

**THE RIVERSIDE LITERATURE SERIES.  
SNOW-BOUND, AMONG THE HILLS,  
SONGS OF LABOR, AND OTHER  
POEMS: WITH BIOGRAPHICAL  
SKETCH AND AXPLANATORY NOTES**

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The Riverside Literature Series. Snow-Bound, among the Hills, Songs of Labor, and Other Poems: With Biographical Sketch and Axplanatory Notes by John Greenleaf Whittier

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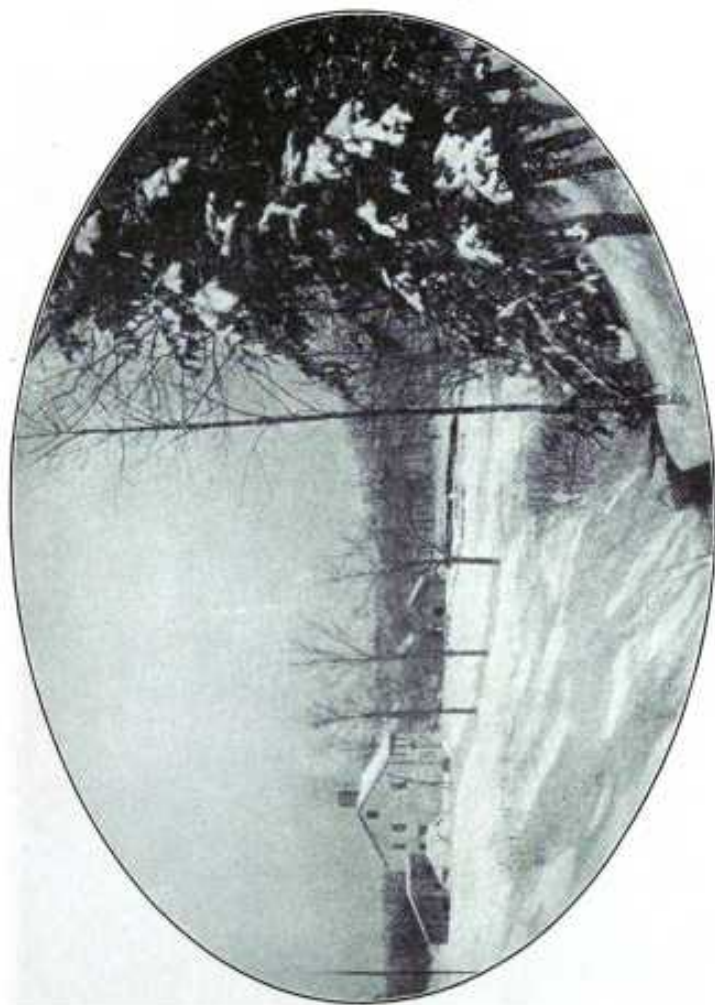
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**WHITTIER'S BIRTHPLACE IN WINTER**

*The Riverside Literature Series*

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SONGS OF LABOR: AND  
OTHER POEMS

BY  
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND  
EXPLANATORY NOTES



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## A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF JOHN GREEN- LEAF WHITTIER.

### I.

THE house is still standing in East Haverhill, Massachusetts, where Whittier was born, December 17, 1807. It was built near the close of the seventeenth century by an ancestor of the poet, it sheltered several generations of Whittiers, in it John Greenleaf Whittier lived till his thirtieth year, and it is likely to enjoy a long lease of life in association with his name, for after his death it was purchased to be held in trust as a shrine, and its chief room has been restored to the condition in which it was when the boy was living in it, the recollection of whose experience inspired that idyl of New England life, "Snow-Bound."

It is to "Snow-Bound" that one resorts for the most natural and delightful narrative of the associations amongst which Whittier passed his boyhood. His family held to the tenets of the Friends, and the discipline of that society, in connection with the somewhat rigorous exactions of country life in New England in the early part of the century, determined the character of the formal education which he received. In later life he was wont to refer to the journals of Friends which he found in the scanty library in his father's house as forming a large part of his reading in boyhood. He steeped his mind with their thoughts and learned to love their authors for their unconscious saintliness. There were not more than thirty volumes on the shelves, and, with a passion for reading, he read them over and over. One of these books, however, was the Bible, and he possessed himself of its contents, becoming not only familiar with the text, but penetrated by the spirit.

Of regular schooling he had what the neighborhood could give, a few weeks each winter in the district school, and, when he was nineteen, a little more than a year in an academy just started in Haverhill. In "Snow-Bound" he has drawn the portrait of one of his teachers at the district school, and his poem "To My Old Schoolmaster" commemorates another, Joshua Coffin, with whom he preserved a strong friendship in his manhood, when they were engaged in the same great cause of the abolition of human slavery. These teachers, who, according to the old New England custom, lived in turn with the families of their pupils, brought into the Whittier household other reading than strictly religious books, and Coffin especially rendered the boy a great service in introducing him to a knowledge of Burns, whose poems he read aloud once as the family sat by the fireside in the evening. The boy of fourteen was entranced; it was the voice of poetry speaking directly to the ear of poetry, and the newcomer recognized in an instant the prophet whose mantle he was to wear. Coffin was struck with the effect on his listener, and left the book with him. In one of his best known poems, written a generation later, on receiving a sprig of heather in bloom, Whittier records his indebtedness to Burns. To use his own expression, "the older poet woke the younger."

The home life which the boy led, aside from the conscious or unconscious schooling which he found in books, was one of many hardships, but within the sanctuary of a gracious and dignified home. The secluded valley in which he lived was three miles from the nearest village; from the date of the erection of the homestead till now no neighbor's roof has been in sight. The outdoor life was that of a farmer with cattle, tempered, indeed, in the short summer by the kindly gifts of nature, so happily shown in the poem "The Barefoot Boy," but for the most part a life of toil and endurance which left its marks indelibly in the shattered constitution of the poet. Twice a week the family drove to a Friends' meeting at Amesbury, eight miles distant, and in

winter without warm wraps or protecting robes. The old barn, built before that celebrated in "Snow-Bound," had no doors, and the winter snows drifted upon its floor, for neither beasts nor men, in the custom of the time, were expected to resist cold except by their native vigor. Whittier's companions of his own age were a brother and two sisters, one of whom, Elizabeth Whittier, was his nearest associate for the better part of his life, and the household held also that figure so beautiful and helpful in many families, an Aunt Mercy, as also a lively, adventurous bachelor, Uncle Moses. The father of the house, as we are told, was a man of few words; the mother, whose life was spared till that happy time when mother and son changed places in care-taking, had a rarely refined nature, in which the Quaker graces of calmness and order were developed into a noble beauty of living.

## II.

The poems written by him when he was a schoolboy display, as indeed did most of his writing for a few years afterward, little more than a versifying facility and a certain sense of correct form. His mother and his sister Mary encouraged him, but his father, a hard-headed, hard-working farmer, of sound judgment and independent habits of thinking, was too severely aware of the straitened condition of the family to think of anything else for his son than a life of toil like his own. Mary Whittier, with a sister's pride, sent one of her brother's poems, unknown to the author, to the "Free Press" of Newburyport, a new paper lately started which commended itself by its tone to the Quaker Whittier, so that he had subscribed to it. The poem was printed, and the first that the poet knew of it was when he caught the paper from the postman riding by the field where he and his father were working. It was such a moment as comes to a young poet, believing in himself and having that aspiration for recognition which is one of the holiest as it is one of the subtlest elements in the