

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

The Corn Song

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Page | 1

In this poem from 1850, John Greenleaf Whittier pays special homage to corn, the Native American crop. Have you every stopped to think about the glory that is corn? Why is it singled out for special praise? How does it differ from the apple, the orange, and the grape of the vine? To whom is thanks due for corn: Those who plowed the earth and chased away the robber crows? “The kindly earth”? “Our farmer girls”? Or God? Why might the blessing of corn have been the most fundamental reason for Thanksgiving? Might it still be so today, whether we know it or not? If not, what are you first thankful for instead?

Heap high the farmer’s wintry hoard!
Heap high the golden corn!
No richer gift has Autumn poured
From out her lavish horn!

Let other lands, exulting, glean
The apple from the pine,
The orange from its glossy green,
The cluster from the vine;

We better love the hardy gift
Our rugged vales bestow,
To cheer us when the storm shall drift
Our harvest-fields with snow.

Through vales of grass and meads of
flowers
Our ploughs their furrows made,
While on the hills the sun and showers
Of changeful April played.

We dropped the seed o’er hill and plain,
Beneath the sun of May,
And frightened from our sprouting grain

The robber crows away.

All through the long, bright days of June
Its leaves grew green and fair,
And waved in hot midsummer’s noon
Its soft and yellow hair.

And now, with autumn’s moonlit eyes,
Its harvest-time has come,
We pluck away the frosted leaves,
And bear the treasure home.

There, richer than the fabled gift
Apollo showered of old,
Fair hands the broken grain shall sift,
And knead its meal of gold.

Let vapid idlers loll in silk
Around their costly board;
Give us the bowl of samp and milk,
By homespun beauty poured!

Where’er the wide old kitchen hearth
Sends up its smoky curls,

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Who will not thank the kindly earth,
And bless our farmer girls?

Then shame on all the proud and vain,
Whose folly laughs to scorn
The blessing of our hardy grain,
Our wealth of golden corn!

Let earth withhold her goodly root,
Let mildew blight the rye,
Give to the worm the orchard's fruit,
The wheat-field to the fly:

But let the good old crop adorn
The hills our fathers trod;
Still let us, for his golden corn,
Send up our thanks to God!

Page | 2