

Whittier *speaks*

The bust of John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) should be placed in any World Hall of Fame as a champion of democracy, as a poet of the people, and as an example of the fine spirit which it is possible for men to develop. He was not a genius, but he was a champion of the oppressed, a poet with a passion for justice and freedom, a man of God, a lover of humanity, and a concerned Quaker.

He was born in East Haverhill, Massachusetts, and lived there and in nearby Amesbury most of his life. His formal education was limited, but his self-education was extensive. Poor health and limited resources curbed his desire for travel and advanced study, but he roamed the world through books and studied human nature through those he met. His home, his Meeting, the world of nature, and his friends were the seedbeds in which his great soul was nurtured.

Whittier was primarily a social prophet. His pen was his chief weapon. With it he championed the rights of labor and Indians, and the freedom of the press. With it he advocated women's rights, better care of the blind, and the abolition of capital punishment. With it he attacked the war system and the imprisonment of debtors. Above all he used his pen as an active abolitionist. As editor, poet, and writer, he was a leader in the fight against slavery.

His greatest legacy to us is the poetry in which he affirms his faith in God and man. He knew the evils of his day, but he was able to live "over all" because of his belief in God—The Eternal Goodness.

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ON HIS PERSONAL FAITH . . .

"I see the wrong that round me lies,
I feel the guilt within;
I hear, with groan and travail-cries,
The world confess its sin.

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 Present is all we have to do our work in, holding as it does the Past and shaping the Future. That behind the elusive and perishable things of time and sense, the *real* things—God, truth, goodness—remain: The things seen are temporal but things unseen eternal; That Heaven and hell are not so much *places* as *conditions* and are not limited in space or time."

"I stand ashamed and almost despairing before holy and pure ideals. As I read the New Testament I feel how weak, irresolute, and frail I am, and how little I can rely on anything save our God's mercy and infinite compassion, which I reverently and thankfully own have followed me through life, and the assurance of which is my sole ground of hope for myself, and for those I love and pray for."

ON DIVINE GUIDANCE FOR HIMSELF . . .

"O, thou! whose power could rule the sea,
Extend thine influence e'en to me!
Control my will, and lay to rest
The stormy passions of my breast;
Check there, each wild discordant mood,
And grant an humble quietude,
To list, amid earth's jarring din,
The teachings of *thy* voice *within*."

ON DIVINE GUIDANCE FOR THE GROUP . . .

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
 Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
 In deeper reverence, praise."

"In simple trust like theirs who heard
 Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them without a word,
 Rise up and follow Thee."

"O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
 O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity
 Interpreted by love."

"Drop thy still dews of quietness,
 Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
 The beauty of Thy peace."

"Breathe through the heats of our desire
 Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
 O still, small voice of calm."

ON CHRISTIAN UNITY . . .

"Forgive, O Lord, our severing ways,
The separate altars that we raise,
The varying tongues that speak Thy praise."

"Suffice it now. In time to be
Shall one great temple rise to Thee,
Thy church our broad humanity."

"The hymn, long sought, shall then be heard,
The music of the world's accord,
Confessing Christ, the inward word."

ON WORSHIP . . .

"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."

"Follow with reverent steps the great example
Of Him whose holy work was 'doing good;'
So shall the wide earth seem our Father's
temple,
Each loving life a psalm of gratitude."

"In calm and cool and silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human
tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is
sung,
Nor deep-toned organ blown, nor censer
swung,
Nor dim light falling through the pictured
pane!
There, syllabled by silence, let me hear
The still small voice which reached the
prophet's ear;
Read in my heart a still diviner law
Than Israel's leader on his tables saw!
There let me strive with each besetting sin,
Recall my wandering fancies, and restrain
The sore disquiet of a restless brain;
And, as the path of duty is made plain,
May grace be given that I may walk therein,
Not like the hireling, for his selfish gain,
With backward glances and reluctant tread,
Making a merit of his coward dread,
But cheerful, in the light around me thrown,
Walking as one to pleasant service led;
Doing God's will as if it were my own,
Yet trusting not in mine, but in His strength
alone!"

ON GOD AND NATURE . . .

"Thanks, O our Father! that, like him,
Thy tender love I see,
In radiant hill and woodland dim,
And tinted sunset sea."

"But beauty seen is never lost,
God's colors all are fast;
The glory of this sunset heaven
Into my soul has passed,
A sense of gladness unconfined
To mortal date or clime;
As the soul liveth, it shall live
Beyond the years of time."

"I read each misty mountain sign,
I know the voice of wave and pine,
And I am yours, and ye are mine."

"Life's burdens fall, its discords cease,
I lapse into the glad release
Of Nature's own exceeding peace."

"Rich gift of God! A year of time!
What pomp of rise and shut of day,
What hues wherewith our Northern clime
Makes autumn's dropping woodlands gay,
What airs outblown from vernal dells,
And clover-bloom and sweetbrier smells,
What songs of brooks and birds, what fruits
and flowers,
Green woods and moonlit snows, have in its
round been ours!"

"With the calm patience of the woods I wait
For leaf and blossom when God gives us
Spring."

ON FREEDOM AND JUSTICE . . .

"Oh, speed the moment on
When Wrong shall cease, and Liberty and Love
And Truth and Right throughout the earth be
known
As in their home above."

(From a letter to William Lloyd Garrison)

"I cannot be sufficiently thankful to the Divine Providence which, in a great measure through thy instrumentality, turned me so early away from what Roger Williams calls 'the world's great trinity—pleasure, profit, and honor,'—to take side with the poor and oppressed."

"Still keep the path which duty bids ye tread
Though worldly wisdom shake the cautious
head;
No truth from Heaven descends upon our
sphere,
Without the greeting of the sceptic's sneer;
Denied and mocked at, till its blessings fall,
Common as dew and sunshine, over all."

"Wrong and violence, fraud and conspiracy, are the expedients of conscious weakness and error, not of truth and justice."

ON PEACE . . .

"Hate hath no harm for love, so ran the song;
And peace unweaponed conquers ever wrong."

"Yet, surely as He lives, the day
Of peace He promised shall be ours,
To fold the flags of war, and lay
Its sword and spear to rust away,
And sow its ghastly fields with flowers!"

ON THE QUAKER OF THE OLDEN TIME . . .

"The Quaker of the olden time!
How calm and firm and true,
Unspotted by its wrong and crime,
He walked the dark earth through.
The lust of power, the love of gain,
The thousand lures of sin
Around him, had no power to stain
The purity within."

"With that deep insight which detects
All great things in the small,
And knows how each man's life affects
The spiritual life of all,
He walked by faith and not by sight,
By love and not by law;
The presence of the wrong and right
He rather felt than saw."

"He felt that wrong with wrong partakes,
That nothing stands alone,
That whoso gives the motive, makes
His brother's sin his own.
And, pausing not for doubtful choice
Of evils great or small,
He listened to that inward voice
Which called away from all."

"O Spirit of that early day,
So pure and strong and true,
Be with us in the narrow way
Our faithful fathers knew.
Give strength the evil to forsake.
The cross of Truth to bear,
And love and reverent fear to make
Our daily lives a prayer!"

ON QUAKER SAINTS . . .

"John Woolman is my ideal saint. I admire some of the Catholic saints, but am well satisfied that the saints of the Quaker calendar are quite their peers. One of the finest features about them is that they were so utterly unconscious of their sainthood."

ON IMMORTAL LOVE . . .

"Immortal Love, forever full,
Forever flowing free,
Forever shared, forever whole,
A never-ebbing sea!"

"We may not climb the heavenly steep
To bring the Lord Christ down:
In vain we search the lowest deeps,
For Him no depths can drown."

"But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is He;
And faith has still its Olivet,
And love its Galilee."

"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."

"Our Lord and Master of us all!
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine."

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