REENLERF BY FRANCIS E. COOKE

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Table of Contents

THE FARM BOY OF HAVERHILL 1
HIDDEN TREASURES
THE FARM BOY'S HERO14
THE WILL AND THE WAY
A SUMMONS TO BATTLE
BUCKLING ON ARMOR
IN THE MIDST OF THE STRIFE
LUCY LARCOM
VICTORY WON
AFTER THE WAR72
OAK KNOLL

CHAPTER 1

THE FARM BOY OF HAVERHILL

In the year 1638, a Quaker named Thomas Whittier sailed from Southampton and crossed the ocean to America to make a new home in a strange land. Twenty miles or so from the Atlantic coast, he built the log hut which was to be his dwelling, surrounded by the woods and meadows through which the beautiful river Merrimack flows. By and by a little country town called Haverhill grew up near the pioneer Quaker's home, and Thomas Whittier helped the new settlers with advice and was held by them in great esteem. One trouble, however, he never shared with them: this was their terror of the Indians, whose ancestors had camped in the neighboring wild forestlands for centuries past, and who, therefore, looked upon the country as their own rightful possession.

No wonder it was, then, that the plumed and painted natives came to explore the settlements of the white men and with none but peaceful intentions. But when they were driven away by fire and sword, they made reprisals in the winter nights by burning lonely dwellings and tomahawking the inhabitants.

So the people of Haverhill built themselves strong places of refuge where timid persons might shelter in case of an attack upon the town, and the feeling of enmity between white settlers and Indians grew apace.

Thomas Whittier neither barred his doors nor shuttered his windows. His trust in the natives and his kind acts toward them gained their goodwill in return. They were always friendly with the peace-loving Quaker, and when he built himself, in course of time, a larger dwelling at a little distance from the log hut where he had no neighbors at hand, it mattered not to him and his family if they caught sight of swarthy faces peeping in through the latticed kitchen window after nightfall and knew that the wild men from the hills were at hand.

Generation after generation passed away, and the farmhouse descended from father to son, till early in this century a farmer named John Whittier, who was a Quaker like his English ancestor, owned the place. It was a low brown wooden building with two windows on each side of the narrow front door and three windows in the story above. This door opened into a small square entry with a steep staircase leading from it and a room on either hand. At one corner of the house, a porch led straight into the kitchen at the back of the dwelling, which was the family living place. Such a room! It was thirty feet long and had a huge fireplace at one end, round which a company of people could gather on a winter night, and children could hide away snugly in the shadowy chimney corners and fall asleep or listen to the tales their elders told by the blazing firelight.

In front of the house lay a terrace and a sloping garden separated from the steep, hilly road by a thick fence of trees and a brook that rushed merrily down its rocky channel. Across the high road stood a granary, a forge, and the barn where the cattle were housed in the winter. On the other side of the garden lay the farm and fields; while at its foot rose a steep hill called "Job's Hill," clothed with oak trees, from the summit of which a fine view was to be seen of the neighboring woods, of Lake Kenoza gleaming in the distance like a jewel, and of the river Merrimack winding through the meadows on its way to the sea. From that hilltop could be heard in stormy weather the roar of the great billows breaking on the beach many miles away.

So much for the Quaker homestead and its surroundings; now

for its inhabitants. Farmer Whittier, who was known as "Friend Whittier" in the neighborhood, was an honest, worthy man whom everyone could trust. He did each day's work diligently and seldom looked beyond it, having few thoughts or wishes that his home and daily life did not satisfy. Eight miles away at Amesbury stood a Quaker meetinghouse. Thither the farmer and his wife used to drive each Sunday in an old-fashioned chaise drawn by a steady old horse, to join in silent worship with the few "Friends" who gathered there. Sometimes "ministering Friends" used to stay at night at Friend Whittier's farmhouse and always found a hospitable welcome; but the visitors who were most often to be found there were poor travelers-tramps and wandering peddlers carrying with them packs of small wares to sell. Some of them were uncouth and ignorant people; some were sturdy knaves who demanded food rudely and did not wait to be invited to take a comfortable seat by the fireside; but the ready kindness of Abigail Whittier, the farmer's wife, and her sister Mercy flowed out to them all, and they carried with them lasting memories of the tender-hearted Quakeresses as they went on their way.

John Greenleaf Whittier, the hero of this story, was the elder son of Friend Whittier and was born on December 17, 1807. Three other children completed the family—Mary, who was a year or two older than Greenleaf, and Matthew and Elizabeth, both younger than he. It was a happy country life that the little lad led in his early childhood, playing barefooted in the summer by the brookside and making friends with the living creatures in the woods and the animals on his father's farm.

But children soon grow out of babyhood in a busy family, and working days began very early for the little Whittiers. The girls helped their mother to spin and keep the house in order; the boys had plenty to do on the farm and in the fields, where the ground was rough and stony and had to be cleared of the old trunks of the forest trees. During the winter when the snow lay thickly on the ground, there was no work to be done out of doors for weeks together. Then, in the long evenings, the mother, sitting at her spinning wheel, used to tell the children stories of her own young days and repeat to them tales she heard from her parents of the adventures which befell the early settlers when the wild Indians with their bows and tomahawks used to come down upon the log huts and farms where the white men lived, whom they looked upon as their enemies. As they listened to her words, the young ones would creep nearer and nearer to the great open fireplace and look round timidly when the wind shook the farmhouse and rattled the latticed windows.

There was great excitement in the household sometimes, at the end of a long, heavy snowstorm, when sledges, drawn by many pairs of oxen, came slowly down the long hillside, forcing their way through the snowdrifts to clear the road from farm to farm. The loud voices of the drivers could be heard in the clear air from far away; and Friend Whittier and his boys used to hurry to the barn and bring out their oxen, ready to be harnessed to the team, while the girls prepared and carried out brimming cups of cider for the men to drink as they waited at the gate.

At times, too, when the storm had been roaring all night round the house, the children woke in the morning to find everything deep in snow; the white drifts lying against the windowpanes; the garden wall and the woodpile buried under one dazzling white cover. Then the farmer used to call out "Boys! A path!" and Greenleaf and Matthew, drawing on their thick mittens as fast as they could over their hands and pulling their caps over their ears, ran out of doors to set to work to tunnel a path through the snow from the house to the barn. They shouted merrily as they neared the end of their journey and woke up the imprisoned animals that used to look with large wondering eyes at the invaders.

The district of Haverhill was at its best in spring and summer

when the meadows were full of flowers. Surely there never were anywhere else such hepaticas and anemones as were to be found beside the brook, half hidden by drooping ferns and grasses. In the woods the oaks and maples were the homes of squirrels and birds that never learned to fear the footsteps of the boys and girls, who would not for the world have done them any harm. Farmer Whittier and his family had no need to go beyond their own farm boundaries for the means of living. Their sheep and the flax grown on the fields provided material for their homespun clothes, they grew their own wheat, and the river was stocked with fish.

It was part of Greenleaf's work each day to milk the cows and carry the milk pails to his mother, who was famous in the neighborhood for the butter and cheese she made. The boys gave pet names to their favorite oxen. One was called "Buck" and another "Old Butter." If ever a holiday was given to the boys on a sultry summer afternoon, they used to drive the cattle up Job's Hill and lie under the trees resting against the patient creatures as they lay chewing the cud in the shade.

One day Old Butter, from his standpoint on Job's Hill, saw Greenleaf coming up with the well-known bag of salt, which he had been to the farm to fetch for the cattle. Down came the ox with flying leaps to meet his young master, and as the boy bent down to strew the salt, Old Butter was upon him in his headlong course. Making a great effort, the ox leaped up and just saved Greenleaf's life, lighting with a mighty blow upon the ground beyond him, happily unhurt. Kind treatment made the creatures on the Whittier's farm half human; and the young Whittiers, by making friends of the dumb animals, gained a pleasure in their early days, which any country boy might possess if he liked.

Half a mile from the homestead stood the little schoolhouse to which Greenleaf trotted by the side of his elder sister, for the first time, when a wee laddie. It was only in the winter when there was little work to be done on the farm that the children, as they grew older, could be spared. They used to trudge through the deep snow and learn to read and write at the notched and battered desks, finding it a strange experience to have the companionship of other boys and girls.

Looking back after fifty years had passed on these early school days, the poet Whittier wrote the following verses for a children's magazine called *Our Young Folks*.

IN SCHOOL DAYS

Still sits the school-house by the road, A ragged beggar sunning; Around it still the sumacs grow, And blackberry vines are running.

* * *

Long years ago a winter sun Shone over it at setting; Lit up its western window-panes, And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls, And brown eyes full of grieving, Of one who still her steps delayed When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy Her childish favor singled; His cap pulled low upon a face Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow, To right and left he lingered, As restlessly her tiny hands The blue-checked apron fingered. He saw her lift her eyes, he felt Her soft hand's light caressing; And heard the tremble of her voice, As if a fault confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word— I hate to go above you; Because,"—the brown eyes lower fell— "Because, you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a gray-haired man, That sweet child face is showing; Dear girl! the grasses on her grave Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school, How few who pass above him Lament their triumph and his loss, Like her—because they love him.

It was a very quiet, uneventful life that this boy led, who was to be famous in the coming years. He rarely went beyond the district of Haverhill. But he was perfectly happy whenever in summertime he could lie beneath the trees on Job's Hill, thinking his own thoughts and dreaming the sunny hours away in visions that were by and by to clothe themselves in beautiful words. Only his mother suspected this. She watched her boy with silent sympathy. Perhaps as she read the Bible to her children on Sunday evenings, and saw Greenleaf's face kindling as he listened to the grand old words, she wondered within herself whether the day would come when his name would be known in the world outside the hills that sheltered his quiet home.