



# John Greenleaf Whittier

Essex County's Famous Son

## Whittier as Quaker

### How the Women Went from Dover

The following is a copy of the warrant issued by Major Waldron, of Dover, in 1662. The Quakers, as was their wont, prophesied against him, and saw, as they supposed, the fulfilment of their prophecy when, many years after, he was killed by the Indians.

*To the constables of Dover, Hampton, Salisbury, Newbury, Rowley, Ipswich, Wenham, Lynn, Boston, Roxbury, Dedham, and until these vagabond Quakers are carried out of this jurisdiction. You, and every one of you, are required, in the King's Majesty's name, to take these vagabond Quakers, Anne Colman, Mary Tomkins, and Alice> Ambrose, and make them fast to the cart's tail, and driving the cart through your several towns, to whip them upon their naked backs not exceeding ten stripes apiece on each of them, in each town; and so to convey them from constable to constable till they are out of this jurisdiction, as you will answer it at your peril; and this shall be your warrant.*

RICHARD WALDRON.

*Dated at Dover, December 22, 1662.*

This warrant was executed only in Dover and Hampton. At Salisbury the constable refused to obey it. He was sustained by the town's people, who were under the influence of Major Robert Pike, the leading man in the lower valley of the Merrimac, who stood far in advance of his time, as an advocate of religious freedom, and an opponent of ecclesiastical authority. He had the moral courage to address an able and manly letter to the court at Salem, remonstrating against the witchcraft trials.

THE tossing spray of Coheco's fall  
Hardened to ice on its rocky wall,  
As through Dover town in the chill, gray dawn,  
Three women passed, at the cart-tail drawn!

Bared to the waist, for the north wind's grip  
And keener sting of the constable's whip,  
The blood that followed each hissing blow  
Froze as it sprinkled the winter snow.

Priest and ruler, boy and maid  
Followed the dismal cavalcade;  
And from door and window, open thrown,  
Looked and wondered gaffer and crone.

"God is our witness," the victims cried,  
We suffer for Him who for all men died;  
The wrong ye do has been done before,  
We bear the stripes that the Master bore!

And thou, O Richard Waldron, for whom  
We hear the feet of a coming doom,

Whittier as Quaker

Introduction

Poems & Commentary

Whittier as Abolitionist

Introduction

Poems & Commentary

Whittier in Haverhill

Introduction

Poems & Commentary

Whittier in Amesbury

Introduction

Poems & Commentary

About this Site

Home

#### Poems in this section:

[First-Day Thoughts](#)

[Abram Morrison](#)

[Our Master](#)

[Worship](#)

[The Brewing of Soma](#)

[The Exiles](#)

[Cassandra Southwick](#)

[The King's Missive](#)

[How the Women Went  
from Dover](#)

[Questions of Life](#)

[Trust & Eternal Goodness](#)

On thy cruel heart and thy hand of wrong  
Vengeance is sure, though it tarry long.

"In the light of the Lord, a flame we see  
Climb and kindle a proud roof-tree;  
And beneath it an old man lying dead,  
With stains of blood on his hoary head."

"Smite, Goodman Hate-Evil!--harder still!"  
The magistrate cried, "lay on with a will!  
Drive out of their bodies the Father of Lies,  
Who through them preaches and prophesies!"

So into the forest they held their way,  
By winding river and frost-rimmed bay,  
Over wind-swept hills that felt the beat  
Of the winter sea at their icy feet.

The Indian hunter, searching his traps,  
Peered stealthily through the forest gaps;  
And the outlying settler shook his head,--  
"They're witches going to jail," he said.

At last a meeting-house came in view;  
A blast on his horn the constable blew;  
And the boys of Hampton cried up and down,  
"The Quakers have come!" to the wondering town.

From barn and woodpile the goodman came;  
The goodwife quitted her quilting frame,  
With her child at her breast; and, hobbling slow,  
The grandam followed to see the show.

Once more the torturing whip was swung,  
Once more keen lashes the bare flesh stung.  
"Oh, spare! they are bleeding!" a little maid cried,  
And covered her face the sight to hide.

A murmur ran round the crowd: "Good folks,"  
Quoth the constable, busy counting the strokes,  
"No pity to wretches like these is due,  
They have beaten the gospel black and blue!"

Then a pallid woman, in wild-eyed fear,  
With her wooden noggin of milk drew near.  
"Drink, poor hearts!" a rude hand smote  
Her draught away from a parching throat.

"Take heed," one whispered, "they'll take your cow  
For fines, as they took your horse and plough,  
And the bed from under you." "Even so,"  
She said; "they are cruel as death, I know."

Then on they passed, in the waning day,  
Through Seabrook woods, a weariful way;  
By great salt meadows and sand-hills bare,  
And glimpses of blue sea here and there.

By the meeting-house in Salisbury town,  
The sufferers stood, in the red sundown,  
Bare for the lash! O pitying Night,  
Drop swift thy curtain and hide the sight.

With shame in his eye and wrath on his lip  
The Salisbury constable dropped his whip.  
"This warrant means murder foul and red;  
Cursed is he who serves it," he said.

"Show me the order, and meanwhile strike  
A blow at your peril!" said Justice Pike.  
Of all the rulers the land possessed,  
Wisest and boldest was he and best.

He scoffed at witchcraft; the priest he met  
As man meets man; his feet he set  
Beyond his dark age, standing upright,  
Soul-free, with his face to the morning light.

He read the warrant: "These convey  
From our precincts; at every town on the way  
Give each ten lashes." "God judge the brute!  
I tread his order under my foot!

"Cut loose these poor ones and let them go;  
Come what will of it, all men shall know  
No warrant is good, though backed by the Crown,  
For whipping women in Salisbury town!"

The hearts of the villagers, half released  
From creed of terror and rule of priest,  
By a primal instinct owned the right  
Of human pity in law's despite.

For ruth and chivalry only slept,  
His Saxon manhood the yeoman kept;  
Quicker or slower, the same blood ran  
In the Cavalier and the Puritan.

The Quakers sank on their knees in praise  
And thanks. A last, low sunset blaze  
Flashed out from under a cloud, and shed  
A golden glory on each bowed head.

The tale is one of an evil time,  
When souls were fettered and thought was crime,  
And heresy's whisper above its breath  
Meant shameful scourging and bonds and death!

What marvel, that hunted and sorely tried,  
Even woman rebuked and prophesied,  
And soft words rarely answered back  
The grim persuasion of whip and rack.

If her cry from the whipping-post and jail  
Pierced sharp as the Kenite's driven nail,  
O woman, at ease in these happier days,  
Forbear to judge of thy sister's ways!

How much thy beautiful life may owe  
To her faith and courage thou canst not know,  
Nor how from the paths of thy calm retreat  
She smoothed the thorns with her bleeding feet.

[Back to commentary on "How the Women Went from Dover"](#)

[Next poem](#) >

