

John G. Whittier.*

A volume of poems by John G. Whittier, a noble volume, octavo, and numbering three hundred and eighty four pages, has been buried up beneath a mass of rubbish on our table for—we don't know how many months. The first thing noticeable is the mechanical beauty of the book itself. Printed on fine, white, thick paper, from a type as broad and open as the brow of the poet himself, and as clear and beautiful, and illustrated copiously with steel engravings, it is altogether the finest book that has yet issued from the American press. If one wanted but a handsome volume to cover the bareness of a marble centre table, this edition of Whittier would best supply the want. But the admirers of passionate, vehement poetry, of honest impulse which leaps proudly and confidently into verse, will be glad to get Whittier in such a befitting dress. The book is worthy of the poet, and the poet of the book.

In looking through the volume, we fail to find several of Whittier's earlier poems—an "Apostrophe to Clay" in particular. Our readers will remember it:

"Not fallen! As well the tall

And pillared Alleghany fall."

That poem has given Whittier a world of trouble. In 1844, during the Presidential contest, it was reproduced, and run the rounds of the Whig press. Whittier protested against its publication, issued a card beseeching the editors to let "Not Fallen" fall, that the verses no longer expressed his sentiments, that he had changed his mind; that—that, in fact and to be candid, Mr. Clay had fallen in the poet's estimation. Poor Whittier! did he think to light a fire on a dry prairie, and then extinguish the flames! The poem literally ran like wildfire, and Whittier, in chasing it, got clean out of breath. But this was not the worst of it. The admirers of Thomas H. Benton clapped his name over it, and compelled Whittier to maintain that Benton was as firm, strong, and upright as

"——— the tall

And pillared Alleghany—"

And to make matters more provoking, a country editor of the Democratic side, immediately after the defeat of Silas Wright, clapped that smart statesman's name to the "Not Fallen," and forthwith every Democratic paper in the State forced Whittier to assure the world that Mr. Wright was right side up. The history of this little poem is a curiosity in American literature.

We miss in these volumes too, the "Songs of Labor" which Whittier originally contributed to the *Democratic Review*, and there are "Lines to New England" which we can no where find. But there is enough in the volume, albeit dyed in the wool, and under the wool, and in every fibre of the wool with abolition, to render it welcome to every one who can sympathize with a true poet and appreciate true poetry. We extract from the volume one of Whittier's earlier poems, written at a time when a few noble souls; headed by John Pierpont, were laboring for the abolition of debt in Massachusetts:—

THE PRISONER FOR DEBT.

Look on him!—through his dungeon grate
Feebly and cold, the morning light
Comes stealing round him, dim and late,
As if it loathed the sight.
Reclining on his strawy bed,
His hand upholds his drooping head—
His bloodless cheek is seamed and hard,
Unshorn his grey, neglected beard;
And o'er his bony fingers flow
His long, dishevelled locks of snow.

No grateful fire before him glows,
And yet the winter's breath is chill;
And o'er his half-clad person goes
The frequent ague-thrill!
Silent, save ever and anon,
A sound, half murmur and half groan,
Forces apart the painful grip
Of the old sufferer's bearded lip;
O sad and crushing is the fate
Of old age chained and desolate!

Just God! why lies that old man there?
A murderer shares his prison bed,
Whose eye balls through his horrid hair,
Gleam on him, fierce and red;
And the rude oath and heartless jeer
Fall ever on his loathing ear,
And, or in wakfulness or sleep,
Nerve, flesh, and pulses, thrill and creep
Whene'er that ruffian's tossing limb
Crimson with murder, touches him!

What has the grey haired prisoner done?
Has murder stained his hands with gore?
Not so; his crime's a fouler one;
GOD MADE THE OLD MAN POOR!
For this he shares a felon's cell—
The fittest earthly type of hell!
For this, the boon for which he poured
His young blood on the invader's sword,
And counted light the fearful cost—
His blood gained liberty is lost!

And so, for such a place of rest,
Old prisoner dropped thy blood as rain
On Concord's field, and Bunker's crest,
And Saratoga's plain?

Look forth, thou man of many scars,
Through thy dim dungeon's iron bars;
It must be joy, in sooth, to see
Yon monument upreared to thee—
Piled granite and a prison cell—
The land repays thy service well!

Go, ring the bells and fire the guns,
And fling the starry banner out;
Shout "Freedom!" till your hisping ones
Give back their cradle-shout:
Let boastful eloquence declaim
Of honor, liberty, and fame;
Still let the poet's strain be heard,
With glory for each second word,
And every thing with breath agree
To praise "our glorious liberty!"

But when the patriot cannon jars,
That prison's cold and gloomy wall
And through its grates the stripes and stars
Rise on the wind and fall—
Think ye that prisoner's aged ear
Rejoices in the general cheer?
Think ye his dim and failing eye
Is kindled at your pageantry?
Sorrowing of soul, and chained of limb,
What is your carnival to him?

Down with the LAW that blinds him thus!
Unworthy freemen, let it find
No refuge from the withering curse
Of God and human kind!

Open the prison's living tomb,
And usher from its brooding gloom
The victims of your savage code,
To the free sun and air of God;
No longer dare as crime to brand
The chastening of the Almighty's hand.

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