

1863

BARBARA FRIETCHIE

John Greenleaf Whittier

Whittier, John Greenleaf (1807-1892) - American poet and editor who was largely self-educated. Known as "The Quaker Poet," Whittier devoted much of his life to social causes and reform. He was an ardent abolitionist. Barbara Frietchie (1863) - A poem inspired by the Civil War. The fictional account of a ninety-six-year-old woman's encounter with General Stonewall Jackson. Opening lines: Up from the meadows rich with corn, Clear in the cool September morn, ...

BARBARA FRIETCHIE

Up from the meadows rich with corn, Clear in the cool September morn,
The clustered spires of Frederick stand Green-walled by the hills of Maryland.

Round about them orchards sweep, Apple and peach tree fruited deep,
Fair as the garden of the Lord To the eyes of the famished rebel horde,
On that pleasant morn of the early fall When Lee marched over the mountain-wall;
Over the mountains winding down, Horse and foot, into Frederick town.

Forty flags with their silver stars, Forty flags with their crimson bars,
Flapped in the morning wind: the sun Of noon looked down, and saw not one.

Up rose old Barbara Frietchie then, Bowed with her fourscore years and ten;
Bravest of all in Frederick town, She took up the flag the men hauled down,
In her attic window the staff she set, To show that one heart was loyal yet.

Up the street came the rebel tread, Stonewall Jackson riding ahead.
Under his slouched hat left and right He glanced; the old flag met his sight.

“Halt!”- the dust-brown ranks stood fast.

“Fire!”- out blazed the rifle-blast.

It shivered the window, pane and sash; It rent the banner with seam and gash.

Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf.

She leaned far out on the window-sill, And shook it forth with a royal will.

“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head, But spare your country’s flag,” she said.

A shade of sadness, a blush of shame, Over the face of the leader came;
The nobler nature within him stirred To life at that woman’s deed and word;
“Who touches a hair of yon gray head Dies like a dog! March on!” he said.

All day long through Frederick street Sounded the tread of marching feet:
All day long that free flag tost Over the heads of the rebel host.

Ever its torn folds rose and fell On the loyal winds that loved it well;
And through the hill-gaps sunset light Shone over it with a warm good-night.

Barbara Frietchie's work is o'er, And the Rebel rides on his raids
no more.

Peace and order and beauty draw Round thy symbol of light and
law; And ever the stars above look down On thy stars below in
Frederick town!

Honor to her! and let a tear Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall's bier.

Over Barbara Frietchie's grave, Flag of Freedom and Union, wave!

THE END