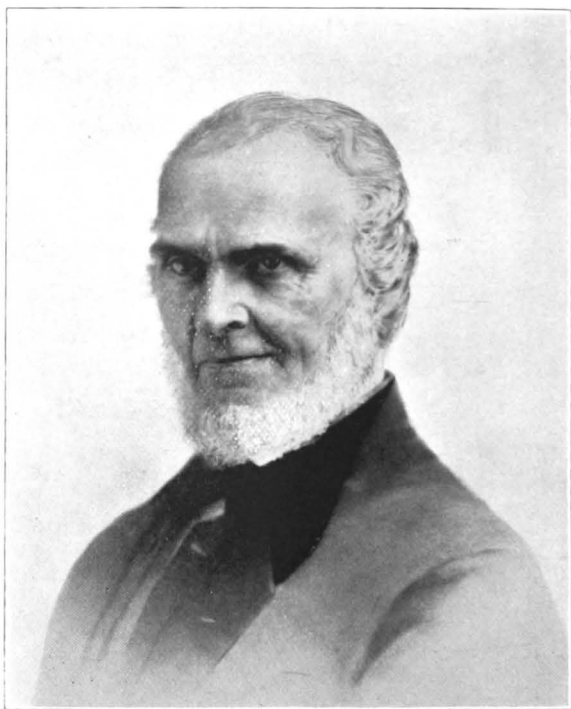


American Reformers

EDITED BY

CARLOS MARTYN



John Whitier

JOHN G. WHITTIER

The Poet of Freedom

BY

WILLIAM SLOANE KENNEDY

"He that hears anything worth communicating and does not communicate it, let him be hanged by the neck."—TALMUD.

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PREFACE.

WHILE the manuscript of this volume was lying in the safe of the publishers, I made a little Whittier itinerary along the storied Essex coast,—a voyage through Whittier ballad-land, bringing before my eyes the very scenes of the poems in the study of the sources of which in the libraries I had made such delightful and exciting discoveries. After adventures manifold and pleasant I found myself on the top of Powow Hill, that rises just above our poet's old home in Amesbury. From this coigne of vantage the eye takes in, in one swift *coup d'œil*, a mighty spread of landscape and sea, beginning with conical Agamenticus, violet-dim and far, in Maine, resting for a moment on the Isles of Shoals, Little Boar's Head, Great Boar's Head, and Salisbury Beach, traveling along the tumbled sand dunes of the Ipswich coast, catching over the blue sea-floor the white sparkle of the houses of Cape Ann, fetching a compass over Danvers and Haverhill, to finally rest on the far range of the Pawtuckaway Hills. This is Essex County with its winding roads, old shingled barns, huge stranded rocks, sea estuaries, clean quiet little sea towns and rugged honest folk,—the Attica of Massachusetts. What the view from Powow Hill is to the traveler I hope this book will be to the indoor reader of Whittier's ballads. I have done my best to show that Flood Ireson was justly tarred and feathered, that John Brown did stoop to kiss the slave child, that Barbara Frietchie did wave that historic flag in the face of the Confederate troops, that at

Lucknow both loud and sweet "the pipes of rescue blew," that Whittier's story of the wreck of the "Palatine" is true to the letter, and that the romantic story of Harriet Livermore is truth stranger than fiction. If, however, you observe with curious interest how very often the poet slips in minor matters of historical accuracy in his rhymed poems, you may ponder the words of Ruskin where he tells us that "a lovely legend is all the more precious when it has *no* foundation." Cincinnatus or any other man might have plowed a field fifty times over and it would have signified little to us; but if no Cincinnatus existed at all, and yet the Roman people, to express their conviction that tilling the soil is a noble occupation, invented a Cincinnatus out of hand and enshrined him for all time in their literature,—“this precious coinage out of the brain and conscience of a mighty people” we had better take to heart most diligently.

The full story of the part Whittier played in the anti-slavery movement is here set down for the first time in book form. Many interesting and unexpected things plowed up during my researches into such subjects as the mobbings in which Whittier was a sufferer, the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia, the estrangement of years which Garrison's narrow intolerance produced between himself and Whittier, with the subsequent reconciliation of the two, and the story of the rise and fall of the Liberty Party, the lineal predecessor of the party that saved the Union.

BELMONT, MASS.

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