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## Colby Library Quarterly 103

### A WHITTIER AUTOGRAPH

THIS is a good time of year for a re-reading of Whittier's *Snow-Bound*. At least we who live on or near the Colby College campus have no difficulty, at the moment, in perfect visual realization of the scene described by the poet:

No cloud above, no earth below,  
A universe of sky and snow!

And most appropriately, therefore, just at this time, there reaches our hands an interesting John Greenleaf Whittier autograph.

Ten years from now, when the year 1966 ushers in the centenary of *Snow-Bound* (originally published when the poet was fifty-nine years old), the Colby College Library will be happy in the possession of this letter, for in it the author refers to certain lines in *Snow-Bound*. The letter was written in 1870 to some unidentified Westerner who had been reading the Quaker poet's lines soon after they were first published, and who had written him in an attempt to remove the veil of anonymity from the portrait of that

woman tropical, intense  
In thought and act, in soul and sense

to whom Whittier had devoted eighty lines of his poem.

There is nothing surprising about the fact that a reader had wondered who this woman was. For her portrait had been painted by the poet with clear and effective strokes. What reader has, in fact, *not* wondered about her?

Another guest that winter night  
Flashed back from lustrous eyes the light.  
Unmarked by time, and yet not young,  
The honeyed music of her tongue  
And words of meekness scarcely told  
A nature passionate and bold,  
Strong, self-concentred, spurning guide,  
Its milder features dwarfed beside  
Her unbent will's majestic pride.  
She sat among us, at the best,  
A not unfeared, half-welcome guest,  
Rebuking with her cultured phrase  
Our homeliness of words and ways.

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No wonder curiosity was aroused, in the mind of more than one reader, as to who this "half-welcome guest" was.

She blended in a like degree  
The vixen and the devotee,  
Revealing with each freak or feint  
The temper of Petruchio's Kate  
The raptures of Siena's saint. . . .

In a later line or two, Whittier remarked:

It is not ours to separate  
The tangled skein of will and fate.

Our recently acquired letter makes it clear, however, that Whittier had no objection to his correspondent's knowing who the "vixen . . . devotee" was. To the inquirer he replied:

Amesbury  
11<sup>mo</sup> 18. 1870

My dear f[rien]d

The person referred to in "Snow Bound" was Miss Harriet Livermore, daughter of Ed. St Loe Livermore, Judge of the Sup[reme] Court of N[ew] H[ampshire]. She spent the last thirty years of her life mostly in Jerusalem and the East.

I thank thee for thy kind words in regard to my poems, and am very glad that I have a friend in the Far West.

Very truly thy f[rien]d

JOHN G. WHITTIER

This identification of Harriet Livermore is, of course, no news; for in later editions of his poem Whittier added an Introduction in which he spoke about her and her "two white horses with red marks on their backs." Doubtless, other readers besides our Westerner had written to Whittier to let him know that he had aroused their curiosity about the "woman tropical, intense." May we not, however, entertain the pleasant thought that it was this recently-acquired letter of inquiry that first brought home to the poet's mind the desirability of letting other readers in on the secret of the identity of the half-welcome guest?