

Some Whittier First Editions

Published in the British Isles

By C. MARSHALL TAYLOR

IN collecting John Greenleaf Whittier first printings, one is impressed with the fact that the Quaker poet found favour in the British Isles almost as early as he did in America, and has held it ever since.¹

Considering he was born in December, 1807, it is surprising to find one of his poems, "To the Author of the Improvisatrice," in *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c.* (London) for 19th June, 1830. Whittier, having seen a poem by Letitia E. Landon, wrote the poem and sent it to the *Philadelphia Gazette*. It came into the hands of Willis Gaylord Clark, who forwarded it to the *Gazette* in London, the editor of which was glad to publish the poem about Letitia E. Landon who, at that moment, was a favourite in English literary circles.

The editor of the *London Gazette* was greatly impressed by Whittier's poem, so much so that he added a note at the end of the poem saying: "We do not often admit personal tributes into our columns but the poetical beauties of this composition and its gratifying character, as confirming from another hemisphere the fame attached to the writings of L.E.L. (Letitia E. Landon), our long-valued and especial favourite in this country, have induced us to give it insertion. The author is described to us in a letter from Philadelphia, to be a "young American poet-editor of great promise" in the U.S., and these lines afford high proof of talent."

Another Whittier poem, "The Indian Girl's Lament," written two months earlier (November, 1829), was the first book printing of Whittier's poems in England, appearing in *The Literary Souvenir*, London, 1830. The poem was first published in the *New England Weekly Review*, Hartford, Conn., 2nd August, 1830. Whittier included the poem in his *Legends of New England*, 1831, yet omitted it from his

¹ The author's list of Whittier printings in the British Isles is preserved at Friends' Reference Library, Friends House, Euston Road, London, N.W.1.

subsequent authorized collected editions, which would seem to indicate that he did not have too high a regard for it. My copy of the *Souvenir*, in the original red watered silk boards, includes two poems each by William and Mary Howitt, three by Miss Landon and one by William Cullen Bryant.

Whittier, on the other hand, seems to have become well acquainted with English politics, even at this early date, for he wrote a poem "Tariffiana" in the spring of 1829, which, however, was never published in England. Earlier that year the *Liverpool Advertiser* had said, "The only true policy for America is entire freedom of trade. Every other system is false, delusive and hazardous." Whittier, though a very young man (21), was editor of *The American Manufacturer*, a paper favouring duties to protect American industries. Two verses suffice to indicate Whittier's unwillingness to accept the *Liverpool Advertiser's* advice :

" Hark ! The voice of John Bull, who with fatherly care
Still watches the nation he governed of old,
And breathes for its weal a benevolent prayer,
Whenever the tale of our greatness is told !

Let the eagle that soars with the wings of the storm,
The bird of our country, his wanderings check.
Bend lowly in homage the pride of his form
That the foot of the lion may rest on his neck."

Dublin was next to become acquainted with Whittier's poems in *Selections From the American Poets* (1834) which printed "To the Dying Year," "The Indian's Tale," "A Legend," and some parts of "The Minstrel Girl." These poems no doubt were copied from Cheever's *American Common-Place Book of Poetry*, Boston, 1831, as it contained the identical Whittier poems. There is supporting evidence for this claim because the Dublin editor compounded an error originally made by Cheever who had ascribed some lines from "The Minstrel Girl" to James G. Whittier, and also all the other poems by the Quaker poet were credited to James G. Whittier by the Dublin publisher.

This editor, who apparently desired to remain anonymous, makes the following comment in the preface : "It has been asserted that no American poet has as yet produced a continuous poem capable of arresting attention." In his search for a reason for this dearth, the editor goes on to explain, "We shall perhaps conclude from an inspection of

the specimens collected, that American intellect is not capable of producing poetry of a very high order—we need not advert to their advancement in every branch of knowledge that can be rendered profitable by application to practical purposes” for “amidst the cares of gain, the noise, the bustle, the distractions of agricultural, commercial and political pursuits, polite literature can scarcely be expected to be cultivated, except as a matter of taste or amusement.” Whittier no doubt read this and other similar comments. He had to bide his time, for it is related that when Longfellow published “*Evangeline*” in 1847, Whittier is quoted as saying, “Eureka! Here, then we have it at last—an American poem, with the lack of which British reviewers have so long reproached us.” Added pleasure must have come to Whittier when he published “*Snow-Bound*” in 1866.

Ballads, and Other Poems, by John G. Whittier, H. G. Clarke and Co., 66 Old Bailey, 1844, was the largest collection of Whittier poems published up to that date on either side of the Atlantic. It was a compilation of the poems included in the Philadelphia edition of 1838, *Lays of My Home and Other Poems*, Boston, 1843, two other poems previously published and four printed therein for the first time, “*The New Wife and the Old*,” “*The Christian Slave*,” “*Texas*” and “*Stanzas for the Times*.” It was issued as No. 30 in *Clarke’s Cabinet Series*, similar in style and published by the same firm as that to whom we owe Emerson’s *Nature; An Essay. And Lectures on the Times*, another Anglo-American first edition published in 1844.¹

It is interesting to note that, in commissioning his friend Professor Elizur Wright to try to arrange for the publication of his first volume of poems in England, Whittier wrote, “I think an edition of my poems would sell pretty well in England, irrespective of any merit or demerit,” for the Quaker poet was the acknowledged poet laureate of freedom and no doubt Joseph Sturge’s friendship was very helpful also.

Probably the most elusive Whittier English first editions are the Leeds Anti-Slavery four-page leaflets, issued separately in 1852-3 as numbers of the “*Leeds Anti-Slavery Series*” carrying the note “Sold by W. and G. F. Cash, 5 Bishopsgate Street, London; and by Jane Jowett, Friends

¹ Brussell, I. R., *Anglo-American First Editions. Part Two: West to East, 1786-1930, 1936*, pp. 124-5.

Meeting Yard, Leeds, at 1s. 2d. per 100." The four leaflets carried the following poems :

No. 10—"The Farewell of a Virginia Slave—Mother to be."

No. 21—"Clerical Oppressors."

No. 43—"The Slave Ship."

No. 52—"The Christian Slave."

Later eighty-two tracts were gathered together into a volume, the title page of which read "*Five Hundred Thousand Strokes for Freedom. A Series of Anti-Slavery tracts, of which half-a-million are now first issued by the Friends of the Negro, London, W. & F. Cash and may be had of all Booksellers, 1853.*" The preface states that "whilst the first impression is passing through the printer's hands, the demand for these tracts has been so great, that a second Half Million are already in the press." This ten-page preface is signed "Wilson Armistead. Leeds. 6th Month, 1853."

Whittier's English *Snow-Bound* is an interesting first edition. It was published by Alfred W. Bennett, 5 Bishopsgate without, and contains five photographs of American winter scenes. It also carries an actual photograph of Whittier taken specially for this volume and which seems never to have been reproduced or republished elsewhere. Unfortunately none of the scenes have any connection with the poet's birthplace at Haverhill, Mass. They are no doubt real American snow scenes and possibly help to spread the tale that, on occasions when Englishmen assigned to the tropics become a bit wearied with the excessive heat, they retire to their libraries, relax, reach for a copy of *Snow-Bound* and, with the reading of the lines describing the snow storm, enjoy at least mental cooling, an example of mind over matter, so to speak.

English appreciation of Whittier's poetry and his anti-slavery activities in many ways surpassed that in America. Two English Friends were his ardent admirers, Joseph Sturge and John Bright. The former aided quite substantially in a financial way and the latter, in addition to his worded praises and support, was said to be able to recite "*Snow-Bound*" from beginning to the end. Who else could or can do that? Likewise, in our own day, Winston S. Churchill, whom no one claims to be a Friend, surprised the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt on the occasion when they rode together through Frederick,

Maryland, by reciting in full the Whittier poem that will no doubt be remembered for all time—"Barbara Frietchie."

Rufus M. Jones rarely gave an address without quoting from Whittier, and a choice selection of Whittier's poems "pre-eminently calculated to nourish "the inner life" of the seekers after Truth" was published in 1909 by the Friends' "Yorkshire 1905 Committee" with an introduction by Rufus M. Jones entitled "Whittier the Mystic." This collection, somewhat enlarged and with a longer introduction by Rufus Jones, was republished in 1919 and again in 1920 under the title *Whittier's Poems (Selected)*. In 1947 under the title *Poems of the Inner Life*, a similar but shorter collection with the same introduction was published by the Friends Home Service Committee in London. Whittier, though he never spoke in meeting, is responsible for the words of over one hundred hymns, the most popular, world-wide, being his "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind," which was sung at the 1948 Amsterdam meeting of the World Council of Churches.

In addition to furnishing words for hymns, a great many of Whittier's other poems have been set to music and published by English music publishers. Among these might be mentioned *The Meeting* (J. Curwen & Sons, Ltd., 1935) and *The Light That is Felt* (C. Jefferys & Sons, no date). These are of special interest to Friends. The words from "The Meeting" are set to music by Sir Hugh S. Robertson, carrying the salutation "To the Society of Friends—Dedication Hymn with Faux Bourdon," with the explanatory note, "The words are taken from Whittier's poem describing the conversation of a Quaker and her guest after Morning Meeting. It was said of Avis Keene, of whom the poem speaks, that she was a woman lovely in spirit and person, whose words seemed a message of love and tender concern to all her hearers." One may well ask how the following words would find any appropriate setting except in deep silence, certainly not to the strains of any music :

" And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off, and leaves us God alone."

Likewise, it seems most inappropriate to set "The Light that is Felt" to music.

As long as Whittier's religious poems, hymns and songs find favour, his memory and his influence will be felt. What more need we ask ?

Quaker Social History

Quaker Social History, 1669-1738. By Arnold Lloyd. With an Introduction by Herbert G. Wood. London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1950. Pp. xv, 207, 12 plates.

It may not be particularly apt that the title chosen for this book challenges for it a comparison with *English Social History*, the fruit of G. M. Trevelyan's ripe scholarship; nevertheless Arnold Lloyd's studies here given to the public do cover the types of material needed for a social history of early Quakerism.

In his preface the author tells how a comparison of the Advices and Queries sent down by George Fox in 1681 to Warwickshire Friends with the *Digest* of 1738 (the first in the line of comprehensive Books of Discipline) suggested two questions needing answer. "By what process did those homely advices, circulated among a loose confederation of local meetings, harden into a rigid discipline administered by a vigilant national assembly? Could George Fox, who wrote those simple queries about the oversight of disorderly walkers and the encouragement of widows in trade indeed be the author of that national system of Quaker church government which has stood the strain of two and a half centuries?"

Arnold Lloyd answers these questions in the first thirty pages of the book—in chapters on Church government, and on Individual freedom and group authority. Having laid down his principles the author proceeds in the rest of the book, to give topical studies on Quaker poor relief, marriage, the Quakers and the State, the Quaker Yearly Meeting, and the like. These essays show how the principles were worked out in different spheres of activity.

This is a book which all interested in Quaker history should read, and we cannot attempt to touch on the many issues raised. In the course of his work Arnold Lloyd gives welcome space to William Penn and his English political activities, although he perhaps tends to lay too modern an emphasis on Penn's personal activities as a parliamentary manager. It is interesting to note that the author observes the Meeting for Sufferings was unique in power and influence among nonconformist bodies of the period.

There are many pitfalls for the historian using local material unless he has intimate knowledge of the places and persons concerned, so it is no discredit to the author that there are inaccuracies in some minor points—although it is unfortunate that these should have publicity. For instance (in spite of note 25 to p. 34), there is no Quaker record of Bristol Friends' poor being sent to the parish for relief—the woman concerned had lost touch with Friends three