riper years bestow;
> For in my childhood did I love to go
> To sit and dream where hill-side violets grow;
> Nor dared to break a stem,
> Lest this glad earth and life were dear to them."

To the last she could never cut a stem without misgiving. As in the beginning, so at the end;--her last piece, an imaginative dream of the conscious life of flowers--a counterpart of the life of man, intimating that immortal life she was so soon to enter. Her last stanza accompanied her to the tomb.

Her poetic feeling was vivid and strong and genuine. In the suffusion of that light, all things shone with a new significance. Loving beauty and gladly recognizing it everywhere, she delighted most in the beauty of the simple and the common, which by virtue

of their universality speak to the imaginative ear with more multitudinous voices. The Poet, whose "song makes the nations glad," to her was King by virtue of his imagination, whose

"purple wings
In golden sunlight flash and change;
A splendor touches common things
Transforming them to rare and strange."

And whether it were the "Pansy at her feet," a drive in the country, a deserted homestead, a foreign scene, a tale of travel, a friend, a poem, a character in fiction, a loved author, a biblical hero,--all were invested and interpreted by the same imaginative light; for which, as Coleridge ways,

"from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory enveloping the earth."

It was in the intensity of her enjoyments through this side of her nature, that despite all her sufferings, she was fond of repeating almost daily Browning's lines:

"How good is our life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart, and the soul, and the senses, forever in joy!"

To her, the room of the invalid was not solitary; but populous with visions.

"Fancy shall brightly paint for me,
The silent mountain's awful form,
The rush and sweep of mountain storm;
On lonely heights the sweet bell's call,
The roar of forming waterfall;
And see within this narrow street
The Alps' grand beauty at my feet."

Though for many years she had looked forward to travel that was denied to her, she had no repining amidst the inexhaustible beauty near at hand. She was in true accord with the sentiment of Whittier's lines, which she often repeated.

"Yet on life's current, he who drifts
Is one with him who rows or sails;
And he who wanders widest, lifts
No more of beauty's jealous veils,
Than he who from his doorway sees
The miracle of flowers and trees;
Feels the warm Orient on the noonday air,
And from cloud minarets hears the sunset call to prayer."

To such a nature, our poetic literature, past and present, supplied inexhaustible enjoyment. Poetry became a necessity, a daily food, a solace in trouble, a refuge in affliction. The masters of song lifted the spirit to the ideal mounts of Transfiguration, where troubles for a time lost their power.

The charades evince many of her characteristic qualities. Choosing foundation words that have some poetic relations, she sought to make of each word and cross-word a little poem by itself: compact in thought, and yet not so clear as to dispense with skill and knowledge in guessing it. The expertness of her correspondents in this field led in some cases to the selection of subtle topics and words of infrequent use. In the confinement of illness, the study, care, and inventive resource which their construction demanded, the skill of her correspondents in guessing them, and the frequent replies in verse, gave her an enduring pleasure. She continued them for a number of years, delighting, in this occasional interchange to

"Catch again
The sweeter answering song."

For those not acquainted with their construction, it may be stated that two words of the same number of letters being first chosen for foundation words, cross-words are then found that have for their first and last letters respectively the successive letters of the two foundation words; making, therefore, as many cross-words as there are letters in each foundation word. In the annexed Key the responses in verse will be found to contribute much to the interest of the reader; and with a knowledge of the answers, the fidelity, breadth, and elevation of the original descriptions are also more apparent.

The introduction into the charades of many biblical subjects and allusions was the natural result of the careful study of the Bible to which she had been accustomed from childhood. Among all other works, none, in her estimation, could rival in poetic beauty, in pathos, in elevation, power and grandeur, the collection of that Book of books. But the works of all pure and noble souls tend to the same end. Prophet, Priest and Poet are of one ministry, to the exaltation of the ideal, the abnegation of self, the purification and consecration of the spirit; and thereby to that final reconciliation, which is found in the conscious, intelligent union of the human Will with the Divine.

John G. Whittier

with regards of

Addison Brown

Dorothy Whittier

APPENDIX II

HYMN METRES WITH EXAMPLES TAKEN FROM:

CHRISTIAN HYMNS

APPENDIX II

HYMN METRES WITH EXAMPLES TAKEN FROM:

CHRISTIAN HYMNS
For
Public and Private Worship,
A
Collection Compiled By A Committee
Of The
CHESHIRE PASTORAL ASSOCIATION.
Thirty-Seventh Edition.
Boston:
Crosby, Nichols, And Company,
111 Washington Street.
1853.

Note: Metres are determined by the number of syllables per line.

L.M. Long Metre
With one consent, let all the earth
To God their cheerful voices raise;
Glad homage pay, with hallowed mirth,
And sing before him songs of praise;

L.M. 61. Long Metre, six lines
Thou art, O God, the life and light
Of all this wondrous world we see;
Its glow by day, its smile by night,
Are but reflections caught from thee.
Where'er we turn, they glories shine,
And all things fair and bright are thine.

L.P.M. Long Particular Metre
I love the volume of thy word;
What light and joy those leaves afford
To souls benighted and distressed!
Thy precepts guide my doubtful way;
Thy fear forbids my feet to stray;
Thy promise leads my heart to rest.

C.M. Common Metre
As, bowed by sudden storms, the rose
Sinks on the garden's breast,
Down to the grave our brother goes,
In silence there to rest.

C.M. 61 Common Metre, six lines
Beyond, beyond that boundless sea,
Above that dome of sky,
Farther than thought itself can flee,
Thy dwelling is on high;
Yet dear the awful thought to me,
That thou, my God, art nigh.

C.P.M. Common Particular Metre
O, let your mingling voices rise,
In grateful rapture, to the skies,
And hail a Savior's birth:
Let songs of joy the day proclaim,
When Jesus all-triumphant came
To bless the sons of earth.

S.M. Short Metre
How swift the torrent rolls,
That bears us to the sea!
The tide which hurries thoughtless souls
To vast eternity!

S.P.M. Short Particular Metre
How Pleasant 't is to see
Kindred and friends agree!
Each in his proper station move;
And each fulfil his part,
With sympathizing heart,
In all the cares of life and love!

H.M. Hallelujah Metre
Give thanks aloud to God,
To God the Heavenly King;
And let the spacious earth
His works and glories sing.
Thy mercy, Lord, | And ever sure
Shall still endure; | Abides thy word.

C.H.M. Common Hallelujah
O, blessed be the hand that gave,--
Still blessed when it takes;
Blessed be he who smites to save,--
Who heals the heart he breaks:
Perfect and true are all his ways,
Whom heaven adores and death obeys.

S.H.M. Short Hallelujah Metre
Behold the bed of death,--
The pale and mortal clay;
Heard ye the sob of parting breath?
Marked ye the eye's last ray?
No; life so sweetly ceased to be,
It lapsed in immortality.

7s. M. Sevens Metre
Holy, holy, holy Lord!
Be thy glorious name adored!
Lord, thy mercies never fail;
Hail, celestial goodness, hail!

7s. M. 61. Sevens Metre, six lines
Safely through another week
God has brought us on our way;
Let us now a blessing seek,
Waiting in his courts to-day,--
Day of all the week the best,
Emblem of eternal rest.

7 & 6s. M. Seven and Sixes Metre
From Greenland's icy mountains,
From India's coral strand,--
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,--
From many an ancient river,
From many a palmy plain,--
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain.

7 & 6s. M. (Peculiar)
From the world of sin, and noise,
And hurry, I withdraw;
For the small and inward voice
I wait with humble awe;
Silent I am now and still,
Dare not in thy presence move;
To my waiting soul reveal
The secret of thy love.

7 & 4s. M. Seven and Fours Metre
When the vale of death appears,
Faint and cold his mortal clay,
O my Father, soothe my fears,
Let me through the gloomy way;
Break the shadows,
Usher in eternal day;--

7 & 5s. M. Seven and Fives Metre
Mark the virtuous man and see
Peace and joy his steps attend,
All his path is purity,
Happy is his end.

7, 6, & 8s. M. Seven, Six, and Eights Metre
Brother, thou art gone to rest;
Thine is an early tomb;
But God hath summoned thee away;
Thy father called thee home.

7 & 8s. M. Seven and Eights Metre
They who die in Christ are blest:
Ours be, then, no thought of grieving:
Sweetly with their God they rest,
All their toils and troubles leaving:
So be ours the faith that saveth,
Hope that every trial braveth,
Love that to the end endureth,
And, through Christ, the crown secureth.

8 & 7s. M. Eight and Sevens Metre
Jesus gave the sacred token
Of his passion, wine and bread,
Symbols of his body broken,
And his blood for sinners shed.
To the rite we come, confessing
Free redemption, grace unbought;
His be every name of blessing,
For his love, surpassing thought!

8, 7, & 4s. M. Eight, Seven, and Fours Metre
Hark! the voice of love and mercy
Sounds aloud from Calvary!
See! it rends the rocks asunder,--
Shakes the earth,--and veils the sky!
"It is finished!"
Hear the dying Saviour cry!

8 & 4s. M. Eight and Fours Metre
O, let the soul its slumbers break,
Arouse its senses, and awake
To see how soon
Life, like its glories, glides away,
And the stern footsteps of decay
Come stealing on.

8 & 6s. Eight and Sixes Metre
Blest is the place where angels bend
To hear our worship rise,
Where kindred thoughts their musings blend,
And all the soul's affections tend
Beyond the veiling skies.

8 & 6s. M. (Peculiar)
Renew my will from day to day,
Blend it with thine, and take away
Whate'er now makes it hard to say,
"Thy will, my God, be done."

8, 6, & 4s. M. Eight, Six, and Fours Metre
And his that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breeze of even,
That checks each fault, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

8 & 9s. M. Eight and Nines Metre
Weep not for the saint that ascends
To partake of the joys of the sky;
Weep not for the seraph that bends
With the worshipping chorus on high;

8 & 7s. M. (Peculiar)
Then let us form those bonds above
Which time can ne'er dissever,
Since, parting in a Saviour's love,
We part to meet for ever.

8s. M. Eights Metre
We know that thy presence is near
While heaves our bark far from the land;--
We ride o'er the deep without fear;--
The waters are held in thy hand.

6s. M. Sixes Metre
I feel within a want
For ever burning there,
What I so thirst for, grant,
O Thou who hearest prayer!

6 & 4s. M. Six and Fours Metre
Come, thou Almighty King!
Help us thy name to sing;
Help us to praise!
Father all-glorious,
O'er all victorious,
Come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days!

6 & 4s. M. (Peculiar)
O Father, in that hour
When earth all helping power
Shall disavow,--
When spear, and shield, and crown,
In faintness are cast down,--
Sustain us, thou!

6 & 5s. M. Six and Fives Metre
Through the night-air stealing,
Hark! the bell is pealing
Mournfully and slow;
Rest to the soul departed,
Peace to the broken-hearted,
In this vale of woe.

6 & 5s. or 11s. M. Six and Fives, or Elevens Metre
Forgive our transgressions,
And teach us to know
That humble compassion
Which pardons each foe:
Keep us from temptation,
From weakness and sin,
And thine be the glory
For ever.--Amen.

6 & 10s. M. Six and Tens Metre
No war nor battle's sound
War heard the earth around,--
No hostile chiefs to furious combat ran;
But peaceful was the night
In which the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began

5 & 12s. M. Five and Twelves Metre
Come, let us anew
Our journey pursue,--
Roll round with the year,
And never stand still till the Master appear;
His adorable will
Let us gladly fulfil,
And our talents improve
By the patience of hope, and the labor of love.

10 s. M. Tens Metre
Yet when our hearts review departed days,
How vast thy mercies! how remiss our praise!
Well may we dread thine awful eye to meet,
Bend at thy throne, and worship at thy feet.

10 & 11s. M. Ten and Elevens Metre
O, worship the King, all glorious above,
And gratefully sing his wonderful love,
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

11s. M. Elevens Metre
Thou sweet-gliding Kedron, by thy silver stream
Our Saviour would linger in moonlight's soft beam;
And by thy bright waters would oftentimes stray,
And lose in thy murmurs the toils of the day.

11 & 8s. M. Eleven and Eights Metre
For good is the Lord, inexpressibly good,
And we are the work of his hand;
His mercy and truth from eternity stood,
And shall to eternity stand.

11 & 10s. M. Eleven and Tens Metre
Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;
Come, at the mercy-seat fervently kneel;
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;
Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

12 & 11s. M. Twelve and Elevens Metre
Thou art gone to the grave; we no longer behold thee,
Nor tread the rough paths of the world by thy side;
But the wide arms of mercy are spread to enfold thee,
And sinners may hope, since the Saviour hath died.

P.M. Particular Metre
Oppression shall not always reign;
There comes a brighter day,
When freedom, burst from every chain,
Shall have triumphant way.
Then right shall over might prevail,
And truth, like hero armed in mail,
The hosts of tyrant wrong assail,
And hold eternal sway.