PERCY BOYNTON

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Percy Boynton

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Boynton P.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

The general purpose in the preparation of this book has been to eliminate negligible detail and to subordinate or omit authors of minor importance in order to stress the men and the movements that are most significant in American intellectual history. The book has therefore been written with a view to showing the drift of American thought as illustrated by major writers or groups and as revealed by a careful study of one or two cardinal works by each. In this sequence of thought the growth of American self-consciousness and the changing ideals of American patriotism have been kept in mind throughout. The attempt is made to induce *study* of representative classics and *extensive reading* of the American literature which illuminates the past of the country – chiefly, of course, in reminiscent fiction, drama, and poetry.

As an aid to the student, there are appended to each chapter (except the last three) topics and problems for study, and book lists which summarize the output of each man, indicate available editions, and point to the critical material which may be used as a supplement, but not as a substitute, for first-hand study. This critical material has been selected with a view, also, to suggesting books which might reasonably be included in libraries of normal schools and colleges, as well as in universities.

As further aids to the student, there have been included two maps, three chronological charts, and, in an appendix, a brief characterization of the American periodicals which have been most significant in stimulating American authorship by providing a market for fiction, poetry, and the essay.

In the writing of the book the author's chief obligation has naturally been to the many university classes who have stimulated its preparation, not only by their attention but by their free discussion. Special acknowledgment is gratefully made to Mr. William W. Ellsworth for a careful reading of all the manuscript and to Miss Marie Gulbransen for the initial work in formulating the appendix on the American magazines.

Acknowledgment is due to the publishers of *The Nation* and *The New Republic* for portions of the chapters on Crèvecœur, the Poetry of the Revolution, Emerson, Lowell, Whitman, Sill, and Miller, which originally appeared in these weeklies.

PERCY H. BOYNTON

CHAPTER I
THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In its beginnings American literature differs from the literatures of most other great nations; it was a transplanted thing. It sprang in a way like Minerva, full-armed from the head of Jove, – Jove in this case being England, and the armor being the heritage which the average American colonist had secured in England before he crossed the Atlantic. In contrast, Greek, Roman, French, German, English, and the other less familiar literatures can all be more or less successfully traced back to primitive conditions. Their early life was interwoven with the growth of the language and the progress of a rude civilization, and their earliest products which have come down to us were not results of authorship as we know it to-day. They were either folk poetry, composed perhaps and certainly enjoyed by the people in groups and accompanied by group singing and dancing, – like the psalms and the simpler ballads, – or they were the record of folk tradition, slowly and variously developed through generations and finally collected into a continuous story like the Iliad, the Æneid, the "Song of Roland," the "Nibelungenlied," and "Beowulf." They were composed by word of mouth and not reduced to writing for years or generations, and they were not put into print until centuries after they were current in speech or transcribed by monks and scholars.

The one great story-poem of this sort in American literature is the "Song of Hiawatha," but this is the story of a conquered and vanishing race; it has nothing basic to do with the Americans of to-day; it is far less related to them than the earlier epics of the older European nations to whom we trace our ancestry. Except for a few place-names even the language of America owes nothing to that of the Indians, for the English tongue is a compound of Greek and Latin and French and German. Our literary beginnings, then, go back to two groups of educated English colonists, or immigrants, and our knowledge of them to conditions in the divided England from which they first came to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607 and to Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620.

The English of the early seventeenth century were an eager, restless, driving people. The splendid reign of Queen Elizabeth was just past. The country was secure from foreign enemies and confident in its strength. Great naval leaders had brought new honors to her name; great explorers had planted her flag on mysterious and new-discovered coasts; a group of dramatists had made the theater as popular as the moving-picture house of to-day; a great architect was adorning London with his churches; poets and novelists, preachers and statesmen, scientists and scholars, were all working vividly and keenly. There was an active enthusiasm for the day's doings, a kind of living assent to Hamlet's commentary, on "this goodly frame, the earth, … this most excellent canopy, the air, … this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire"; and to the exclamation that follows: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!" And under a strong and tactful monarch the nation had been kept at peace with itself.

Yet in this fallow soil the seeds of controversy had been steadily taking root; and when Elizabeth was followed on the throne by the vain and unregal James I, the crop turned out to be a harvest of dragons' teeth. Puritan democrats and cavalier Royalists fought with each other over the body of England till it was prostrate and helpless. What followed was the rise of Puritan power, culminating with the execution of Charles II and the establishment of the Commonwealth under the Cromwells from 1649 to 1660, and the peaceful restoration of monarchy at the latter date. It was during the mid-stages of these developments that the first settlements were made in English America. Both factions included large numbers of vigorous individuals of the pioneer type. The Puritans were technically called "dissenters" and "nonconformists" because of their attitude toward the established Church of

England; but the Royalists who came over to America were simply nonconformists of another type who preferred doing things out on the frontier to living conventional lives at home.

The Royalists, who settled in the South, came away, like other travelers and explorers of their day, to settle new English territory as a landed aristocracy. They were a mixed lot, but on the whole they were not an irreligious lot. They believed in the established church as they did in the established government, and they persecuted with a good will those who tried to follow other forms of worship than their own. They were, however, chiefly fortune hunters, just as were the men who surged out to California in 1849 or those who went to Alaska fifty years later; they hoped to make their money in the west and to spend it back in the east, and they had little thought of literature, either as a thing to enjoy or as a thing to create. When they wrote they did so to give information about the country, the Indians, and the new conditions of living, or to keep in touch with relatives, legal authorities, or sources of money supply; and always they had in mind the thought of attracting new settlers, for they needed labor more than anything else. They made no attempt at general education, adopting the now-abandoned aristocratic theory that too much knowledge would be a dangerous source of discontent among the working people. Some few individuals wrote accounts and descriptions that are interesting to the modern reader, but these were not representative of the people as a whole. They were Englishmen away from home, living temporarily in *Virgin*-ia (the province of the virgin queen, Elizabeth), in *James*-town, in the *Carolinas* (from the Latin for Charles), in *Mary*-land, and, even as late as 1722, in *George*-ia.

The nonconformists whom adverse winds drove to the North in 1620 were a very different folk. They were predominantly Puritan in prejudice and in upbringing. Many of their leaders were graduates of Cambridge University who had gone into the Church of England, only to be driven out of it because of their unorthodox preaching – born leaders who were brave enough to risk comfort and safety for conscience' sake. They came over to America in order, as Mrs. Hemans put it, to have "freedom to worship God," but not to give this freedom to others. They had endured so much for their religious faith that they wanted a place where this, and this only, should be tolerated. So they became, not illogically, the fiercest kind of persecutors, practicing with a vengeance the lessons in oppression that they had learned in England at the cost of blood and suffering. They settled in compact towns where they could believe and worship together; they put up "meetinghouses" where they could listen to the preacher on the Lord's Day and where they could transact public business, with the same man as "moderator," on week days. He was the controlling power – "pastor," or shepherd, and "dominie," or master, of the community. And when the meetinghouses were finished, the settlers erected as their next public buildings the schoolhouses, where the children might learn to read the Scriptures so that they could "foil the ould deluder, Satan." Education became compulsory as well as public. The Puritans' place-names were Indian – Massachusetts and Agawam; derived from England of Puritan associations, like Boston, Plymouth, and Falmouth; or quaintly Scriptural, like Marthas Vineyard, Providence, and Salem. These people, unlike the settlers in the South, came over to live and die here. They wrote for the same social and business reasons that the Virginians did, but they also wrote much about their religion, compiled the "Bay Psalm Book," published sermons, and recorded their struggles, which began very early and were doomed to final failure, to keep their New England free from "divers religions." At first their writings were sent to England for publication, but before long, in 1638, they had their own printing press, and the things that were printed on it were not so much the sayings of individual men as the opinions of the community.

The history of the migrations to the North and to the South during the seventeenth century is one with the history of the civil struggle in England. Up to 1640 colonization was slow and consistent at both points. From 1640 to 1660 it increased rapidly in the South and declined in the North, for in those years the grip of the Puritans on the old country relieved them from persecution there and from the consequent need to avoid it and, at the same time, made many Royalists glad of a chance to escape to some more peaceful spot. From 1660 on, with the return of the Royalists to power in

England, Puritan migration was once more started to the North, and the home country was again secure for the followers of the king. But the real characters of the two districts were unchanged. They were firmly established in the earliest years, and they have persisted during the intervening centuries clear up to the present time. The America of to-day is a compound whose basic native qualities are inherited from the oldest traditions of aristocratic Virginia and the oldest traits of democratic and Puritan Massachusetts.

In dealing with the early periods of any literature the exercise of artistic judgment is always very charitable. Rough, uncouth, fragmentary pieces are taken into account because they serve as a bridge to the remoter past. Harsh critics of colonial American literature seem to forget this practice when they rule out of court everything produced in this country before the days of Irving and Cooper. A great deal of the earlier writing should, of course, be considered only as source material for the historian; but some of it has the same claim to attention as the old chronicles, plays, and ballads in English literary history. It deserves study if it portrays or criticizes or even unconsciously reflects the life and thought of the times, and it is significant as an American product if in form or content or point of view it clearly belongs to this side of the Atlantic.

The nature of settlement and the neglect of popular education led to an early lapse in authorship in the Southern colonies, so that in a survey as brief as this chapter their writers do not come into view until they find expression in the oratory and statesmanship of the Revolutionary period. Their narratives and descriptions of colonial life, as long as they wrote them at all, were quite like most of the earliest Northern writings of the sort. The one outstanding difference is that in whatever they wrote, the religious motive for settlement and the belief in a personal Providence were less insistently recorded than by the Puritans. Thus where John Smith was content with the general phrase “it pleased God,” Anthony Thacher, saved from shipwreck in Boston Harbor, wrote devoutly, “the Lord directed my toes into a crevice in the rock”; and where Smith’s companions hoped for the benevolent favor of the Most High, Thacher’s fellow-worshipers were perfectly certain that every step they took was ordained by God, so that even their apparent misfortunes were His punishments for misconduct.

In all the great mass of Puritan writing in the first century of residence in America one definite current appears, and that is the quiet but irresistible current of change in human thought. The Puritans had made the profound but constantly repeated mistake of assuming that after thousands of years of groping by mankind, they had at last discovered the “ultimate truth”; that for the rest of time men need do nothing but follow the precepts which God had revealed to them about life here and life hereafter. They were, in their own serious way, happy in their confident possession of truth and sternly resolved to bestow it or, if necessary, impose it on all whom they could control. Their failure was recorded with their earliest attempts, and it came, not because of their particular weakness or the strength of their particular adversaries, but because they were trying to obstruct the progress of human thought, which is as inexorable as any other force of nature. They might as well have entered into an argument with gravitation or the tides. The most interesting and the best-written pieces of seventeenth-century New England literature all give evidence of this rearguard action against the advancing forces of truth.

The Puritanism against which this rising tide of dissent developed was admirably embodied in William Bradford (1590-1657), the *Mayflower* Pilgrim who was more than thirty times governor of his colony and the author of “A History of Plimouth Plantation.” He was a brave, sober, devout leader with an abiding sense of the holy cause in which he was enlisted. His journal of the first year in America and his history are clearly and sometimes finely written, and give ample proof of his stalwart character – “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,” and free from the personal narrowness which is often mistakenly ascribed to all Puritans. In his account, for example, of the reasons for the Pilgrims’ removal from Leyden the chronicle tells of the hardships under which they had lived there, the encroachments of old age, the disturbing effects of the life on the children, and, lastly, the great hope they entertained of advancing the church of Christ in some remote part of the world. It recounts many of the objections advanced against attempting settlement in America, and concludes:

> It was answered, that all great and honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate; the difficulties were many, but not invincible. For though there were many of them likely, yet they were not certain; it might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others, by provident care and the use of good means, might in a great measure be prevented; and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience, might either be borne or overcome. True it was, that such attempts were not to be made and undertaken without good ground and reason; not rashly or lightly, as many have done for curiosity or hope of gain, etc. But their condition was not ordinary; their ends were good and honorable; their calling lawful and urgent; and therefore they might expect the blessing of God in their proceeding. Yea, though they should lose their lives in this action, yet might they have comfort in the same, and their endeavors would be honorable.

Unhappily this heroic trait of Puritanism was coupled with a desperate religious bigotry which the world is even yet slow to forgive.

One of the earliest local dissenters was Thomas Morton (1575? -1646), author of the "New English Canaan," published in London, 1637. It is a half-pathetic fact that this should stand out today beyond anything else written in the same decade in America, for the best of it – the third book – is a savage satire on the Puritans in Massachusetts. Morton, it is needless to say, was not a Puritan himself. He was a restless, dishonest, unscrupulous gentleman-adventurer from London who gave the best part of his life to fighting the Puritans on their own grounds. He started a fur-trading post at "Merry Mount," just southeast of Boston, sold the Indians liquor and firearms, consorted with their women, and in wanton mockery set up a Maypole there and taught the Indians the English games and dances which were particularly offensive to the grave residents of Plymouth and Boston. If he had not written his book, he would be remembered now only as one of the chief trouble-makers whom the Puritans had to fight down; but he did them more damage with his pen than with all his active misbehavior. He undermined their influence by not treating them soberly. He made fun of their costume, derided their speech, ridiculed their religious formalities, and held the valiant Miles Standish up to scorn by nicknaming him Captain Shrimp. He went further, and questioned their motives and their honesty, their integrity in business, and their sincerity in religion. A great deal of what he wrote about them was libelously unfair; he should never be taken as an authority for facts unless supported by other writers of his day. But underneath all his clever abuse of them and their ways, there is an evident basis of truth which is confirmed by the sober study of history. Although the Puritans were brave, strong, self-denying servants of the stern God whom they worshiped, they were sometimes sanctimonious, sometimes cruelly vengeful, and all too often so eager to achieve His ends on earth that they were regardless of the means they took. At the very beginning of their life in America, Thomas Morton held these characteristics up to public scorn; and in so doing he made his book an omen of the long, losing battle they were destined to fight. Morton's effectiveness as a writer lies in the fact that however ill-behaved he may have been, he was attractively – maybe dangerously – genial in character. He was in truth "a cheerful liar"; but he lied like the writer of fiction who disregards the exact facts because he is telling a good story as well as he can and because that good story is based on real life. The next New Englander to give proof that the Puritans were not having an easy time in their "new English Canaan" was Nathaniel Ward (1578-1652?), author of "The Simple Cobler of Aggawam." In character and convictions he was as different from Morton as a man could be. When he wrote this book, which was published in London in 1647, he was an irascible old Puritan who had suffered much for his faith, and was still fighting for it, although very near to his threescore years and ten. He had been graduated at Cambridge, gone into the Church of England, been hounded there for

his liberalism, come to America, and served a pastorate at Agawam (now Ipswich), Massachusetts. He had withdrawn on account of ill health, but later had served the state so well that he was granted six hundred acres as a reward, and had lived on there until his return to England at the age of seventy. He believed fiercely in the righteousness of the Puritan doctrines and in the wickedness of any departure from them; and his book was a valiant protest against any relaxation on the part of the faithful. It was written with reference to conditions in England, but it was composed after fifteen years' residence in America, and showed his unrest at conditions in the new country as well as in the old.

The book is a strange compound. In thought it is a piece of dyed-in-the-wool old fogyism, but in form and literary style it is vigorous, jaunty, and amusing. The full title is "The Simple Cobler of Aggawam in America; willing to help Mend his Native Country, lamentably tattered, both in the upper-Leather and sole, with all the honest stitches he can take. And as willing never to be paid for his work by Old English wonted pay. It is his Trade to patch all the year long, gratis. Therefore I Pray Gentlemen keep your Purses." He feared all innovations, but most of all the doctrine that men should enjoy liberty of conscience. "Let all the wits under the Heavens lay their heads together and find an Assertion worse than this [and] I will Petition to be chosen the universal Ideot of the World." "Since I knew what to fear, my timorous heart hath dreaded three things: a blazing Star appearing in the Air; a State Comet, I mean a favourite, rising in a kingdom; a new Opinion spreading in Religion." The second section of the book is devoted to fashions of dress, an evergreen subject for the satirist. Ward's attitude toward woman as an inferior creature was almost as primitive as that of the cave man, and apparently he would have liked it better if the "bullymong drossock" had dressed with the simplicity of a cave woman. As it was he felt that the lady of fashion was "the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of the quarter of a cypher, the epitome of Nothing"; and he had equal contempt for tailors who "spend their lives in making fidle-cases for futulous Women's phansies; which are the very pettitoes of Infirmity, the giblets of perquisquilian toyes." The remainder of the work is given to a discussion of affairs of English state, written with the same aggressive positiveness. The most interesting bit of it is the portion which proclaims his belief in savage oppression of the Irish, summing up the essence of the wrong-headed stupidity which has made the history of Ireland so lamentable a story even to the present time. What the old gentleman wrote is striking at points, because it seems so timely. But Ward was never up to date, in the sense of being prophetic. When he said things that apply to the twentieth century, they apply either because, like the question of extravagance in dress, the topic is a persistent trait in human nature or because, like the Irish problem, matters which should long ago have been settled have been allowed for centuries to confuse and complicate life. Yet Ward wrote with odd and striking effectiveness; and his book is far more than the "curiosity" which many critics have agreed to call it, for it is one of the best surviving records of the Puritan attempt to maintain a strangle hold on human thought.

The belief in the righteousness of persecuting dissenters was the particular ground for attack by a younger and equally vigorous man, Roger Williams (1604-1683). Williams, before he was forty years old, had been thrown out of two church establishments – first in Protestant England and then in Puritan Massachusetts. He represented what Macaulay termed the very "dissidence of dissent." And now, in a long and laborious argument lasting from 1644 to 1652, he fought out the issue with the Reverend John Cotton. Only by the most generous interpretation can the lengthening chain of this printed controversy be considered as literature, yet it has the same right to inclusion as the English disquisitions of Wyclif, Jeremy Taylor, and John Wesley. An English prisoner in Newgate, assailing persecution for cause of conscience, had been answered by John Cotton. Then followed Williams's "The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for cause of Conscience, discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace" (1644); Cotton's reply "The Bloody Tenent washed and made white in the Blood of the Lamb" (1647); and Williams's rejoinder, "The Bloody Tenent yet More Bloody: by Mr. Cottons endeavor to wash it white in the Blood of the Lambe" (1652). The whole process of argument by both the reverend gentlemen was to set their literal English minds to work at analyzing

and expounding Biblical passages which were full of oriental richness of imagery. It was, all things considered, rather less reasonable than it would be for the chancellors of the British and German empires to base an argument about the freedom of the seas upon definite citations from the "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam.

The chief grounds of offense in the sinful unorthodoxy of Roger Williams were that he asserted two things which have become axioms to-day, and two more which will be admitted by every thoughtful and honest person. The first two were that religion should not be professed by those who did not believe it in their hearts, and that the power of the magistrates extended only to the bodies and the property of the subjects and not to their religious convictions. The second two were that America belonged to the Indians and not to the king of England, and that the established church was necessarily corrupt. By this last he meant simply that any human organization that is given complete authority, and need not fear either competition or overthrow by public opinion, is certain to decay from within. It was the idea beneath Tennyson's lines

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Yet these opinions, preached and practiced by Williams, resulted in his being expelled from the community. The attempt was made to send him back to England, but he managed to get a permanent foothold in Rhode Island, where he opposed the still more liberal Quakers almost as violently as the churchmen of old and new England had opposed him. To his credit be it said, however, that he did not invoke the law against them. In action as well as in belief he marked the progress of liberal thought.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Read the “New English Canaan,” Bk. III, with a view to deciding how far Morton’s evident prejudice discredited his account of the Puritans; examine it again for its specifically literary qualities.

Read from Bradford’s “History of Plimouth Plantation” for the admirable traits of Puritanism and see, also, if you find grounds for any of Morton’s strictures.

Read the Hawthorne selections in the Book List – Literary Treatment of the Period – and decide how far he may have sympathized with the attitude of Morton in the “New English Canaan.”

Read from “The Simple Cobler of Aggawam” for any evidence of Nathaniel Ward’s residence in America; decide on the degree to which the work is English and the degree to which it is colonial.

Compare the attitude toward Ireland of Nathaniel Ward in this work and of Jonathan Swift in his “Modest Proposal.”

Make comparisons in diction from a corresponding number of pages in “The Simple Cobler” and in Carlyle’s “Sartor Resartus.”

CHAPTER II
THE EARLIEST VERSE

Although it is generally said of the Puritans that they were actually hostile to all the arts, there is abundant proof that they had a liking for verse and a widespread inclination to try their hands at it. They wrote memorial verses of the most intricate and ingenious sorts, sometimes carving them in stone as epitaphs. There is less verse sprinkled through the unregenerate Morton's "Canaan" than there is in the intolerant Ward's "Cobler." The old conservative never wrote more wisely than in this so-called "song":

> They seldom lose the field, but often win,
> Who end their Warres, before their Warres begin.
>
> Their Cause is oft the worse, that first begin,
> And they may lose the field, the field that win.
>
> In Civil Warres 'twixt Subjects and their King,
> There is no conquest got, by conquering.
>
> Warre ill begun, the onely way to mend,
> Is t'end the Warre before the Warre do end.
>
> They that will end ill Warres, must have the skill,
> To make an end by Rule, and not by Will.
>
> In ending Warres 'tween Subjects and their Kings,
> Great things are sav'd by losing little things.

The first whole volume in English printed in the Western Hemisphere (printing of Spanish books in Mexico had long preceded) was "The Bay Psalm Book," Cambridge, 1640. This represented a conscientious attempt to put into the service of worship a literal translation of the Psalms. The worst passages are all too frequently cited as evidence of the inability of the Puritans to compose or appreciate good verse. And this in spite of the often-quoted and charmingly written prose comment in the editors' preface:

> If therefore the verses are not alwayes so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect; let them consider that God's Altar needs not our pollishings: Ex. 20. for wee have respected rather a plaine translation, then to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and soe have attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather then poetry, in translating the hebrew words into english language, and David's poetry into english meetre; that soe wee may sing in Sion the Lords songs of prayse according to his owne will; untill hee take us from hence and wipe away all our teares, & bid us enter into our masters joye to sing eternall Halleluliahs.

Some historians, moreover, seem to derive satisfaction from quoting passages from Michael Wigglesworth's (1631-1705) "Day of Doom" as added proof that the Puritans were never able to write verse that was beautiful or even graceful. It must be admitted that this grave and pretentious piece of work was hardly more lovely than the name of the author. Wigglesworth was a devoted Puritan

who came to America at the age of seven; graduated from Harvard College; qualified to practice medicine; and then became a preacher, serving, with intermissions of ill health, as pastor in Malden, Massachusetts, from 1657 until his death in 1705. He was a gentle, kindly minister, unfailing in his care for both the bodies and the souls of his parishioners.

He had the "lurking propensity" for verse-writing which was common among the men of his time, but instead of venting it merely in the composing of acrostics, anagrams, and epitaphs, he dedicated it to the Lord in the writing of a sort of rimed sermon on the subject of the Day of Judgment. The full title reads, "The Day of Doom or, a Description Of the Great and Last Judgment with a short discourse about Eternity. Eccles. 12. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." It was printed, probably in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1662. The poem is composed of two hundred and twenty-four eight-line stanzas. After an invocation and the announcement of the day of doom, the dead come from their graves before the throne of Christ. There the "sheep" who have been chosen for salvation are placed on the right, and the wicked "goats" come in groups to hear the judge's verdict. These include hypocrites, civil, honest men, those who died in youth before they were converted, those who were misled by the example of the good, those who did not understand the Bible, those who feared martyrdom more than hell-torment, those who thought salvation was hopeless, and, finally, those who died as babes. All are sternly answered from the throne, and all are swept off to a common eternal doom except the infants, for whom is reserved "the easiest room in hell."

Two facts should be remembered in criticizing "The Day of Doom" as poetry. The first is that Wigglesworth wrote it consciously as a teacher and preacher and not as a poet. In his introduction he said:

> Reader, I am a fool
> And have adventurèd
> To play the fool this once for Christ,
> The more his fame to spread.
> If this my foolishness
> Help thee to be more wise,
> I have attainèd what I seek,
> And what I only prize.

The second point is that in writing a rimed sermon for Christian worshipers he had a model supplied him in the popular "Bay Psalm Book," which had appeared some twenty years before and which was familiar to all the people who were likely to be his readers. The translators of the 121st Psalm wrote, for example:

> 1 I to the hills lift up mine eyes,
> from whence shall come mine aid
> 2 Mine help doth from Jehovah come,
> which heav'n and earth hath made.

And Wigglesworth took up the strain with

> No heart so bold, but now grows cold,
> and almost dead with fear;
> No eye so dry but now can cry,
> and pour out many a tear.

To any modern reader the use of this light-footed meter for so grave a subject seems utterly ill-considered, and the whole idea of the day of doom as he presented it seems so unnatural as to be amusing. But Wigglesworth was trying to write a rimed summary of what everybody thought, in a meter with which everybody was familiar, and he was unqualifiedly successful. A final verdict on Michael Wigglesworth is often superciliously pronounced on the basis of this one poem, or, if any further attention is conceded him, the worst of his remaining output is produced for evidence that he and all Puritan preachers were clumsy and prosaic verse-writers.

Yet in the never-quoted lines immediately following "The Day of Doom" – a poem without a title, on the vanity of human wishes – Michael Wigglesworth gave proofs of human kindliness and of poetic power. In these earnest lines Wigglesworth showed a mastery of fluent verse, a control of poetic imagery, and a gentle yearning for the souls' welfare of his parishioners which is the utterance of the pastor rather than of the theologian. For a moment God ceases to be angry, Christ stands pleading without the gate, and the good pastor utters a poem upon the neglected theme "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you":

Fear your great Maker with a child-like awe,
Believe his Grace, love and obey his Law.
This is the total work of man, and this
Will crown you here with Peace and there with Bliss.

"The Day of Doom," however, was far more popular than the better poetry that Wigglesworth wrote at other times. It was the most popular book of the century in America. People memorized its easy, jingling meter just as they might have memorized ballads or, at a later day, Mother Goose rimes; and the grim description became "the solace," as Lowell says, "of every fireside, the flicker of the pine-knots by which it was conned perhaps adding a livelier relish to its premonitions of eternal combustion." The popularity of "The Day of Doom" shows that in the very years when the Royalists were returning to power in England the Puritans were greatly in the majority in New England. The reaction marked by Morton, Ward, and Roger Williams was only beginning. Moreover, if it had been the only "poetry" of the period, we should have to admit that the Puritans were almost hopelessly unpoetical.

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) proves the contrary, and in doing so she proves how the love of beauty can manage to bloom under the bleakest skies. Her talent was assuredly a "flower in a crannied wall." She was born in England in 1612 and was married at the age of sixteen, as girls often were in those days, to a man several years older, Simon Bradstreet. In 1630 she came to Massachusetts with her husband and her father. Both became eminent in the affairs of the colony. In the family they were doubtless sober and probably dull. Mrs. Bradstreet kept house under pioneer conditions in one place after another, and when still less than forty years old had become the mother of eight children. Yet somewhere in the rare moments of her crowded days – and one can imagine how far apart those moments must have been – she put into verse "a compleat Discourse and Description of The Four Elements, Constitutions, Ages of Man, Seasons of the Year; Together with an exact Epitome of the four Monarchies, viz., the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman" [this means *five* long poems, and not two]; "also a dialogue between Old England and New concerning the late troubles; with divers other pleasant and serious poems." All these she wrote without apparent thought of publication, for the purely artistic reason that she enjoyed doing so; and in 1650 – halfway between "The Bay Psalm Book" and "The Day of Doom" – they were taken over to London by a friend, and there put into print as the work of "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America."

Poetry was more than a diversion for Anne Bradstreet; it must have been a passion. As a girl she had been allowed to read in the library of the Puritan Earl of Lincoln, over whose estate her father was steward. And here she had fallen under the spell of the lesser poets of her age, naturally

not the dramatists, whom the Puritans opposed. So, after their fashion, and particularly in the fashion of a Frenchman, Du Bartas, whose works were popular in an English translation, she wrote her quaint "quarternions," or poems on the four elements, the four seasons, the four ages, and the four "humours," and capped them all with the four monarchies. These are interesting to the modern reader only as examples of how the human mind used to work. Chaucer had juggled with the same materials; Ben Jonson had been fascinated with them. It was a literary tradition to develop them one by one, to set them in debate against each other, and to interweave them into corresponding groups: childhood, water, winter, phlegm; youth, air, spring, blood; manhood, fire, summer, choler; and old age, earth, autumn, melancholy.

Yet her chief claim on our interest is founded on the shorter poems, in which she took least pride. In these she showed her real command of word and measure to express poetic thought. Her "Contemplations," for example, is as poetic in thought as Bryant's "Thanatopsis," or as Lanier's "The Marshes of Glynn," to which it stands in suggestive contrast (see pp. 161 and 357). The former two are on the idea that nature endures but man passes away. This was never long absent from the Puritan mind, but when it came to the ordinary Puritan it was likely to be cast into homely and prosaic verse, as in the epitaph:

The path of death it must be trod
By them that wish to walk with God.

Anne Bradstreet, taking the same observation, wrote with noble dignity:

O Time the fatal wrack of mortal things,
That draws oblivions curtain over kings,
Their sumptuous monuments, men know them not,
Their names without a Record are forgot,
Their parts, their ports, their pomp's all laid in th' dust
Nor wit, nor gold, nor buildings, scape time's rust;
But he whose name is grav'd in the white stone[1]
Shall last and shine when all of these are gone.

Yet as a strictly Puritan poetess she did only one part of her work. She was even more interesting as an early champion of her sex. She did not go so far as to assert equality of the sexes; that was too far in advance of the age for her imagination. But she did contend that women should be given credit for whatever was worth "small praise." This appears again and again in her shorter poems.

Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are
Men have precedency and still excell,
It is but vain unjustly to wage warre;
Men can do best, and women know it well;
Preheminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgment of ours.

Naturally she was full of pride in the achievements of Queen Elizabeth, a pride which she expressed in a fine song "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess":

From all the Kings on earth she won the prize.

[1] Rev. ii, 17.

Nor say I more then duly is her due,
Millions will testifie that this is true.
She hath wip'd off th' aspersion of her Sex,
That women wisdom lack to play the Rex:
Spains Monarch, sayes not so, nor yet his host:
She taught them better manners, to their cost.
The Salique law, in force now had not been,
If France had ever hop'd for such a Queen.
But can you Doctors now this point dispute,
She's Argument enough to make you mute.
Since first the sun did run his nere run race,
And earth had once a year, a new old face,
Since time was time, and man unmanly man,
Come shew me such a *Phœnix* if you can?

Then follows a recital of Elizabeth's proudest triumphs, and assertions of how far she surpassed Tomris, Dido, Cleopatra, Zenobya, and the conclusion:

Now say, have women worth? or have they none?
Or had they some, but with our Queen is't gone?
Nay Masculines, you have thus taxt us long,
But she, though dead, will vindicate our wrong.
Let such as say our Sex is void of Reason,
Know tis a Slander now, but once was Treason.

Anne Bradstreet foreshadowed the "woman's movement" of to-day by two full centuries, and thus showed how even the daughter of one Puritan governor of Massachusetts and the wife of another could be thinking and aspiring far in advance of her times.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Confirm the comparison of meters in the “Bay Psalm Book” and “The Day of Doom.”

Read the opening and closing passages in “The Day of Doom” (Boynton, “American Poetry,” pp. 18–21) for the genuinely poetic material. Compare with Milton’s use of the same material in “Paradise Lost,” Bk. I.

Read Anne Bradstreet’s verses to Queen Elizabeth, the Prologue to the long poems, the rimed epistles to her husband, and the tributary poems of Nathaniel Ward and others (Boynton, “American Poetry,” pp. 1–13 passim) for the difference – even with her liberalism – between her point of view and that of the modern woman.

Read “Contemplations” and a passage of equal length from “The Faerie Queene” for likenesses and differences in versification.

Compare the ideas of God and of nature in “Contemplations” (of the later seventeenth century), “Thanatopsis” (of the early nineteenth), and “The Marshes of Glynn” (of the later nineteenth) and note how far they are personal to Anne Bradstreet, Bryant, and Lanier and how far they represent the spirit of their respective periods.

CHAPTER III
THE TRANSITION TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

As the end of the seventeenth century approached, the Puritans were still in an overwhelming majority in New England, but the hold of the churchmen on the government of the colonies was, nevertheless, being slowly and reluctantly relaxed. Government in America has always, in its broad aspects, reflected the will of the people. If legislators and legislation have been vicious, it has been because the majority of the people have not cared enough about it to see that good men were chosen. If stupid and blundering laws have been passed, it has been because the people were not wide awake enough to analyze them. On the other hand old laws, unadjusted to modern conditions, have often become "dead letters" because the majority did not wish to have them enforced, even though they were on the statute books; and new and progressive legislation has been imposed on reluctant lawmakers by the pressure of public opinion. Now the Puritan uprising in England had been a democratic movement by a people who wanted to have a hand in their own government. It was a religious movement, because in England Church and State are one and because the oppression in religious matters had been particularly offensive. And in England it had been on the whole successful in spite of the restoration of kingship in 1660, for from that time on the arbitrary power of king and council were steadily and increasingly curbed. As a consequence there was a parallel movement in the democracy across the sea. American colonists with a highly developed sense of justice resented a bad royal governor like Andros, and were able to force his withdrawal; and they resented unreasonable domination by the clergy, and were independent enough to shake it off. Between 1690 and 1700 Harvard College became for the first time something more than a training school for preachers; the right to vote in Boston was made to depend on moral character and property ownership instead of on membership in the church; and in the midst of the Salem witchcraft hysteria judges and grand-jurymen caught their balance and refused any longer to act as cat's-paws of the clergy. The passage to the eighteenth century was therefore a time of transition in common thinking; and the record of the change is clearly discernible in the literary writings of the old-line conservatives Cotton and Increase Mather, in the Diary of Samuel Sewall, who was able to see the light and to change slowly with his generation, and in the Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight, who represented the silent unorthodoxy of hundreds of other well-behaved and respectable people.

The Mathers, Increase (1639–1723) and Cotton (1663–1728), were the second and third of a succession of four members of one family who were so popular and influential as to deserve the nickname which is sometimes given them of the "Mather Dynasty." These two were both born in America, educated in Boston and at Harvard, and made church leaders while still young men. In age they were only twenty-four years apart, and from 1682 to 1723 they worked together to uphold and increase the power of the church in New England. Because of their prominence as preachers they inherited the "good will" which had belonged to their greatest predecessors, and by their own industry, learning, eloquence, and general vigor they added to their ecclesiastical fortunes like skillful business men. Their congregations were large and respectfully attentive; scores of their sermons were reprinted by request; on all public occasions and in all public discussions they were at the forefront. They were great popular favorites, and in the end they suffered the fate of many another popular favorite. For the deference which was given to them year after year made them vain and domineering; they talked too much and too long and too confidently, and they made the mistakes of judgment which men who talk all the time are bound to make. When Increase Mather lost the presidency of Harvard in 1701 they both acted like spoiled children; their prestige was already on the wane, for when the reaction had followed the witchcraft delusion, to which they had fanned the flames, the caution which they had advised was forgotten, and the encouragement which they had given was held

up against them. To the ends of their lives, in 1723 and 1728, they were proudly unrelenting, but their last years were embittered by the knowledge that their power was departed from them.

The bulk of their authorship was prodigious, even though most of it was in the form of pamphlets or booklets, for it amounted in the case of Increase to about one hundred and fifty titles, and in the case of Cotton to nearly four hundred. But they are chiefly remembered for three books: "An Essay for the recording of Illustrious Providences," by the elder; and "The Wonders of the Invisible World" and the "Magnalia Christi Americana: Or the Ecclesiastical History of New-England," by the younger. The first two of these are unintended explanations to the twentieth-century reader as to how a whole community could ever have been swept into the Salem witchcraft excesses of 1692. Any educated man who should advance the theories to-day which were soberly expounded by these two really learned men would be held up to scorn and very possibly be made subject of a sanity investigation. Yet two hundred years ago the world was ignorant of the commonplaces of science. Popular superstition therefore ran riot; and the belief that God would interpose in the affairs of daily individual life, and that a personal devil was walking up and down the earth seeking whom he might devour, added to the confusion. Medicine in those days was hardly a science even in the broadest sense of the word. Physicians depended for honest effects on a few simple herb remedies and on powerful emetics and the letting of blood. The populace believed in curatives which still are resorted to only by children and the most ignorant of grown-ups – like anointing implements with which they had been injured, in order to heal cuts and bruises, or like being touched by the monarch as a remedy for scrofula, the "king's evil." Sir Kenelm Digby, a well-known subject of Charles II, reported that he overcame a persistent illness by having the fumes of camomile poured into his ear. The same sort of speculation prevailed in all the other sciences; and side by side with it superstition flourished. Between 1560 and 1600 in the little kingdom of Scotland, which had a population no larger than that of Massachusetts to-day, there were eight thousand executions for witchcraft, – an average of nearly four a week; and James I, who was Scotland's gift to England, was the author of a work on demonology.

What the New Englanders, and among them the Mathers, believed was, therefore, not unusual at the time. In fact the Mathers were both somewhat less credulous than their fellows, but they only substituted one superstition for another. Their way of casting off the old and vulgar beliefs which were pagan in origin was to contend that these vain and foolish ideas were put into Christian minds by Satan and his emissaries. Said Increase Mather in his "Illustrious Providences":

> Some also have believed that if they should cast Lead into the Water, then *Saturn* would discover to them the thing they inquired after. It is not *Saturn* but *Satan* that maketh the discovery, when anything is in such a way revealed. And of this sort is the foolish Sorcery of those Women that put the white of an Egg into a Glass of Water, so that they may be able to divine of what Occupation their future husbands shall be. It were much better to remain ignorant than thus to consult with the Devil. These kind of practices appear at first blush to be Diabolical; so that I shall not multiply Words in evincing the evil of them. It is noted that *the Children of Israel did secretly those things that are not right against the Lord their God* 2 King. 17. 9. I am told there are some who do secretly practice such Abominations as these last mentioned, unto whom the Lord in mercy give deep and unfeigned Repentance and pardon for their grievous Sin.

These preachers thus turned superstition into an enemy of the true religion, as it assuredly is; but they regarded it not as the fruit of ignorance, to be remedied by education and intelligence, but as a device of Satan which could be offset by preaching and prayer. The two books are cut from the same cloth, so that an indication of the contents of the one just mentioned will give an idea of them both. The chapter headings run as follows: Of Remarkable Sea Deliverances; Preservations;

Lightening; Philosophical Meditations; Things Preternatural [voices of invisible speakers and doings of mysterious mischief-makers]; That there are Daemons and Possessed Persons [three main arguments: (1) Scripture forbade witchcraft, therefore there must be such a thing; (2) experience has made it manifest; (3) convicted maldoers have confessed it]; Apparitions; Conscience; Deaf and Dumb Persons; Tempests; Earthquakes; and Judgments. As a whole the book is a collection of curious anecdotes taken on almost any hearsay, but almost all at second or third hand. They resemble some of the most popular of the atrocity stories which have been told during every war that history chronicles, but which no investigator has been able to run down in any single instance. In point of superstition the Mathers, to repeat, should be considered in two lights: compared with educated men of the twentieth century they were almost incredibly primitive in what they were willing to believe, but considered with reference to their own generation they fought the wiles of the devil as soldiers of the Lord.

The most ambitious work that either produced was Cotton Mather's "Magnalia," a history of the Church in New England. This was a bulky two-volume effort, divided into seven parts, or books. As a matter of fact it was really a general history of the region by a man who regarded the existence of New England as identical with the existence of the Church. In this basic assumption as well as in many of his details Cotton Mather revealed himself as a hopeless conservative of his day – hopeless because it was already evident to all but him and his kind that the State was shaking off the control of the Church leaders. One can get a fair idea of the bias of the book from the opening paragraph:

> It is the Opinion of some, though 'tis *but* an *Opinion*, and *but* of *some* Learned Men, That when the Sacred Oracles of Heaven assure us, *The Things under the Earth* are some of those, *whose Knees are to bow in the Name of Jesus*, by those *Things* are meant the Inhabitants of *America*, who are Antipodes to those of the other *Hemispheres*. I would not quote any words of *Lactantius*, though there are *some* to countenance this Interpretation, because of their being so *Ungeographical*: nor would I go to strengthen the Interpretation by reciting the Words of the *Indians* to the first *White Invaders* of their Territories, *We hear you are come from under the World, to take our World from us.* But granting the *uncertainty* of such an Exposition, I shall yet give the Church of God a certain account of these *Things*, which in *America* have been Believing and Adoring the glorious *Name* of Jesus; and of that Country in America, where those *Things* have been attended with Circumstances most remarkable.

The "Magnalia" is really an attempt at a general history of New England from 1620 to 1698, containing classified material on the governors, magistrates, and preachers, a history of Harvard, a collection of reports of church transactions, an account of the Indian Wars, and "A Faithful Record of many Illustrious Wonderful Providences." Yet for historical data it is almost as unreliable as the libelous "New English Canaan" of Thomas Morton. For Morton was no more eager to turn the facts to the discredit of the Puritans than Mather was to interpret them to the glory of the Church; and the consequence was that neither could be absolutely trusted. The historians have abandoned Mather as a safe authority. His sin has found him out, even though he committed it in the name of the Lord.

The man in this period in whom complete faith can be put is Samuel Sewall, who did not profess to be an author except in an incidental way. He lived from 1652 to 1730 and kept a very full diary from 1673 to 1729. This was written with no thought of publication, and actually was not printed until a hundred and fifty years later, when it was given to the world by the Massachusetts Historical Society. In American literature Sewall's Diary occupies a place almost exactly parallel to that of John Evelyn's in English letters. Their lives and their long diaries covered about the same years, and they held corresponding positions in the communities. Both were educated men – Sewall was a graduate of Harvard – and both were highly respected and trusted. Sewall held a minor position at Harvard connected with the library, was prominent in church affairs, and was a judge, officiating

at the time of the Salem witchcraft trials. An informal journal written without prejudice, by such a man as he, gives material of the greatest value for a picture of the times. It is material of course and not the picture itself, for it lacks anything in the way of composition, just as do the facts of ordinary daily life in the order of their occurrence. But out of it two main threads of interest may be unwoven. One is the sober but not unrelieved background of the times, itself a composite of various strands. Religion was its strongest fiber. Few weeks pass in which there is no record of sermon, fast, christening, wedding, funeral, or special celebration. These were among the chief social happenings of the calendar. Funerals as well as more festive occasions were accompanied with gifts of gloves and rings; refreshments were ample if not lavish; and the bill for strong drinks was always a heavy item, for it must be remembered that prohibition is of recent origin, and that among the Puritans self-control made drunkenness as infrequent as drinking was common. Against frivolity too they set their minds; and Sewall's Diary gives a protest at "tricks" and dancing and May festivals, and even Christmas and Easter, which were triply hated because they had their origins in pagan tradition and had come to the present through the Church of Rome and the Church of England. Yet the objections to these practices and festivals show that they were real disturbances in Sewall's Boston, as were the roistering of sailors and other strangers in town.

The other and more important thread is the revelation of the inner mind of a flesh-and-blood colonial American. It takes patient reading to recreate the real man; but he is here in these pages, with all the inconsistencies that make up life out of story-books. He was all in all a fine, devout, broad-gauge man – and this is what any biographer would tell of him – with a moderate supply of littleness and petty vanity, which the biographer would be almost certain to suppress. And he was in himself a record of the public opinion of his generation. He wrote two other things besides his Diary. One is a theological treatise which was as uninspired as the quoted paragraph from Mather's "Magnalia," and on much the same theme. It shows him to be an apparently hopeless old fogy. The other is a pamphlet called "The Selling of Joseph," which was probably the first antislavery utterance printed in America, and implies that Samuel Sewall was centuries ahead of the times. There is at second glance nothing perplexing in this contradiction. Sewall was a normal man who stood between the oldest-fashioned and the newest-fashioned thinkers. Sometimes he leaned backward, and sometimes forward; but on the whole he was inclined to advance. Of this he gave one famous proof. Five years after the Salem trials he had the honesty to admit to himself that he had been all wrong in his judgment, and the courage to make a public confession of his repentance. He chose one of the hardest ways of doing it. Among the "curious punishments of bygone days," one was the humiliation of disreputable persons by forcing them to sit at the foot of the church pulpit while the minister read a public reproof. On Fast Day, 1697, Samuel Sewall of his own choice posted a bill which could be read by any who would, and, giving a copy of it to the Reverend Mr. Willard, stood up at the reading before the congregation. The method of atoning for his mistake proves that he was still a devout and faithful Puritan worshiper, but the fact that he did so at all shows that he could confess errors, even when they had been committed in behalf of the Church. The Mathers could neither have seen nor acknowledged such mistakes. They were too cocksure of being always right. So life passed on, leaving them by the wayside; and Samuel Sewall was with the quiet majority who sadly left them behind.

A third representative of the attitudes of mind at the changing of the centuries was a genial woman, Mrs. Sarah Kemble Knight (1666–1727). She was not in any sense a public figure, like the preachers and the judge just mentioned, nor did she pursue the habit of writing a continued diary like Sewall's. Most emphatically she was not given to the unwholesome recording, like many other women in her day, of "itineraries of daily religious progress, aggravated by overwork, indigestion, and a gospel of gloom." But there was one itinerary which she did record for her own satisfaction and which was published more than a century later, in 1825, – her "Journal of a Journey from Boston to New York in 1704." At this time a vigorous woman of thirty-eight, a wife and a mother, she set out alone on the ten-day journey, taking such guides as she could engage from one stage to the

next. The hardships were considerable and the discomforts and inconveniences very great; and the striking fact about them is that she bore up under them in a good-humored, matter-of-fact, sort of twentieth-century way. An accident was an accident and not a visitation from on high; a disagreeable or churlish or even a dishonest person was somebody to be put up with and not to be moralized on as unscriptural. The worst innkeeper she encountered was a man to avoid in the future rather than a man to convert; she did not seem shocked by a drunken quarrel late one night, but she was annoyed, because she wanted to go to sleep.

She was at times positively frivolous and irreverent in her allusions. Crossing a river one day she was very near to being tipped over.

> The canoe was very small and shallow, so that when we were in [it] seemed ready to take in water, which greatly terrified me, and caused me to be very circumspect, sitting with my hands fast on each side, my eyes steady, not daring so much as to lodge my tongue a hair's breadth more on one side of my mouth than t' other, nor so much as to think on Lot's wife; for a wry thought would have overset our wherry.

Her jests about the name of the innkeeper, Mr. Devil, would have landed her in the stocks had she made them publicly in Boston.

> The post encouraged me by saying we should be well accommodated at Mr. Devil's, a few miles further; but I questioned whether we ought to go to the Devil to be helped out of affliction. However, like the rest of the deluded souls that post to the infernal den, we made all possible speed to this Devil's habitation; where, alighting in good assurance of good accommodations, we were going in.

The accommodations turned out to be anything but good; and she left her host with a sigh of relief, and the thought "He differed only in this from the old fellow in t' other country – he let us depart," following the observation with a rimed warning for subsequent travelers to avoid this earthly hell. These are quoted not because they are admirable or worthy of imitation but because they give an indication of what was going on under one very respectable bonnet when Mrs. Knight was sitting decorously in her Boston pew. She was a highly respected woman in the Puritan community. She was accustomed to its ways. There is no word of motherly regret that she was away from her little daughter on Christmas Day, for Christmas was not a festal day in her calendar. Of the people who were coming into manhood and womanhood when Sarah Kemble Knight was born, Hawthorne wrote in "The Scarlet Letter": "The generation next to the early immigrants wore the blackest shade of Puritanism, and so darkened the national visage with it, that all the subsequent years have not sufficed to clear it up. We have yet to learn again the forgotten art of gayety."

It was men like the author of the "Magnalia" who had darkened the national visage, but women here and there, like the writer of this Journal, who had already returning gleams of gayety. Of the three people whom we have taken as types of New-England thought at this period, Cotton Mather may fairly be regarded as representing the faith of a declining theology, Samuel Sewall the hope of a broader and more generous civic attitude, and Mrs. Knight as the flicker of charity or warm-hearted and genial fellow-feeling which had been almost extinguished in the seventeenth century.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Read the introduction to the “Magnalia” or a chapter from “Illustrious Providences,” or “The Wonders of the Invisible World,” for evidence of superstition based on Scriptural authority and of vulgar, or folk, superstition.

In the *Nation* of August 17, 1918, pp. 173–175, there is an article in review of five new books under the title “Spirit Communication.” Establish the differences and the likenesses between the modern attitude and the attitude of the seventeenth century toward “the invisible world.”

Read Fitz-Greene Halleck’s “Connecticut,” stanzas xiii-xxvi, and Whittier’s “The Double-Headed Snake of Newbury,” ll. 71–85, as well as Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (see p. 129 in this volume), for typical literary expressions of aversion to Cotton Mather.

The best method of approaching Samuel Sewall’s Diary is to read some fifty pages – preferably between 1680 and 1710 – for the references to a definite topic. This may best be selected from promising suggestions in the first few pages of reading. If none appears, look for any of the following or others like them: Sunday observance; funerals, weddings, and christenings; the pastor and his people; holidays; parents and children; self-analysis; religious discipline; law and order. Comparisons on a given topic with the entries for the same period in Evelyn or for an equal number of pages in Pepys are fruitful.

A similar approach may be made to Mrs. Knight’s compact and consecutive Journal. Her humor, irreverence, tolerance, independence, timidity, or her use of exaggeration, mock-heroics, Scriptural allusion, personal description, social analysis, are rich in their possibilities.

Read in Andrew Macphail’s “Essays in Puritanism” the essay on John Winthrop, and then the exchange of opinions between Messrs. White and Hackett in the *New Republic*, May 17, 1919. Do either or both throw light on the chief characters discussed in this chapter?

CHAPTER IV
JONATHAN EDWARDS AND BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

The danger in drawing conclusions about a whole century, as we have been doing, is that the facts may be forced to seem far simpler than they were. It should be kept in mind that these are only certain broad currents of thought, tendencies which were obscured by all sorts of cross waves and chop seas. And it should be mentioned that the Puritan with the greatest mind of them all, Jonathan Edwards, was only a year old when Mrs. Knight made her journey to New York, and that to the end of his life, in 1758, he struggled in vain to keep alive the logic of the old religious doctrines.

He was born in 1703 with a rich heritage from the learned aristocracy. As a youth he showed extraordinary precocity, which appeared in his early excursions into philosophy and natural science and developed further in the unfulfilled promise of religious radicalism.

> From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God… I have often, since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so.
>
> The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, 1 Tim. i. 17, *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being…
>
> Not long after I first began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father of some things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together; and when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looking up on the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious *majesty* and *grace* of God, that I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together; it was a sweet and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.

The striking fact about Edwards's later development, however, is that he passed entirely from poetic mysticism to a championship of the theology of Calvin. His great period of influence was during his pastorate in Northampton, Massachusetts, from 1727 to 1750, and during his following six years at Stockbridge, Massachusetts. He was a preacher of extraordinary power – the more extraordinary because his command of audiences was obtained by the sheer quality of his discourse and not, as in the case of John Cotton and the Mathers, by pulpit presence or flights of eloquence. His sermons were at once irresistible in their logic (provided his auditors were willing to start with his assumptions) and, at the same time, irresistibly cogent in their simple, concrete methods of illustration. His most famous discourse, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," is a complete illustration of his method. Notwithstanding his sincerity and his talents as a preacher his ministerial experience was ended with a tragic downfall. His parishioners could not endure the rigor of his

teachings, agreeing perversely with Dr. Johnson's later dictum on his "Freedom of the Will" – that all theory might be for it but all experience was against it. During his residence in Stockbridge he continued with the writing of discourses which philosophers have agreed at once to applaud and reject. He died in 1758 shortly after his inauguration as president of the College of New Jersey.

His failure lay in the fact that his religion was a religion of logic rather than of faith. It was based on what learned men had theorized out from the Bible, and in a great many cases from the least important passages of the Bible, and it sternly rejected what many other equally learned men had found in the same book. Moreover, it was concerned with life on earth chiefly as a prelude to a future life of reward or punishment. In all the tide of human event which was making the eighteenth century each year more interesting as a matter of present living, men could not go on indefinitely looking everywhere but at life itself. Oliver Wendell Holmes summed up the situation in his "Wonderful 'One-Hoss Shay'" (see p. 305). This is a pleasant story for children, but a comment on life for grown-ups; and to the grown-ups Holmes addressed his concluding couplet:

> End of the wonderful one-hoss shay:
> *Logic* is *logic*. That's all I say.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) is the man who reflected better and earlier than other Americans the complete change from the Puritan point of view – reflecting it so unqualifiedly that he must be understood as an extreme case and not a typical one. In education and character he offered a succession of contrasts to the leaders of seventeenth-century New England. He did not come of a cultured family; he was not a college man; he did not enter any of the learned professions – ministry, law, or teaching; he was not an active supporter of the church; he did not live in the New England where he was born. In fact he was one of the first to act on the much-quoted principle, "Boston is a very good place – to come from."

Franklin was born in Boston in 1706, the youngest son of a tallow-chandler and the fifteenth of seventeen children. He was industrious and bookish as a boy, and before he was seventeen years old he had trained himself to write in the fashion of the English essayist Joseph Addison, had been apprenticed in his brother's printing shop, and had written many articles published in his brother's paper, *The New England Courant*. In 1723, as the result of troubles with his brother, he ran away to Philadelphia. From there he went to London for two years, on the promise of the irresponsible Governor Keith to set him up in the printing business on his return. The failure of the governor to keep his word did him no harm in the end, for he established his own printing house in 1728, and in 1748, at the age of forty-two, he was able to retire with a moderate fortune. During this time he had not only succeeded in Philadelphia but had combined with partners in New York, Newport, Lancaster (Pennsylvania), Charleston (South Carolina), Kingston, Jamaica, and Antigua.

The activities of his life were so crowded and interwoven that they may best be summarized under a few simple heads. As a public-spirited citizen of Philadelphia he organized a debating society, the Junto, in 1727; published *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729; founded the first circulating library in America in 1731; conducted *Poor Richard's Almanac* from 1732 to 1748; organized the American Philosophical Society in 1744; and in 1749 founded the academy which developed into the University of Pennsylvania. As an inventor he perfected the Franklin stove in 1742 and contrived methods of street paving and lighting which were widely adopted. As a scientist he proved the identity of lightning and electricity in 1752, and went on from that to further investigations which sooner or later brought him election to the Royal Academy of London and their Copley gold medal, an appointment as one of the eight foreign associates of the French Academy of Sciences, and medals and diplomas from other societies in St. Petersburg, Madrid, Edinburgh, Padua, and Turin. As a holder of public trusts and offices he became clerk of the Assembly of Pennsylvania in 1736; postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737; deputy postmaster-general of the colonies in 1753; commissioner from Pennsylvania to

the Albany Congress in 1754; colonial agent to London from Pennsylvania in 1757 and 1764 and for Massachusetts in 1770; one of the framers of the Declaration of Independence; minister to the French court from the United States in 1778; a signer of the Peace Articles in 1783; president of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1785–1787; and a framer of the Constitution of the United States. Such a catalogue is not a thing to be exactly memorized. Its value is like that of an entry in "Who's Who in America" – it should be referred to when needed. Yet it is worth reading and rereading as an evidence of the almost unparalleled variety and usefulness of occupations which filled this man's life.

Usefulness is, without question, the idea which Franklin most emphasized in his writings and exemplified in his conduct. In comparison with the Puritan fathers he was more interested in the eighteenth century than in eternity, more actively concerned with Philadelphia and Pennsylvania and the United States of America than with the mansions prepared above. This attitude of mind was not a freakish or accidental one; it can be accounted for in the influences which affected him when he was a boy and in the kind of English and American thinking which characterized his whole century.

He came of what he himself called an "obscure family," his ancestors in the near generations having been hard-working, intelligent English clerks and artisans. They were nonconformists, and independent enough to take their chances in the new world for the sake of liberty of conscience. But the lesson that he learned from his parents was rather more practical than theological and was, perhaps unconsciously, attested to in the epitaph which he wrote for them. At two points in it he recorded his belief that God helps them who help themselves, laying special stress on the degree to which they help themselves:

> By constant labor and industry,
> With God's blessing,

he says, and again:

> Be encouraged to diligence in thy calling
> And distrust not Providence.

Cotton Mather, whom Franklin quoted with respect, would have reversed the ideas in order and importance; but it was Cotton Mather's "Essays to Do Good" that Franklin quoted, and his ability to draw a practical inference from some slight event ("Be not too proud," he said, when he bumped his head against a beam), and not any of his sermons. Franklin's early reading was almost wholly in the field of what might be called common-sense literature – discussions of different aspects of daily life and how to get on in it. He read "Pilgrim's Progress," which of all religious books is one of the most definite on questions of earthly conduct. He read a great deal of history and biography: Defoe "Upon Projects," Locke "Concerning Human Understanding" and "The Art of Thinking," and Addison on all the common-sense subjects that make up the contents of the *Spectator*. He read the rimed "Essays" of Alexander Pope, too, using a quotation from one of them to confirm his belief in a system of arguing by means of asking questions, which is known as the "Socratic method."

In a word, he filled his boyish mind with the special kind of writing which belonged to the first half of the eighteenth century in England, and this was exactly the kind to be valuable to a youth who was destined to work his way unaided to prosperity. For this period was a particularly prosaic and practical one. In the two generations just gone England had passed through the Puritan uprising against Charles I, the return of the Stuarts to the throne, and the further rebellion against James II. Religious enthusiasm had risen to its height in the middle of the century, but had already waned by the years when John Milton received only ten pounds for the manuscript of "Paradise Lost." By the end of the century politics had definitely overthrown religion as a subject of popular discussion. Little newspapers had sprung up in surprising numbers, the coffeehouses had provided centers for

conversation, and a common-sense age was settling down to a rather sordid and common-sense existence. Sometimes under the impulse of a world movement a few leaders of thought have a great deal to do with actually molding the character of the period in which they live, but in less inspiring times the popular writers produce just about "what the public wants." The period of Franklin's youth was one of the latter kind, and Addison, Pope, and their followers were writing for a public who wanted to keep on the surface of life. It was as if the people had said: "All this religious zeal of the last century only made England uncomfortable. Just see what confusion it threw us into! Now we are back about where we were when the trouble started. Let's be sensible and stick to facts, and stop quarreling with each other." So the populace, who began reading in greater numbers than ever before, read the little newspapers; and the various groups of congenial people talked things over in the coffeehouses; and Addison made it his ambition to bring "philosophy" (by which he meant a simple theory of everyday living) down from the clouds and into the field of ordinary thinking. The plays of Shakespeare would have helped Franklin very little in the early stages of the printing business; so would the poems of Milton; but the essays of Addison, Pope, and Defoe made for him what would be called to-day "excellent vocational reading." And he profited by it to the limit.

Moreover, if literature helped to make him a good printer, printing was no less helpful toward making him a good writer. There are few trades or crafts which demand so high a degree of accuracy. A boy or girl who achieves a grade of 95 per cent in any study, even in mathematics, is well above the average; but a typesetter or proofreader who avoids error in only nineteen out of every twenty operations will have a short career in any printing house. Most people do not know of the extreme care which is given to assure correctness in the simplest product which is put into type. A textbook, for example, after being written, revised, recopied, and revised is criticized by a special expert and once more revised before the publisher's editor goes over it word by word. Then when it goes to the printer it is set up in long strips, or galleys, from these into pages (still in type), and from these is cast into plates, and after each of these three operations is read over with microscopic care by both an editorial proofreader and the author. During the printing experience a liberal allowance is made to the author for actual changes from his original copy, but the printer is held responsible for any slightest departure from the manuscript that is supplied him. The boy who, like Franklin, has spent some years in the printing room and the editorial office has received a discipline which is miles beyond that which can ever be given in any school or college composition course.[2]

To this important training Franklin added a conscious attempt to develop his own powers. Printing and the love of books led the horse to water, but his desire for self-expression made him drink. Of this he tells in an early passage of the "Autobiography." His daily work had taught him to spell and punctuate correctly, but he was faulty in choice of words and in "perspicuity," or clearness of construction. So he took Addison's *Spectator* as his model, put paragraphs into his own words, then tried to set them back into the original form, compared the two products, and made up his mind wherein Addison's versions were better than his and wherein, as he sometimes thought, his were better than his teacher's. He also followed up the art of discussion both in speech and in writing, making it always a point to convince his opponents without antagonizing them. These things he did, not in order to become a professional writer but solely in order to utter or write his ideas to the best effect. "It has ever since," he says, "been a pleasure to me to see good workmen handle their tools; and it has been useful to me, having learned so much by it as to be able to do little jobs myself." Prose writing was simply a tool for him – the most useful one that he ever mastered and, as he says elsewhere, the principal means of his advancement.

As long as he was a printer (until he was forty-two years old) he employed his prose composition in writing copy which was clear and interesting and therefore salable – chiefly in the *Pennsylvania*

[2] This same discipline was enjoyed – among later American authors – by Mark Twain, Bret Harte, William Dean Howells, and Walt Whitman, all of whom were scrupulously careful writers.

Gazette and in *Poor Richard's Almanac*; but during and after that time he put his powers to even greater use as a speaker and as a writer of articles and pamphlets on affairs of public interest. He was almost always simple, definite, and practical, for he wrote to the mass of people with little education. He realized that if he was to bring his points home to them he must not write "over their heads," and that he must appeal to their common sense and their self-interest; and he was invariably good-humored, for he knew that good humor makes more friends than enemies.

Out of the great mass of Franklin's published writings – and they run to a dozen large volumes – two deserve special attention as pieces of American literature: *Poor Richard's Almanac* and the "Autobiography." The former of these was a commercial undertaking; it was written to sell. The almanac, an annual publication of which the calendar was a very small part, had been popular in England and America for many generations before Franklin started his own. It preceded the newspaper and until 1800, or even later, reached a wider public. The second piece of printing in this country was *Pierce's Almanack*, printed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1639. Others followed: in Boston, 1676; in Philadelphia, 1676; in New York, 1697; in Rhode Island, 1728; and in Virginia, 1731. There had been, however, only one great almanac editor to precede Franklin in America – Nathaniel Ames, who began publishing his series in Dedham, Massachusetts, in 1726. Besides the calendar, the astronomical data for the year, and the half-jocular weather predictions, the chief feature of Ames's was the poetry, very considerable in bulk, and the "interlined wit and humor," which was brief and usually rather pointless. Franklin, realizing the fondness of his generation for the wise sayings of which Alexander Pope was then the master-hand in the English-speaking world, dropped the poetry and studied to expand the interlined material of Ames into the chief contribution of his "Richard Saunders." "I endeavored to make it both entertaining and useful," he said in the "Autobiography," "and it accordingly came to be in such demand, that I reaped considerable profit from it; vending annually near ten thousand. And observing that it was generally read, scarce any neighborhood in the province being without it, I considered it as a proper vehicle for conveying instruction among the common people, who bought scarcely any other books. I therefore filled all the little spaces, that occurred between the remarkable days in the Calendar with proverbial sentences, chiefly such as inculcated industry and frugality, as the means of procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue; it being more difficult for a man in want, to act always honestly, as, to use here one of those proverbs, *it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright*."

In the Almanac of 1757 he collected the sayings of the last twenty-five years into a timely essay on "The Way to Wealth," making an old man deliver a speech filled with quotations from "Poor Richard." This contained not only sound practical advice for any time but was also pertinent to a political issue of the moment, and so applied to the state as well as to all the people in it. It was reprinted by itself and had an immense circulation in America and abroad, in the original and in several translations. Very likely since "The Day of Doom," in 1662, nothing had been so influential in the colonies as "The Way to Wealth," in 1757; and no contrast could better indicate the change that had taken place between those two dates. Said Father Abraham, the old speaker:

> It would be thought a hard Government that should tax its People one-tenth Part of their Time, to be employed in its Service. But *Idleness* taxes many of us much more, if we reckon all that is spent in absolute *Sloth*, or doing of nothing, with that which is spent in idle Employments or Amusements, that amount to nothing. Sloth, by bringing on Diseases, absolutely shortens Life. *Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than Labour wears; while the used Key, is always bright*, as *Poor Richard* says. *But dost thou love life, then do not squander Time, for that's the stuff Life is made of*, as *Poor Richard* says. How much more than is necessary do we spend in sleep, forgetting that *The sleeping Fox catches no Poultry*, and that *There will be sleeping enough in the Grave*, as *Poor Richard* says.

This was the sort of workaday advice that was shouldering the old-time theology into modest Sabbath-day retirement.

Franklin's "Autobiography" is the greatest of his writings if not the greatest of all his achievements. "Poor Richard" and "The Way to Wealth" are full of good common sense, but they belong only to the "efficiency" school of ideas and morality; they are neither distinguished in form nor inspiring in content, and they are chiefly interesting because they so well mirror what was in the eighteenth-century mind. The "Autobiography" has a larger claim to attention than these, for by general consent it has come to be regarded as one of the great classics of literature. Several features have combined to make it deserve this high place. Simply stated they are all nothing more than ways of explaining that this book is the simple, definite, honest life-story of an eminent man, as he recalled it in his old age.

In the first place, it is simple and uncalculated. It was not composed, like "Poor Richard," to sell, nor, like many of Franklin's speeches and pamphlets, to convince by skillful argument. As a matter of fact, Franklin did not want to write it at all, and consented only when the insistence of his friends and relatives made it easier to do it than to leave it undone. Moreover, he dropped it for the thirteen years from 1771 to 1784, took it up again when wearied, old, and ill, and left it at his death hardly more than well started, with all the most celebrated part of his life still to be recounted. It is simple therefore because it was done with no desire to create an impression or to be "literary," and is the unadorned narrative of an old man familiarly told to those who knew him best.

For the same reason it is definite and homely in what he chose to record. It is the "little, nameless, unremembered" episodes not set down in more pretentious histories for which the "Autobiography" is itself best remembered. Some of the details make real the conditions of living in those simple times – the invention of the stove named after him, the improvements in street lighting and paving, the organization of a fire company. Others are typical of human nature in any age, as his portrait of the croaker, Samuel Mickle, who sadly predicted Franklin's failure as a printer, or as his jocular account of the entrance of luxury into his own household.

> We have an English proverb that says, *He that would thrive, must ask his wife*. It was lucky for me that I had one as much disposed to industry and frugality as myself. She assisted me cheerfully in my business, folding and stitching pamphlets, tending shop, purchasing old linen rags for the paper-makers, etc., etc. We kept no idle servants, our table was plain and simple, our furniture of the cheapest. For instance, my breakfast was a long time bread and milk (no tea), and I ate it out of a twopenny earthen porringer, with a pewter spoon. But mark how luxury will enter families, and make a progress, in spite of principle: being called one morning to breakfast, I found it in a China bowl, with a spoon of silver! They had been bought for me without my knowledge by my wife, and had cost her the enormous sum of three and twenty shillings, for which she had no other excuse or apology to make, but that she thought *her* husband deserved a silver spoon and China bowl as well as any of his neighbors. This was the first appearance of plate and China in our house, which afterward in a course of years, as our wealth increased, augmented gradually to several hundred pounds in value.

Many and many of the simplest episodes reveal how shrewd, penetrating, and, above all, how clear headed he invariably was. Such, for example, was the hour when he was listening to the great evangelist, Whitefield, and while all his other auditors were being thrilled by the speaker's eloquence, Franklin was backing away from him step by step, in order to estimate how far his voice would carry, and thus to verify the newspaper accounts of his having preached to twenty-five thousand people in the fields. Franklin went away full of admiration for the preacher's voice, but with no word of comment on his sermon. He went often to hear Whitefield, but always as a very human public speaker

and never as a "divine." A biographer, even one of his associates, could not have known many of the intimate facts that Franklin included, and he would almost surely have left out other details as irrelevant or impertinent. Franklin himself, in contrast, wrote the things which still clung in his old man's memory and which must have been important in his development, or he would have forgotten them.

Another striking feature of the "Autobiography" is its honesty, for he did not hesitate to record happenings which revealed defects in his character – defects which nine out of ten admiring biographers would have been inclined to omit or even actually to cover up. Franklin knew that his life had not been all admirable, that many times it had not been above reproach; but, all things considered, he was willing to let it stand for what it was. In consequence, if one reads his story as honestly as Franklin wrote it, – and few people do, – it will appear that not only was he disorderly and unmethodical but that he was not always truthful, that he was sometimes unscrupulous in business, and that he was at times self-indulgent and immoral. In fact too often the editing of Franklin's life-story seems to have been done on the principle laid down by Dr. Samuel Johnson about Chesterfield's "Letters to his Son" – that they should be put into the hands of every young man after the immorality had been taken out of them. This is not honest teaching and does not lead to honest habits of study.

The truth is that Franklin was like other people in being a combination of virtues and defects. He was unlike other people in having extraordinary talents and virtues and in owning up to his defects. For the two great "errata" of his life – the use of money intrusted to him for Mr. Vernon and his unfaithfulness while in London to Miss Read, his betrothed – he afterward made the fullest possible atonement. In his glorification of usefulness at every turn he was at once the greatest expounder and the greatest example of his century. He made a religion of usefulness, putting it into a simple creed which gives less heed to the spirit of worship than many of us need, but far more to the spirit of service than most of us follow:

> It is expressed in these words, viz.:
> That there is one God, who made all things.
> That he governs the world by his providence.
> That he ought to be worshipped by adoration, prayer and thanksgiving.
> But that the most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.
> That the soul is immortal.
> And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter.

In the third of these articles Franklin recommended a worship which he did not practice, but in the fourth he presented a doctrine of service of which his life was a remarkable fulfillment. In his theory of life Franklin seemed to make no claims for the finer emotions, but in his actual citizenship in all its public aspects he was so far above the average man as to serve as a pretty safe "working model" for this and coming generations.

If he had not written this uncompleted life-story we should not know the man as intimately as we do, for to read the "Autobiography" is to read Franklin himself.

Since the "Autobiography" brings the story of Franklin only up to 1757, it gives no hint of the Revolutionary struggle in which as negotiator and diplomat he was hardly less important than was Washington as military leader. The America presented in these pages is loyal and contented. The rising voices of discomfort from 1765 to 1775, of doubt during the next year, and of decision for revolt in 1776 were all echoed and often led by Franklin in his political writings. Moreover, it is of especial significance in these days to recall another fact unrecorded in his own story – that he was the first American to represent his nation among other nations, and that in his feeling for America as a member of the great world-family he was a hundred years and more ahead of his countrymen. The new marshaling of forces in 1917 which brought about the celebration of the Fourth of July in

London and the arrival of allied American troops in Paris recalled from hour to hour the name of Franklin as our first great international figure.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Few modern readers can regard the sermons of Jonathan Edwards as anything but documents of historical interest. It is quite worth study to read at first-hand one or two sermons about which so many careless generalizations have been made. The chief points of interest are the theology as it stands in his own living words, and his rhetorical method, which is an admirable exercise of forensic discourse.

Read Harriet Beecher Stowe's "The Minister's Wooing" and "Oldtown Folks" (especially chap.) for a faithful portrait of one of Edwards's chief successors (see pp. 305–308).

Read Franklin's "Autobiography" for its revelation of personal characteristics: his continued emphasis on usefulness; his refusal to allow his emotions to carry him away (whether anger, love, religious fervor, or desire for revenge); his willingness to act unscrupulously for what he felt was a good end; his self-analysis (in other places than the passage on the virtues); his public spirit.

Read Franklin's "Autobiography" for its literary characteristics: his emulation of Addison's style (compare passages of this and the *Spectator*); his respect for Pope and his likeness in use of apothegms; his similarity to Chesterfield in point of view and use of homely detail. Contrast Franklin's style with Irving's or Cooper's.

CHAPTER V
CRÈVECŒUR, THE "AMERICAN FARMER"

By 1750 the thirteen colonies had all been long established, and the straggling community on the Atlantic seaboard from Maine to Georgia had an individuality of its own. The America-to-be was at once young and old. There were old towns, old churches, old homes, old families. There was an aristocracy with memories that went back to England, but with roots firmly planted in American soil. Yet, withal, the country was so vast and the people on it so few that there was unlimited chance for the energetic man of real ability. It was a new land of untold opportunities; all its apparent maturity was the maturity of a well-born young gentleman who has just become of age and whose real career is all before him. The old age of the Old World was something very different, for it was based chiefly on the control of the land – of the actual soil and stream and forest. Edmund Burke in 1775 said in his "Speech on Conciliation of the American Colonies" that if the attempt were made to restrict the population of the colonies the people could swarm over the mountain ranges and resettle there in a vast plain *five hundred miles square*. However fair the estimate was to the land in actual English possession, that statement was about as far as the imagination of an Englishman accustomed to smaller dimensions could then go, or as big a figure as he could dare to hope his fellow-members of Parliament would believe; for in those days, as to-day, there were not in England or France five square miles of land out of ownership, and very little that was not in the possession of a few great proprietors. As the control of government was largely in the same hands, the great mass of the people could neither freely enjoy the fruits of their own labor, which were pitilessly reduced by rents and taxes, nor make any effective peaceful protest in behalf of political change. The American Revolution was the voice of the colonies protesting against the possible repetition of such conditions on this side the water, and the French Revolution was the harsh voice of a downtrodden people calling for redress.

No man could better appreciate the promise of life in America than one who had felt the oppression of the old conditions and had then enjoyed the freedom of the new ones. In the same years when the wiser leaders in the colonies were viewing with alarm the aggressive and mistaken policies of George III and his ministers, a young Frenchman, educated in England, came over to this country, settled and prospered on his own land, and was so delighted with his life as a farmer and a citizen that he could not refrain from making a record of his happy circumstances. This was Michel Guillaume St. John de Crèvecœur, and his book was the "Letters from an American Farmer," published in London in 1782, though written almost entirely before the outbreak of the Revolution. It is made up of twelve so-called letters addressed to an imaginary English friend. Two of these are about his direct experience on his own acres in the middle colonies; five are on the people and the country in northern colonies, as he found them in Marthas Vineyard, Nantucket, and Cape Cod; one is drawn from observations in South Carolina; and the other four are less related to definite places, three being on nature themes, and one – the most important of all – on the ever-new question, "What is an American?"

With industry and frugality hardly less than Franklin's, Crèvecœur had also a certain power of poetic imagination and fresh enthusiasm. He was writing from a kind of earthly paradise. Seen against the background of unhappy France, the rights to own, to earn, and to have a voice in governing himself seemed almost too good to be true. He had no misconceptions about the hard labor which was necessary to make a farm productive; but he enjoyed work because he knew that he could enjoy the fruits of it, and he enjoyed it all the more because he knew that in making an ear of corn grow where none had grown before he was the best kind of pioneer. To his sorrow he knew much about the ugliness of an old civilization; it was with the zest of a youthful lover that he wrote about the beauty of this new country's inexperience.

He felt a perfect satisfaction in his own state of mind and body. Although he was a newcomer, he had a sense of belonging to the district as complete as Emerson, with two centuries of ancestry, was later to have; and, with a pride equal to Emerson's in "Hamatreya," could "affirm, my actions smack of the soil." With his baby boy ingeniously rigged before him on the plow, he reckoned the increase of his fields, herds, flocks, – even his hives, – and acknowledged his inferiority "only to the Emperor of China, ploughing as an example to his kingdom." Then, looking beyond his own little acreage, he hinted at future industries. He was tilling the surface; there must be further treasures below. He and his neighbors were weaving the natural wool; some chemist must make and prepare colors. Commerce must follow on the heels of abundant production; "the avenues of trade are infinite." And in time the deep vast of the West, about which men had yet such feeble and timid fancies, must be explored and subjugated in its turn.

> Here we have, in some measure, regained the ancient dignity of our species: our laws are simple and just; we are a race of cultivators; our cultivation is unrestrained, and therefore everything is prosperous and flourishing. For my part I had rather admire the ample barn of one of our opulent farmers, who himself felled the first tree in his plantation, and was first founder of his settlement, than study the dimension of the temple of Ceres. I had rather record the progressive steps of this industrious farmer, throughout all the stages of his labor and other operations, than examine how modern Italian convents can be supported without doing anything but singing and praying.

Moreover, above all the material resources of field, forest, and mountain, he was glad for the human stream which was flowing into America to fertilize them. The thrifty people who were shrewd and bold enough to come over from Great Britain and northern Europe were to profit by nature's gifts, and in the experience were to be welded "into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared." If it is fair to say that the history of immigration to America falls into three general periods, Crèvecœur was writing about the very midst of the middle period, from 1675 to 1875. First had been a half century when only the strongest spirit of adventure or the strongest desire for freedom could impel men to attempt the conquest of an untried world. Every Englishman who came over and every American born here was conscious of the need of more hands to work, and all were eager for more Englishmen, and yet more, to help in the gigantic undertaking. In the last forty years, with the taking up of all the available land and the manning of the industries, the millions who have flooded in, not alone from England or Great Britain but mainly from southern Europe and the near East, have arrived as new mouths to feed. The problem has been not so much how they could help America as how America could take care of them; and with their arrival a feeling of perplexity and alarm has arisen such as was expressed in 1892 by Thomas Bailey Aldrich in his "Unguarded Gates":

> … Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
> And through them presses a wild motley throng —
> Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
> Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
> Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
> Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
> These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
> Those, tiger passions here to stretch their claws.
> In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
> Accents of menace alien to our air,
> Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
> O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well

To leave the gates unguarded? …
Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn
And trampled in the dust…

But Crèvecœur was living between these two periods. The first conquest of the Eastern woods and fields had been made. America was known to be a land of plenty, and as yet there was more than plenty for all the newcomers from England and the neighboring countries of northern Europe. There seemed to be no limit to its resources. And so he wrote:

> What, then, is the American, this new man? He is neither a European, nor the descendant of a European: hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family, whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a Frenchwoman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great "alma mater." Here individuals are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigor and industry, which began long since in the East. They will finish the great circle.

There was an artistic strain in this man who could so easily kindle with enthusiasm and who could express his enthusiasms with such rhythmic eloquence. The special subjects on which he could best vent his poetic powers were found in his passages and his occasional whole chapters on nature themes – in particular the letters on "John Bartram, Botanist," and "The Snakes and the Humming Bird." In these it is impossible not to feel the resemblances between this early naturalist and his successor, Thoreau (see pp. 222–229). While neither was a scientist in the strict sense of the word, neither was content to dismiss nature subjects with mere words of general appreciation. Both were interested enough to observe in detail and to record with some exactness the ways of plants, flowers, birds, and insects; but both were at their best when they were giving way to the real zest they had in the enjoyment of the out of doors.

> Who can listen unmoved to the sweet love-tales of our robins, told from tree to tree, or to the shrill cat-birds? The sublime accents of the thrush, from on high, always retard my steps, that I may listen to the delicious music… The astonishing art which all birds display in the construction of their nests, ill-provided as we may suppose them with proper tools, their neatness, their convenience, always make me ashamed of the slovenliness of our houses. Their love to their dame, their incessant, careful attention, and the peculiar songs they address to her while she tediously incubates their eggs, remind me of my duty, could I ever forget it. Their affection to their helpless little ones is a lovely precept; and, in short, the whole economy of what we call the brute creation, is admirable in every circumstance; and vain man, though adorned with the additional gift of reason, might learn from the perfection of instinct, how to regulate the follies, and how to temper the errors, which this second gift often makes him commit… I have often blushed within myself, and been greatly astonished, when I have compared the unerring path they all follow, – all just, all proper, all wise, up to the necessary degree of perfection – with the coarse, the imperfect, systems of men.

For generations the beauties of nature had held small place in English literature, because the English men of letters were a completely citified set of writers; and they had received little attention in America, partly because England gave American writers no reminder and partly because nature in America had been chiefly something to struggle with.

So enthusiastic was Crèvecœur over conditions in America, and so certain was he that they never would be disturbed in any unfortunate way, that the twentieth-century reader looks over his pre-Revolution pages with a kind of wistful impatience. About many aspects of the material development of the country Crèvecœur was keenly prophetic. Throughout eleven of the letters, evidently written before 1775, he continued in an exalted and confident mood. Whether he was presenting the "provincial situations, manners and customs" of Nantucket and Marthas Vineyard, or of the central Atlantic, or of the Southern colonies, his senses and his judgment were equally satisfied. Industry prevailed. The wilderness was being converted into towns, farms, and highways. "A pleasing uniformity of decent competence" was a rule of the democracy. The indulgent laws were fair to the laborer and the voter. He seemed to feel that the era of prosperity would last till the end of the world. His vision of the future was the vision of a man perched in the small end of an infinite horn of plenty, with a vista unclouded by the hint of any limit to the supply or of any possible conflict between gluttony and hunger.

In fact, along the whole coast there was only one practice which deserved the name of a problem, and that was the institution of slavery. Against this, which existed both North and South, Crèvecœur protested just as Samuel Sewall and John Woolman had done before him, and as Timothy Dwight and Joel Barlow in Connecticut and William Pinkney and other lawmakers and abolitionists in Maryland and Virginia were to do soon after him. Yet, however sincere he was, he regarded slavery only as an external blemish rather than as a national danger. It was a mistake, but not a menace. It was typical of the America of the future that Crèvecœur should have had so unquestioning a confidence in the prospect. The belief in a "manifest destiny" for America, which is finely inspiring for all who will work to bring about a glorious future, has been demoralizing to millions who have used a lazy belief in it to excuse them from feeling or exercising any responsibility.

With the twelfth letter came a total change of key. It was evidently written long after all the others, after the outburst of war, perhaps after his New Jersey property had been burned, possibly even during his return voyage to France in the autumn of 1780. As a naturalized subject of King George, when well on in middle life he had been forced to choose between his sworn allegiance and the interests of his fellow-colonists. He sympathized with the American cause, though he did not enlist. And then in the years that followed he learned (the perennial lesson of war time) of the "vanity of human wishes." Unhappily for the moral of the tale, the latter part of his life was far from heroic. In the concluding letter, written quite after the fashion of the most sentimental and unreal eighteenth-century nature lovers, Crèvecœur decided to abandon the struggle in the war zone and to take up life anew with his family among the Indians in the West. He would forswear all talk of politics, "contemplate nature in her most wild and ample extent," and formulate among his adopted neighbors a new system of happiness. As a matter of fact, however, his retreat was even more complete than this; for he returned permanently to the Continent, lived contentedly in Paris, London, and Munich, married his daughter to a French count, wrote volumes on Pennsylvania and New York, and memorialized his career as a farmer by inditing a paper on potato culture.

Although such a turn of events resulted in very much of an anticlimax, this fact should not make one forget the prophetic quality in his "Letters," nor should his failure to predict every aspect of modern life throw any shadow on the clearness with which he foretold some of the most important of them. It is true, of course, that he did not appreciate how tragic were to be the fruits of slavery; that he saw immigration only as a desirable supply of labor to a continent which could never be overpopulated; that, writing before the earliest chapter of the factory era, he did not dream of the industrial complexities of the present. But when he said that the American, sprung from Europe but

here adopted into a new nation, “ought therefore to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born,” he was saying something that has been repeated with new conviction ten thousand times since the outbreak of the Great War. And when he declared that “the American is a new man, who acts upon new principles” he was foreshadowing national policies which the world has been slow to understand. The possibility of a nation’s being too proud to fight at the first provocation, and the subordination of national interest to the interest of mankind – this is the language of the new principles that Crèvecœur was invoking. It is nearly a century and a half since he tried to answer the question “What is an American?” Much has happened since then. Internally the country has developed to the extent of his farthest dreams, and in the world-family, after five great wars, it has become one of the greatest of the powers, fulfilling so much of his predictions that one speculates in all humility on what may be the next steps “for that new race of men whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.”

BOOK LIST

Individual Author

Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecœur. Letters from an American Farmer. Written for the information of a friend in England. Edited by J. Hector St. John. 1782.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Read the characterization of the American colonies in Burke's "Speech on Conciliation."

Read the letter entitled "What is an American?" and see how far its generalizations apply to the America of to-day.

Read Zangwill's play "The Melting Pot" in the light of this letter on "What is an American?"

Read passages which deal with nature for Crèvecœur's observation on plant and animal life.

Read the closing essay in comparison with Rousseau's "Émile" for its romantic idealization of primitive life. Compare this essay with the picture of frontier life as presented in "The Deerslayer" or "The Last of the Mohicans." Note the resemblances to Châteaubriand's "René."

Read the opening chapters or divisions of Thoreau's "Walden" and compare with the Crèvecœur "Letters" in point of the contrasting views on property, labor, and citizenship.

Read Mary Antin's "The Promised Land" for the differences in the America to which Crèvecœur came and the America which she found.

CHAPTER VI
THE POETRY OF THE REVOLUTION AND PHILIP FRENEAU

With the Revolutionary War there was naturally a great output of printed matter. Controversial pamphlets, state papers, diaries, letters, and journals, plays (with prologues and epilogues), songs, ballads and satires, all swelled the total. No one can fully understand the Revolution or the period after it who does not read extensively in this material; yet, taken in its length and breadth, the prose and most of the verse are important as history rather than as literature. Out of the numerous company of writers who were producing while Franklin was an aging man and while Crèvecœur was an American farmer, one, Philip Freneau, may be considered as chief representative, and two others, Francis Hopkinson and John Trumbull, deserve a briefer comment.

Francis Hopkinson (1737–1791), the Philadelphian, was well characterized in a much-quoted letter from John Adams to his wife in August, 1776:

> At this shop I met Mr. Francis Hopkinson, late a mandamus councillor of New Jersey, now a member of the Continental Congress, who … was liberally educated, and is a painter and a poet… He is one of your pretty little, curious, ingenious men… He is genteel and well-bred and is very social. I wish I had leisure and tranquillity of mind to amuse myself with those elegant and ingenious arts of painting, sculpture, statuary, architecture and music. But I have not.

Undoubtedly Hopkinson's work savors of the dilettante throughout; yet part of its historical significance is inherent in this fact, for Hopkinson is one of the earliest examples of talented versatility in American life. He had virtues to complement the accomplishments half enviously cited by John Adams. He was a learned judge, a stalwart revolutionist, a practical man of affairs, and a humorist.

His collected writings in three volumes were done in the best manner of eighteenth-century England. Five sixths of them are essays, written not in series, but quite of the *Spectator* type. Three prose satires – "A Pretty Story" (1774), "A Prophecy" (1776), and "The New Roof" (1778) – are as important a trio as any written by one man in the Revolutionary days. The other sixth – his verse – belonged no less to the polite literature of the period. There are Miltonic imitations, songs, sentiments, hymns, a fable, and a piece of advice to a young lady. There are occasional poems, including birthday and wedding greetings, dramatic prologues and epilogues, elegies, and rimed epitaphs. Verses of these kinds, if they were all Hopkinson had written, would indicate a hopeless subservience to prevailing English fashions. But Hopkinson was nobody's vassal. When he wrote he might as truly have asserted his refusal to submit to any sort of trammels except at his own option. Into a few imitation ballads he poured the new wine of Revolutionary sentiment, one of which, "The Battle of the Kegs," with its mocking jollity, put good cheer in all colonial hearts in the times that tried men's souls. It was his jaunty self-control, the quality of heroism without its pompous mannerisms, that set Hopkinson off in contrast with his fellows. He was almost the least pretentious of them all, yet few were more effective.

> My generous heart disdains
> The slave of love to be,
> I scorn his servile chains,
> And boast my liberty,

John Trumbull (1750–1831), most talented of the "Hartford Wits," tried his hand, like Hopkinson, at the conventional poetical subjects, but, unlike him, the bulk of his verse was contained

in two long satirical essays: “The Progress of Dulness” (1772 and 1773) and “M’Fingal” (1776 and 1782). Apparently he had no further ambition for himself or other American poets than to

> bid their lays with lofty Milton vie;
> Or wake from nature’s themes the moral song,
> And shine with Pope, with Thompson and with Young.
> This land her Swift and Addison shall view,
> The former honors equalled by the new;
> Here shall some Shakspeare charm the rising age,
> And hold in magic chains the listening stage;
> A second Watts shall strike the heavenly lyre,
> And other muses other bards inspire.

Nevertheless, in these two satires he wrote first from a provincial and then from an early national point of view. “The Progress of Dulness” is a disquisition on how not to bring up children. He chose for his examples Tom Brainless, Dick Hairbrain, and Harriet Simper. He put the boys through college (Trumbull was a graduate of Yale), making one a dull preacher and the other a rake. Harriet, the American counterpart of Biddy Tipkin in Steele’s “Tender Husband” or Arabella in Mrs. Lennox’s “The Female Quixote,” is fed on flattery, social ambition, and the romantic fiction of the hour (see p. 103), becomes a coquette and a jilt, and, thrown over by Dick, sinks into obscurity as the faded wife of Parson Tom. This was homemade satire, democratic in its choice and treatment of character, and clearly located in and about New Haven, Connecticut.

So also, and much more aggressively, was the rimed political document “M’Fingal,” an immensely popular diatribe at the Tory of the Revolution – his attitude, his general demeanor, and his methods of argument. It recounts the events of a day in a New England town which was torn by the dissensions between the rival factions in the opening days of the conflict, and describes in detail the ways in which this particularly offensive Tory was driven to cover. The modern reader must bring to it a good deal of student interest if he expects to complete the reading and understand it, even with the aid of Trumbull’s copious footnotes. For the moment it was a skillful piece of journalistic writing. Trumbull knew how to appeal to the prejudices of his sympathizers (for controversial war writing confirms rather than convinces); he knew how to draw on their limited store of general knowledge; and he knew how to lead them on with a due employment of literary ingenuities like puns, multiple rimes, and word elisions, and a judicious resort to rough jocosity and vituperation. “M’Fingal” was war literature with all its defects of passion, uncandor, and speciousness, but the score or more of editions through which it ran before 1800 are evidence that it reached the low mark at which it was aimed. If it had the faults of its kind, so in later years did “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and “Mr. Britling sees it Through.”

This most representative poet of the Revolutionary period was Philip Freneau, who lived from 1752 to 1832 and who was active in authorship for forty-five years, from 1770 on. He was a graduate of Princeton College in 1771, gained a sudden reputation as a political satirist in 1775, and lived a strangely varied life from then till well into the nineteenth century. For three years he lived in Santa Cruz and Bermuda. In 1779 he sailed to the Azores, and for a six-year period at a later time he was engaged in Atlantic coast trade. From 1784 to 1807 he went the circle in five stages as editor, seaman, editor, farmer, and seaman again. Everything he did he seems to have done hard, and nothing held him long. It is a kind of life which does not seem surprising in a man who has often been called “Poet of the Revolution,” for he wrote as vigorously as he sailed or farmed or edited, and he plowed his political satires quite as deep and straight as he plowed the seas and the furrows of his fields. After his bitter experience of three months on a British prison ship, he blazed out with a savage flame of verse which has carried the horrors of this particular form of war brutality down the centuries to

greet the "atrocities" of the present. When the editors of rival papers and rival parties annoyed him he scourged them with a savageness of attack which was notable even in a day when journalism knew no restraint and recognized no proprieties. Freneau had at least one title to the friendship of Dr. Samuel Johnson, who loved "a good hater."

This vehement side of his life resulted in a generous amount of war poetry which would be remembered – or forgotten – with the best of the rest of its kind if it were all that he had written. In a brief survey like the present chapter it can therefore serve the double purpose of illustrating the verse of the Revolution and of representing a less important aspect of his whole work. In this respect it is comparable to the Civil-War and antislavery poetry of Whittier. Sometimes this verse is full of scorn, as in "The Midnight Consultations," in which Lord Howe is ridiculed as presiding over a council which arrives at the following heroic conclusion:

> Three weeks – ye gods! – nay, three long years it seems
> Since *roast beef* I have touched, except in dreams,
> In sleep, choice dishes to my view repair,
> Waking, I gape and champ the empty air, —
>
> •••
>
> On neighbouring isles uncounted cattle stray,
> Fat beeves, and swine, an ill-defended prey —
> These are fit victims for my noonday dish,
> These, if my soldiers act as I would wish,
> In one short week should glad your maws and mine;
> On mutton we will sup – on roast beef dine.

Sometimes it is full of the hate which war always engenders. Freneau wrote no more bitterly about the king, Lord North, and the leading generals in active service against the colonists than did Jonathan Odell – the foremost Tory satirist – about Washington and his associates. As the war went on, and the likelihood of American success became stronger, Freneau's tone softened, as he could well afford to have it, and in such a product as "The Political Balance" he wrote with nothing more offensive than the mockery of a rather ungenerous victor. This poem, characterized by well-maintained humor, is one of the best of its kind. It represents Jove as one day looking over the book of Fate and of coming to an incomplete account of Britain, for the Fates had neglected to reveal the outcome of the war. In order to find out for himself, he directs Vulcan to make an exact model of the globe, borrows the scales from Virgo, and plans to foretell the future by setting the mother country on one side and the States on the other. When, after many difficulties, the experiment is tried, of course the States overbalance the little island. Then, to make sure, he adds the foreign dominions on Britain's side,

> But the gods were confounded and struck with surprise,
> And Vulcan could hardly believe his own eyes!
>
> For (such was the purpose and guidance of fate)
> Her foreign dominions diminish'd her weight —
> By which it appeared, to Britain's disaster,
> Her foreign possessions were changing their master.

Then as he replac'd them, said Jove with a smile —
"Columbia shall never be rul'd by an isle —
But vapours and darkness around her shall rise,
And tempests conceal her a while from our eyes;

"So locusts in Egypt their squadrons display,
And rising, disfigure the face of the day;
So the moon, at her full, has a frequent eclipse,
And the sun in the ocean diurnally dips.

"Then cease your endeavors, ye vermin of Britain —
(And here, in derision, their island he spit on)
'T is madness to seek what you never can find,
Or think of uniting what nature disjoin'd;

"But still you may flutter awhile with your wings,
And spit out your venom, and brandish your stings,
Your hearts are as black, and as bitter as gall,
A curse to yourselves, and a blot on the Ball."

After the successful completion of the war it was only natural that Americans in their rejoicing should imagine the glorious future that awaited their new independence. The more vivid their imaginations were, the more splendid were the prophecies they indulged in. As we read over the records of their lofty hopes we are reminded of commencement oratory; and the likeness is not unreal, for these post-Revolution poets were in fact very like eager college graduates, diploma in hand, looking forward to vague but splendid careers. It was in these poems too that the germs of Fourth of July oratory first took root – the oratory described by James Fenimore Cooper in his "Home as Found" (chap. xxi):

> There were the usual allusions to Greece and Rome, between the republics of which and that of this country there exists some such affinity as is to be found between a horse-chestnut and a chestnut horse, or that of mere words; and a long catalogue of national glories that might very well have sufficed for all republics, both of antiquity and of our own time. But when the orator came to speak of the American character, and particularly of the intelligence of the nation, he was most felicitous, and made the largest investments in popularity. According to his account of the matter, no other people possessed a tithe of the knowledge, or a hundredth part of the honesty and virtue of the very community he was addressing; and after laboring for ten minutes to convince his hearers that they already knew everything, he wasted several more in trying to persuade them to undertake further acquisitions of the same nature.

These elephantine poems were written each in several "books," to each one of which was prefixed an outline which, in the language of the day, was called "the argument." Here is a part of the outline for Book VII of Timothy Dwight's "Greenfield Hill" (1794):

> Happiness of U. S. contrasted to Eastern Despotism. Universal Prevalence of Freedom. Unfortified, and therefore safe, state of U. S. Influence of our state of Society on the Mind. Public Property employed for the Public Benefit. Penal Administrations improved by Benevolence. Policy enlarges its scope. Knowledge

> promoted. Improvements in Astronomical and other Instruments of Science. Improvements of the Americans, in Natural Philosophy – Poetry – Music – and Moral Science. State of the American Clergy. Manners refined. Artificial Manners condemned. American Women. Cultivation advanced. Other Nations visit this country, and learn the nature, and causes, of our happiness. Conclusion.

And here is a part of the argument to Book IX of Joel Barlow's "Columbiad," in which he demonstrates that the present government of America is a culmination of all human progress:

> … the ancient and modern states of the arts and of society, Crusades, Commerce, Hanseatic League, Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Galileo, Herschel, Descartes, Bacon, Printing Press, Magnetic Needle, Geographic Discoveries, Federal System in America.

Freneau had shared all this prophetic enthusiasm, and had expressed it even before the war, partly in an actual commencement poem on "The Rising Glory of America" and partly in a series of eighteen "Pictures of Columbus." Just after graduation he had written:

> I see, I see
> A thousand Kingdoms rais'd, cities and men
> Num'rous as sand upon the ocean shore;
> Th' Ohio then shall glide by many a town
> Of note; and where the Mississippi stream
> By forests shaded now runs weeping on,
> Nations shall grow, and States not less in fame
> Than Greece and Rome of old; we too shall boast
> Our Alexanders, Pompeys, heroes, kings,
> That in the womb of time yet dormant lye
> Waiting the joyful hour of life and light.

After the war, however, he did not rejoin the increasing choir who were singing this kind of choral. His most interesting bit of prophecy, which must have seemed to his contemporaries to be a piece of the airiest fancy, has been amazingly verified more than a century after he wrote it. This is "The Progress of Balloons," written in the jaunty tone of "The Political Balance":

> The stagemen, whose gallopers scarce have the power
> Through the dirt to convey you ten miles in an hour,
> When advanc'd to balloons shall so furiously drive
> You'll hardly know whether you're dead or alive.
> The man who at Boston sets out with the sun,
> If the wind should be fair, may be with us at one,
> At Gunpowder Ferry drink whiskey at three
> And at six be at Edentown, ready for tea.
> (The machine shall be order'd, we hardly need say,
> To travel in darkness as well as by day)
> At Charleston by ten he for sleep shall prepare,
> And by twelve the next day be the devil knows where.

•••

If Britain should ever disturb us again,
(As they threaten to do in the next George's reign)
No doubt they will play us a set of new tunes,
And pepper us well from their fighting balloons.

•••

Such wonders as these from balloons shall arise —
And the giants of old that assaulted the skies
With their Ossa on Pelion, shall freely confess
That all they attempted was nothing to this.

This, of course, was newspaper poetry, and Freneau, for long years of his life, was a newspaper man. Even his lines "To Sir Toby," a slaveholding sugar-planter in Jamaica, spirited as they are, are in effect an open letter in protest against human slavery, and they were printed in the *National Gazette* in 1792.

The really poetical work of Freneau, however, which entitles him to an attention greater than that for his fellows, had nothing to do with political or military events of the day. They were his shorter poems on American nature and American tradition; and a distinguishing feature of them was that they were different from the English poetry of the time, in form as well as in content. As a young man Freneau had set out on his career by writing after the style of Milton and Dryden and Pope and their lesser imitators. This was absolutely natural. Until after the Revolution, America was England; and it was more nearly like England in speech and in thought than much of Scotland and Ireland are today. All the refinements of America were derived from English sources; practically all the colonists' reading was from English authors. But after the Revolution there came a strong reaction of feeling. We can look to Freneau's own rimes (journalistic ones again) for an explanation of the new and native quality of his later verse; they are called "Literary Importation," and they conclude as follows:

It seems we had spirit to humble a throne,
Have genius for science inferior to none,
But hardly encourage a plant of our own:
If a college be planned
'Tis all at a stand
'Till to Europe we send at a shameful expense,
To send us a bookworm to teach us some sense.

Can we never be thought to have learning or grace
Unless it be brought from that horrible place
Where tyranny reigns with her impudent face;
And popes and pretenders
And sly faith-defenders
Have ever been hostile to reason and wit,
Enslaving a world that shall conquer them yet.

'Tis a folly to fret at the picture I draw:
And I say what was said by a Doctor Magraw;
"If they give us their Bishops, they'll give us their law."
How that will agree
With such people as we,
Let us leave to the learned to reflect on awhile,
And say what they think in a handsomer stile.

As a consequence of this feeling that America should be different, the tendency grew to seek out native subject matter and to cease conscious imitation of English literary models. For the next half century American authors were contending, every now and then, that native themes should occupy their attention, and a good deal of verse and prose was written with this idea in mind. Most of it was more conscientious than interesting, for literature, to be genuinely effective, must be produced not to demonstrate a theory but to express what is honestly in the author's mind. The first step toward achieving nationality in American writing was, therefore, to achieve new and independent habits of national thinking. The Irish mind, for example, is basically different from the English mind, and Irish literature has therefore a long and beautiful history of its own, in spite of the fact that Ireland is near to England and subject to it. But the Australian is simply a transplanted English-speaking, English-thinking mind, and Australia has consequently produced no literature of which the world is yet aware.

Now Freneau was a naturally independent thinker. He was educated and well read in the best of English and classical literature. But unlike most of his fellow authors, he was not a city man, nor a teacher, preacher, or lawyer. His hands were hardened by the steersman's wheel and the plow, and doubtless much of his verse – or at least the inspiration for it – came to him on shipboard or in the field rather than in the library. In the midst of the crowd he was an easy man to stir up to fighting pitch. All his war verse shows this. Yet when he was alone and undisturbed he inclined to placid meditation, and he expressed himself in the simplest ways. As a young man he wrote a little poem called "Retirement." It is the kind of thing that many other eighteenth-century poets – confirmed city dwellers – wrote in moments of temporary world-weariness; but Freneau's life-story shows that he really meant it:

A cottage I could call my own
Remote from domes of care;
A little garden, wall'd with stone,
The wall with ivy overgrown,
A limpid fountain near,
Would more substantial joys afford,
More real bliss impart
Than all the wealth that misers hoard,
Than vanquish'd worlds, or worlds restor'd —
Mere cankers of the heart!

And there was another poem of his youth which told a secret of his real character. This was "The Power of Fancy," an imitation of Milton in its form, but genuinely Freneau's in its sentiment. The best of his later work is really a compound of these suggestions – poems of fancy composed in retirement. Thus he wrote on "The Indian Burying Ground," interpreting the fact that instead of being buried recumbent as white men are. And thus he wrote in "To a Caty-did," "The Wild Honeysuckle," and "On a Honey Bee," little lyrics of nature and natural life, which were almost the first verse written in America based on native subject matter and expressed in simple, direct, and unpretentious form.

The Indian, when from life releas'd,
Again is seated with his friends
And shares again the joyous feast,

Nathaniel Ames, in one of his early almanacs, recorded soberly:

MAY

Now Winters rage abates, now chearful Hours
Awake the Spring, and Spring awakes the Flowers.
The opening Buds salute the welcome Day,
And Earth relenting, feels the genial Ray.
The Blossoms blow, the Birds on Bushes sing;
And Nature has accomplish'd all the Spring.

This was perfectly conventional and perfectly indefinite; not a single flower, bud, blossom, bird, or bush is specified. The six lines amount to a general formula for spring and would apply equally well to Patagonia, Italy, New England, or northern Siberia. Mr. R. Lewis, who wrote on "A Journey from Patapsco to Annapolis" in 1730, improves on this:

First born of *Spring*, here the *Pacone* appears.
Whose golden Root a silver Blossom rears.
In spreading Tufts see there the *Crowfoot*, blue,
On whose green Leaves still shines a globous Dew;
Behold the *Cinque-foil*, with its dazling Dye
Of flaming Yellow, wounds the tender Eye.
But there enclos'd the grassy Wheat is seen
To heal the aching Sight with cheerful Green.

Lewis mentions definite flowers, colors, and characteristics, but he never misses a chance to tuck in a conventional adjective or participle, and he is led by them into weaving the extravagant fancy of an eye made to ache by flaming and dazzling colors, and healed by the cheerful green of the wheat field. In contrast to these, Freneau's little nature poems are as exact as the second and as simple as the subject on which he writes:

In a branch of willow hid
Sings the evening Caty-did:
From the lofty locust bough
Feeding on a drop of dew.
In her suit of green array'd
Hear her singing in the shade,
Caty-did, Caty-did, Caty-did.

Such simplicity as this does not seem at all remarkable to-day, but if it be compared with the fixed formalities that belonged to almost all the verse of Freneau's time it will stand out as a remarkable exception.

On account of the two kinds of poetry which Freneau published he has often been given misleading titles by his admirers. Those who have been interested in him mainly or exclusively from the historical point of view have christened him the "Poet of the American Revolution." This is unfair because of the implication that he gave his best energy to this and had no other right to distinction. Even as a journalist he was more than poet of the Revolution, since he wrote on local and timely themes for many years after its close. This designation does not claim enough for him. The other title is defective for the opposite reason, that it claims too much. This is the "Father of American Poetry." Such a sweeping phrase ought to be avoided resolutely. It is doubly false, in suggesting that there was no American poetry before he wrote and that everything since has been derived from him. The facts are that he had a native poetic gift which would have led to his writing poetry had there never been a war between the colonies and England, but that when the war came on he was one of the most effective penmen on his side; that entrance into the field of public affairs diverted him from the paths of quiet life; that after the war he continued both kinds of writing. He never ceased wholly to think and write about "affairs," but more and more he speculated on the future, dreamed of the picturesque past, and played with themes of graceful and tender sentiment. He is very much worth reading as a commentator on his own times, and he is no less worth reading for the beauty of many poems quite without reference to the time or place in which they were written.

The long and fruitful colonial period must not be overlooked by any honest student of American literature, yet it may fairly be regarded as no more than a preparatory stage. It has the same relationship to the whole story as do the ancestry, boyhood, and education to the development of an individual. In the broad and brief survey attempted in these chapters a few leading facts have been reviewed about the youth of America: (1) Everything characteristic of the early settlers was derived directly from England, those in the South representing the aristocratic traditions of king and court, and those in the North reflecting the democratic revolt of the Puritans. As a natural consequence of these differences the writing of books soon waned in Virginia and the neighboring colonies, but developed consistently in Massachusetts and New England. (2) The attempt of the Puritans to force all New Englanders to think the same thoughts and worship in the same way was unsuccessful from the start, and the most interesting writers of the seventeenth century reveal the spread of disturbing influences. The first three chosen as examples are Thomas Morton, the frank and unscrupulous enemy of the Puritans; Nathaniel Ward, a sturdy Puritan who was alarmed at the growth of anti-Puritan influences; and Roger Williams, a deeply religious preacher, who rebelled against the control of the Church in New England just as he and others had formerly rebelled in the mother country. (3) Even in the first half century a good deal of verse was written: sometimes, as in the case of "The Day of Doom," as a mere rimed statement of Puritan theology; but sometimes, as in the case of Anne Bradstreet and her followers, as an expression of real poetic feeling. (4) With the passage to the eighteenth century the community was clearly slipping from the grasp of the Puritans. Evidence is ample from three types of colonists: the Mathers, who were fighting a desperate but losing battle to retain control; Samuel Sewall, who, although a Puritan, was willing to accept reasonable changes; and Mrs. Sarah Kemble Knight, who said little at the time, but in her private journals showed the existence of growing disrespect for the old habits of thought. (5) Benjamin Franklin, whose work is more valuable than that of any of his predecessors, is also completely representative of the complete swing away from religious enthusiasm to a hard-headed worldliness which was prevailing in England in the eighteenth century. (6) On the other hand, Crèvecœur, writing just before the Revolution, sounded the note of thanksgiving to the Lord that America was different from the Old World, and emphasized what were the conditions of life that were worth fighting to save. (7) Finally, out of all the roster of talented writers during the Revolutionary War, Freneau was selected as the most gifted poet of the period, both as an indirect recorder of the conflict and as an author of poetry on native themes in no way related to the war.

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The Contrast, by Royall Tyler.[3]
André, by William Dunlap.[3]

Fiction

Churchill, Winston. Richard Carvel.
Cooper, J. F. Lionel Lincoln; or, The Leaguer of Boston.
Cooper, J. F. The Pilot.
Cooper, J. F. The Spy.
Ford, P. L. Janice Meredith.
Harte, Bret. Thankful Blossom.
Jewett, Sarah Orne. The Tory Lover.
Kennedy, J. P. Horse Shoe Robinson.
Mitchell, S. Weir. Hugh Wynne.
Simms, W. Gilmore. The Partisan.
Simms, W. Gilmore. The Scout.

Poetry

Poems of American History (edited by B. E. Stevenson), pp. 125–265.
American History by American Poets (edited by M. V. Wallington), Vol. I, pp. 125–293.

[3] Also in *Representative American Plays* (edited by A. H. Quinn). 1917.

TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

In a survey course enough material is presented for Hopkinson, Trumbull, Dwight, and Barlow in the collections mentioned in the Book List for this chapter. The only reprint available of Lewis's interesting "Journey from Patapsco to Annapolis" is in "American Poetry" (P. H. Boynton, editor), pp. 24–29. These poems are chiefly significant for the combination of English form and American subject matter.

Compare Trumbull's comments on the education of girls with the corresponding passage by Mrs. Malaprop, in Sheridan's "The Rivals," and with Fitz-Greene Halleck's comments on the education of Fanny, in the poem of that name (see "American Poetry," pp. 127, 128, and 155, 156).

Compare Dwight's "Farmer's Advice to the Villagers," "Greenfield Hill," Pt. VI, with Benjamin Franklin's "The Way to Wealth."

Compare the nationalistic note in the seventh and ninth books of Barlow's "Vision of Columbus" with that in Timrod's "Ethnogenesis" and that in Moody's "Ode in Time of Hesitation." Do the dates of the three poems suggest a progressive change? (See "American Poetry," pp. 123, 349, and 577.)

Read Freneau's more bitter war satires in comparison with Jonathan Odell's "Congratulation" and "The American Times," for which see "American Poetry," pp. 78–83.

Read Freneau's more jovial war satires in comparison with Whittier's "Letter from a Missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church" ("American Poetry," p. 255); John R. Thompson's "On to Richmond" ("American Poetry," p. 325); Edmund C. Stedman's "How Old Brown took Harper's Ferry" ("American Poetry," p. 317); and Lowell's "Biglow Papers."

Read Freneau's "Pictures of Columbus" in comparison with Lowell's "Columbus" ("American Poetry," p. 382); Lanier's "Sonnets on Columbus" ("American Poetry," p. 458); and Joaquin Miller's "Columbus" ("American Poetry," p. 564).

"The Progress of Balloons" derives its title from a whole series of preceding "progress" poems. Cite others and compare them as you can.

With reference to Freneau's diction in nature passages as compared with that of Ames and Lewis in the text, read Wordsworth's essay on "Poetic Diction" prefatory to the lyrical ballads of 1798, with which Freneau agreed and which he anticipated in certain of his poems.

CHAPTER VII
THE EARLY DRAMA

In the growth of most national literatures the theater has developed side by side with the drama, the stage doing for the play what the printing press did for the essay, poem, and novel. But in America, the land of a transplanted civilization, the order was changed and the first plays were supplied from abroad just as the other forms of literature were. In the history of the American stage, therefore, the successive steps were the presentation of English plays by American amateurs in regular audience rooms with improvised stages; then the development of semiprofessional and wholly professional companies who played short seasons at irregular intervals; then the erection of special playhouses; and finally the formation of more permanent professional companies, both English and American, – all of which took place in the course of nearly two generations before the emergence of any native American drama. Recent investigations have so frequently pushed back the years of first performances, playhouses, and plays that now one can offer such dates only as subject to further revision.

According to the "Cambridge History of American Literature," "there seem to have been theatrical performances in this country since 1703." Paul Leicester Ford in his "Washington and the Theater" says, "that there was play-acting in New York, and in Charleston, South Carolina, before 1702, are unquestioned facts." In 1718 Governor Spottswood of Virginia gave an entertainment on the king's birthday, the feature of which was a play, probably acted by the students of William and Mary College, as there are references to later events of this sort. The Virginia governor's patronage bore different fruit from the early indorsement of playing in staid Massachusetts, for Samuel Sewall recorded in his diary of March 2, 1714, a protest at the acting of a play in the council chamber. "Let not Christian Boston," he admonished, "goe beyond Heathen Rome in the practice of Shamefull Vanities." On the other hand, Williamsburg, Virginia, had its own theater before 1720, New York enjoyed professional acting and a playhouse by 1732, and in Charleston, South Carolina, the use of the courtroom was frequent in the two seasons before the opening of a theater in the winter of 1736. These slight beginnings, with further undertakings in Philadelphia, doubtless gave Lewis Hallam, the London actor, courage to venture over with his company in 1752. With his twelve players he brought a repertory of twenty plays and eight farces, the majority of which had never been presented in America; and since the year of their arrival the American theater has had a consecutive and broadening place in the life of the people.

The beginnings of drama in America, to distinguish them from the early life of the theater, are not quite clearly known. The first romantic drama, and the first play written by an American and produced by a professional company, was Thomas Godfrey's "The Prince of Parthia," completed by 1759 and acted in 1767 at the Southwark Theater, Philadelphia. The first drama on native American material – an unproduced problem play – was Robert Rogers's "Ponteach," published in London in 1766. The first American comedy to be produced by a professional company was Royall Tyler's "The Contrast," acted in 1787 at the John Street Theater, New York. The first professional American playwright was William Dunlap (1766–1839), author and producer, who wrote, adapted, and translated over sixty plays, operas, sketches, farces, and interludes, of which at least fifty were produced and nearly thirty have been published. The first actor and playwright of more than local prominence was John Howard Payne (1791–1852), more original than Dunlap and equally prolific, with one or two great successes and eighteen published plays to his credit. The history of the American drama, as yet unwritten, will be a big work when it is fully done, for the output has been very large. Three hundred and seventy-eight plays are known to have been published by 1830 and nearly twice that number to have been played by 1860. In the remainder of this chapter, the aim of which is to

induce study of plays within the reach of the average college class, four dramas will be discussed because they are interesting in themselves and because they are early representatives of types which still prevail.

The first is "The Prince of Parthia," a romantic tragedy by Thomas Godfrey (1736–1763). He was the son of a scientist, a youth of cultured companions, West the painter and Hopkinson the poet-composer, and his almost certain attendance at performances of the American company of actors led him, in addition to his juvenile poems, to make his ambitious attempt at drama. "The Prince of Parthia" is evidently imitative, and yet no more so than most American poems, essays, novels, and plays written in the generation to which Godfrey belonged until his early death at the age of twenty-seven. The Hallam and American companies had played more of Shakespeare than any other one thing, somewhat of Beaumont and Fletcher, and more or less of Restoration drama; and these combined influences appear in Godfrey's work. There are traces from "Hamlet," signs of "Macbeth," evidences of "The Maid's Tragedy," and responses to the Restoration interest in pseudo-oriental subjects. Yet the play should not be dismissed with these comments as though they were a condemnation. What is more to the point is the fact that "The Prince" is very admirable as a piece of imitative writing. The verse is fluent and at times stately. The construction as a whole is well considered. The characters are consistent, and their actions are based on sufficient motives. Many a later American dramatist fell far short of Godfrey both in excellence of style and in firmness of structure and characterization. Had Godfrey lived and had he passed out of his natural deference for models, he might have done dramatic writing quite equal to that of many a well-known successor. The twentieth-century mind is unaccustomed to the "tragedy of blood." A play with a king and two princely sons at once in love with the same captive maiden, a jealous queen, a vengeful stepson, and a court full of intriguing nobles, a story which ends with the accumulating deaths of the six leading characters, hardly appeals to theatergoers accustomed to dramas which are more economical in their material. But Godfrey should be compared with his own contemporaries, and, all things considered, he stands the comparison well. The type of poetic drama he attempted reoccurs later in the work of Robert Montgomery Bird, Nathaniel Parker Willis, George Henry Boker, and Julia Ward Howe, and reappears in the present generation in plays by such men as Richard Hovey and Percy Mackaye.

The second notable play was Robert Rogers's (1730? -1795) "Ponteach: or the Savages of America," published in London in 1766. The fact that it was not produced at the time must be laid to managerial timidity rather than to defects in the play, for it has some of the merits of Godfrey's work in the details and construction. Two reasons sufficient to put a cautious manager on guard were its criticism of the English and its treatment of the churchman. For the play as a whole is a sharp indictment of the white man's avarice in his transactions with the Indians, in the course of which a Roman Catholic priest is by no means the least guilty. Traders, hunters, and governors combine in malice and deceit, undermining the character of the Indians and at the same time embittering them against their English conquerors. A play with this burden, written so soon after the Seven Years' War, had no more chance of being produced than a pacifist production did from 1914 to 1918. Godfrey's treatment of the Indians seems at first glance unconvincing, but this is chiefly because of the way he made them talk. All the savages and all the different types of white rascal hold forth in the same elevated rhetorical discourse. This fact, which constitutes a valid criticism, should be tempered by the recollection that generations were yet to pass before anything lifelike was to be achieved in dialect writing. Cooper's Indians are quite as stately in speech as Rogers's. Yet, like Cooper, Rogers endowed them with native dignity, self-control, tribal loyalty, and reverence for age as well as with treachery and the lust for blood. If "Ponteach" had been an indictment of the French instead of the English, it is a fair guess that American audiences would have seen it and greeted it "with universal applause." As an Indian play it was followed by many successors – Pocahontas alone was the theme of four plays between 1808 and 1848. As a race play it broke the trail not only for these but for others which branched off to the negro theme – from "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "The Octoroon," before the

Civil War, to Sheldon's "The Nigger," of 1911. As a problem-purpose play it was the first American contribution to a long series which never flags entirely and which always multiplies in years when class or political feeling runs high.

The third notable American play – a success of 1787 and the first of many successes in its field – was "The Contrast," a comedy by Royall Tyler (1757–1826). Its purport is indicated in the opening lines of the prologue:

> Exult each patriot heart! – this night is shewn
> A piece, which we may fairly call our own;
> Where the proud titles of "My Lord! Your Grace!"
> To humble Mr. and plain Sir give place.
> Our Author pictures not from foreign climes
> The fashions, or the follies of the times;
> But has confin'd the subject of his work
> To the gay scenes – the circles of New York.

There is a complacency of pioneership in this and a hint at servility among other playwrights which are not strictly justified by the facts, but the prologue is none the less interesting for this. It is quite as true to its period as the content of the play is, for it displays the independence of conscious revolt, exactly the note of Freneau's "Literary Importation" written only two years earlier (see p. 78) and a constantly recurrent one in American literature for the next fifty years.

Tyler's play is a comedy of manners setting forth "the contrast between a gentleman who has read Chesterfield and received the polish of Europe and an unpolished, untraveled American." This is reënforced by the antithesis between an unscrupulous coquette and a feminine model of all the virtues, and between a popinjay servant and a crude countryman, the original stage Yankee. As far as the moral is concerned the play makes its point not because the good characters are admirable but because the bad ones are so vapid. Manly, the hero, is well disposed of by his frivolous sister's statement: "His conversation is like a rich, old-fashioned brocade, it will stand alone; every sentence is a sentiment"; and Maria, the heroine, is revealed by her own observation that "the only safe asylum a woman of delicacy can find is in the arms of a man of honor." Yet the contrasts lead to good dramatic situations and to some amusing comedy, and the play is further interesting because of the fund of allusion to what Tyler considered both worthless and worthy English literary influences. The extended reference to "The School for Scandal" as seen at the theater by Jonathan is acknowledgment enough of Tyler's debt to an English master. "The Contrast" is the voice of young America protesting its superiority to old England and old Europe. It had been audible before the date of Tyler's play, and it was to be heard again and again for the better part of a century and in all forms of literature. In drama the most famous play of the type in the next two generations was Anna C. O. Mowatt's "Fashion" of 1845. "Contrast" was furthermore a forerunner of many later plays which were descriptive without being satirical, a large number of which carried New York in their titles as well as in their contents. These doubtless looked back quite directly to the repeated successes of Pierce Egan's "Life in London," but they had all to acknowledge that Tyler was the early and conspicuous playwright who had

> confin'd the subject of his work
> To the gay scenes – the circles of New York.

The fourth and last play for any detailed comment here is "André" (1798) by William Dunlap (1766–1839). Dunlap asked for recognition, as Tyler had done, on nationalistic grounds,

> A Native Bard, a native scene displays,

And claims your candour for his daring lays;

and he took heed, as Rogers seems not to have done, of the risk he was running in entering the perilous straits of political controversy in which "Ponteach" was stranded before it had reached the theater:

O, may no party spirit blast his views,
Or turn to ill the meanings of the Muse;
She sings of wrongs long past, Men as they were,
To instruct, without reproach, the Men that are;
Then judge the Story by the genius shown,
And praise, or damn it, for its worth alone.

Party feeling was high at the time over the opposing claims of France and England – "The Rival Suitors for America," as Freneau called them in his verses of 1795. "Hail Columbia," by Joseph Hopkinson, made an immediate hit when sung at an actors' benefit less than four weeks after the production of "André," and made it by an appeal to broad national feeling. And Dunlap, after a slip of sentiment in the first performance, kept clear of politics, and showed tact as well as daring by making the Briton heroic, though a spy, and by his fine treatment of the unnamed "General," who was evidently Washington. Dunlap's play showed a ready appreciation of theatrical effectiveness. It was the work of a playmaker rather than a poet, and the verse had none of the elevation of Godfrey's or Rogers's. It was far better than the declamatory stage efforts of the Revolutionary years by Brackenridge, Leacock, Low, and Mercy Warren, and it was the best early specimen of the historical romance for which there is always a ready patronage.

Dunlap is more significant as an all-round man in the early history of the American theater than as a pure dramatist. He was a good judge of what the public wanted, and fairly able to achieve it. What he could not write he could translate or adapt. He turned Schiller's "Don Carlos" into English, and it failed; but he made a great success of Zschokke's "Abaellino" and translated no less than thirteen plays of Kotzebue. A comic opera, a dramatic satire, a farce, or an interlude seemed all one to him in point of ease or difficulty. From 1796 to 1803 he produced more than four plays a year under his own management at the Park Theater in New York. He continued as a manager till 1805 and was connected with the theater again in 1810–1811. Finally, to cap all, in 1832 he published in two volumes his "History of the American Theater," which, though inaccurate in many details, is full of the personal recollections of men and events that no amount of exact scholarship could now unearth.

The really auspicious beginnings in American play-writing up to 1800 were hardly followed up in the period before the interruption of the drama by the Civil War. One man stands out, John Howard Payne (1791–1852). Starting as a precocious boy actor and a dramatist whose first play was staged at the age of fifteen, he developed into a reputation greater than that of Dunlap, but in the perspective of time little more enduring. His "Brutus" was played for years by well-known tragedians, and his "Charles II," in which Washington Irving had a hand, was long successful as a comedy. But he was too prolific for high excellence, and he did nothing new. Now and then men who wrote abundantly produced single plays of rather high merit though of imitative quality, such as Robert Montgomery Bird's "Broker of Bogota." There was a generous output, but a low level of production; tragedies, historical plays, comedies of manners, local dramas, social satires, melodramas, and farces followed in steady flow. Successful novels of Cooper, Simms, Mrs. Stowe, and writers of lesser note were quickly staged, but no one of undoubted distinction came to the fore. Writers in other fields, like Nathaniel Parker Willis, the essayist, George Henry Boker, the poet, and Julia Ward Howe, turned their hands at times to play-writing with moderate success. But it is significant that the conspicuous names of the period were names of actors and producers rather than of playwrights. The history of

the American stage has been unbroken up to the present time, but it was not until near the end of the century that the literary material presented on the stage became more than a vehicle for the enterprise of managers and the talents of actors. This later stage will be briefly discussed in one of the closing chapters of this book.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

The best available sources of material are the collection of A. H. Quinn, which contains three of the plays mentioned in detail, and the first volume of the collection of M. J. Moses, which contains all four, and a half dozen more from the early period.

There is no need of suggesting specific topics in connection with the different plays. Each one may be read with reference to its story content – the kind of plot, of characters, of scenes, of episodes – or with reference to the skill with which it was written – the construction, the characterization, the supply of motives for action, the dialogue, the prose or verse style – or with reference to the personality of the author and the "signs of the times" – the purpose of the play, the moral, intellectual, and æsthetic character and prejudices of the author.

If the student is working toward a report – written or oral – he will arrive at a satisfactory result only as he limits himself to one very definite subdivision and presents his findings in detail.

CHAPTER VIII
CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN

The first professional man of letters in America, and the last of note who was born before the Revolution, was Charles Brockden Brown. His short life, from 1771 to 1810, was almost exactly contemporary with the productive middle half of Freneau's long career. That he earned his living by his pen is a matter of incidental interest in American literary history; the more important facts are that he looms large in the chronicles of the American novel and that he was a factor in the development of the American periodical.

He was born in Philadelphia. "His parents," says Dunlap, whose whole biography is written with the same labored elevation, "were virtuous, religious people, and as such held a respectable rank in society; and he could trace back a long line of ancestry holding the same honorable station." He was a delicate, precocious child, and under the prevalent forcing process of the day was cultivated into an infant prodigy. By the time that he was sixteen he was well schooled in the classics; he had versified parts of Job, the Psalms, and Ossian; he had sketched plans for three epic poems; and he had permanently undermined his health. At eighteen he was studying law, indulging in debate and in philosophical speculation, and was the author of his first published magazine article. In the next few years – the dates are not exactly recorded – he abandoned the law; at one time gave thanks that because of his feeble health he was free from the ordinary temptations of youth, and at another, for the same reason, contemplated suicide; and finally, to escape the urgent counsels of his advisers, he left his home city for New York. Here he fell in with congenial literary companions, joined the Friendly Club, in which among other benefits he was the recipient of friendly criticism for his "disputatiousness and dogmatism," and in the stirring period of the '90's began to dream Utopian dreams of a new heaven on the old earth.

His active authorship, which began with 1797, was varied and incessant. It included between then and 1810 a large number of magazine contributions (many of them serials), six novels (all published between 1798 and 1801), several other volumes more or less in the nature of hack work, and nine years of periodical editorship. He wrote with the confidence of youth for a youthful and uncritical reading public, with the natural result that his output was more bulky than distinguished. He was immensely communicative: filled with "the rapture with which he held communion with his own thoughts" – committing them to paper in a copious journal, in circumstantial letters, and in the rivulet which flowed from his pen into the forgotten gulf of magazinedom. In 1799 he was working on five different novels, although from April until the end of the next year he was editing *The Monthly Magazine and American Review*. Before he was thirty his reputation was established and his important work was done. In 1801 he returned to Philadelphia with achieved success as a reply to the friends who had tried to dissuade him from professional writing. There he undertook in 1803 another editorial venture in *The Literary Magazine and American Register*. From the excited young radical of a half-dozen years earlier, disciple of William Godwin, he had become by some reaction a fulfiller of his pious ancestry. In his statement of principles he made it clear that he would rather be respectable than disturbing in his sentiments. He referred to the recent bold attacks on "the foundations of religion and morality," declared that he would conserve these and proscribe everything that offended against them, and concluded (using the editorial third person): "His poetical pieces may be dull, but they at least shall be free from voluptuousness or sensuality; and his prose, whether seconded or not by genius and knowledge, shall scrupulously aim at the promotion of public and private virtue." Even under the weight of this unmitigated morality the magazine was continued for four years. Brown had, however, stepped down from the level of an author who was in any degree creative to a platform for dispensing commonplace conservatism and useful knowledge. The decline is further proven by the nature of his

last industrious ventures: "The American Register, or General Repository of History, Politics and Science" (Philadelphia, 1807–1811, seven vols.) and a prospectus in 1809 of an unfinished "System of General Geography; containing a Topographical, Statistical and Descriptive Survey of the Earth." With the handicap of his early impaired health and under the burden of his self-imposed schedule his strength failed him, and he died in 1810, an overworked consumptive. It is quite evident, however, that his distinctive work was done. If old age had been granted him, unless some amazing reversal of form had taken place, it would have been a long, industrious, and ultraconventional anticlimax to the rather brilliant promise of his young manhood.

In entering the field of fiction-writing Brown took his place in the newest literary movement in America. For nearly two centuries, as the preceding chapters have shown, poetry and expository prose had been the only accepted forms. Some years after the beginnings of a native theater in the middle of the eighteenth century the first attempts were made in a native drama, but they were faint and scant and were looked on with indifference, if not with disapproval, by most of the country. The chief tide of composition after the war for independence was controlled by the twin moons of Pope and Addison. The triumph of the English novel had occurred in the twenty-five years after the death of Pope, however, and its influence could not be long unfelt. In fact the six years of controversy which led to the dismissal of Jonathan Edwards from his Northampton church in 1750 (see p. 43) suggest that Richardson achieved a furtive reading almost at once; for it was Edwards's protest against certain books which led to "lascivious and obscene discourse" among the young people that started the whole trouble – and "Pamela" was the sensation of the day. A later disapproval of Richardson was based merely on his encouragement of frivolity. Says Trumbull of Harriet Simper, in "The Progress of Dulness" of 1773:

> Thus Harriet reads, and reading really
> Believes herself a young Pamela,
> The high-wrought whim, the tender strain
> Elate her mind and turn her brain:
> Before her glass, with smiling grace,
> She views the wonders of her face;
> There stands in admiration moveless,
> And hopes a Grandison, or Lovelace.

And by 1804 so strait a conservative as President Dwight of Yale could refer with complacency to novelists in general, and to Sterne in particular: "Our progress resembled not a little that of my Uncle Toby; for we could hardly be said to advance at all."

The earliest American novels were tentative beginnings of several sorts. The first was "The Power of Sympathy," by a Lady of Boston (Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton), in 1789. It was soon overshadowed by Susanna Rowson's extremely popular "Charlotte" in 1790. Both were highly-seasoned love stories. Of a different kind was H. H. Brackenridge's "Modern Chivalry" (1792–1793-1797), a rollicking satire on democracy carried on a narrative thread, with about the same right to be termed a novel as Pierce Egan's "Life in London" of a generation later. Different again was G. Imlay's "The Emigrants" (1793), a tale of the West with a conventional London plot and set of characters. And different again was Royall Tyler's "The Algerine Captive" (1797), a contemporary story combining social satire, travel, and international politics, with significant witness in the preface to the growing American vogue of the novel.

When Brown came to the point of telling his own stories, however, he did not follow in the footsteps of any American predecessors, but turned to a type for which he was especially fitted – the Gothic romance. This was the first extravagant contribution of fiction to the Romantic movement, – the tale of wonder and horror, of alternating moonlit serenities and midnight storms, of haunted

castles and secret chambers, of woods and vales and caves and precipices, of apparent supernaturalism which was explained away in a conscientious anticlimax, and of the same seraphic heroine and diabolical villain who had played the leading roles for Richardson. It had been developed by Horace Walpole and Mrs. Anne Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis and finally by William Godwin, who combined all this machinery into a kind of literary "tank" for the conveyance of a didactic gun crew, for his "Caleb Williams" was in fact little more than "Political Justice" in narrative camouflage. This was a formula exactly to Brown's taste, since he had both a strong ethical bias and a liking for the mysterious. His particular undertaking was to translate it into American terms, a task that he carried through in his extraordinary output of 1798 to 1801.

The first to be published was "Wieland," a gradually increasing succession of horrors which are brought about through the influence of a mysterious voice. By the oracular commands of the unseen speaker Wieland's double tendency to superstition and melancholy is deepened into a calm and steady fanaticism. At the end, in obedience to what he thinks is the voice of God, he murders his wife and children and, confessing, is acquitted on grounds of insanity. The horrid chapter of mishaps is explained by the repentant villain, Carwin, a ventriloquist, who accounts for the stupendous wickedness of his achievement by nothing more convincing than an irresistible inclination to practice his talent. "Ormond," of the next year, is a story of feminine virtue triumphant over obstacles, which is complicated by the employment of two heroines, two victimized fathers, and two villains. The element of horror is supplied in the background of the yellow-fever plague; and the mystery, by the apparent omniscience of the worse of the malefactors, who is simply an ingenious resorter to false doors and secret partitions.

Brown's most ambitious novel was "Arthur Mervyn," which appeared in two volumes in 1799 and 1800. It carries as a subtitle "The Memoirs of 1793." These days, according to the preface, were suggestive to "the moral observer, to whom they have furnished new displays of the influence of human passions and motives." He has used "such incidents as appeared to him most instructive and remarkable," believing that "it is every one's duty to profit by all opportunities of inculcating upon mankind the lessons of justice and humanity." He believes in tragic realism on account of the "pity" which it may inspire. As a matter of fact the plague seems rather incidental than integral to the story. It gives rise to the introduction of Arthur Mervyn on the scene and to the long piece of retrospective narrative which occupies all of the first volume. This tells of the experiences of Arthur, three days long, with a consummate villain, Welbeck, just as the sins of the latter return to him in a dozen ways. The second volume pursues certain unfinished stories begun in the first, the general motives being to show how completely the innocent Arthur Mervyn is misunderstood and to present his efforts to atone in some degree for the offenses of the real sinner. The structure is by no means as firm even as this analysis would seem to indicate. It is an endless ramification of stories within stories, and stops at last without any sufficient conclusion.

"Arthur Mervyn" is evidently indebted to William Godwin, of whose "transcendent powers" in "Caleb Williams" Brown was an ardent admirer. But it as hard for the modern reader to see why either book is strikingly individual. Godwin's feelings about the travesties on justice indulged in by the English courts had been anticipated by Smollett in "Roderick Random" (chap. lxi ff.); and Caleb's hard times as a fugitive from a false charge are very similar to Roderick's. In the light of history it seems apparent that Brown was impressed by the book because it was widely popular when he was writing, and that its popularity was due not so much to its merits as to its political timeliness at a moment of revolutionary excitement. Of Brown's three remaining novels only one, "Edgar Huntly," is of any importance. This is a good detective story, fresher than any of his others. A somnambulist who murders while walking in his sleep supplies the horror and creates the mystery; and certain pictures of frontier life and Allegheny Mountain scenery, with an Indian massacre and a panther fight, are effectively homemade.

Brown's novels should naturally be estimated in comparison with the works of his contemporaries rather than with the crisp and clean-cut narrative of the present, but even so they are burdened with very evident defects. The most flagrant of these are the natural fruits of hasty writing. He is quoted as saying to one of his friends, "Sir, good pens, thick paper, and ink well diluted, would facilitate my composition more than the prospect of the broadest expanse of clouds, water or mountains rising above the clouds." This suggests the steady craftsmanship of Anthony Trollope with his thousand words an hour. Yet he was in no respect of style or construction the equal of Trollope. His novels are full of loose ends and inconsequences. He is unblushing in his reliance on "the long arm of coincidence." Even when one untangles the plots from the maze of circumstance in which he involves them, they are unconvincing because they are so deficient in human motive. Moreover, in style they are expressed in language which is dizzily exalted even for the formal period in which they were written. "I proceeded to the bath, and filling the reservoir with water, speedily dissipated the heat that incommoded me." "I had been a stranger to what is called love. From subsequent reflection I have contracted a suspicion that the sentiment with which I regarded the lady was not untinctured from this source and that hence arose the turbulence of my feelings."

As he never wrote – never had time to write – with painstaking care, his best passages are those which he set down with passionate rapidity. When the subject in hand rapt him clean out of himself so that he became part of the story, he could transmit his thrill to the reader. The horrors of a plague-stricken city such as he had survived in New York made him forget to be "literary." And the tense excitement of an actor in moments of suspense he could recreate in himself and on paper. His gifts, therefore, were such as to strengthen the climaxes of his stories and to emphasize the flatness of the long levels between. He had the weakness of a dramatist who could write nothing but "big scenes," but his big scenes were thrillers of the first magnitude. He was a journalist with a ready pen; his best work was done in the mood and manner of a gifted reporter. He had neither the constructive imagination nor the scrupulous regard for details of the creative artist.

Although in his Gothic tales Brown was a pioneer among American novelists, he was like many another American of early days in trailing along after a declining English fashion. By 1800 the great day of the Gothic romance was over. Within a few years it was to become a literary oddity. Scott was to continue in what he called the "big bow-wow" strain but was to make his romances rational and human, and Jane Austen was to describe the feelings and characters of ordinary life with the hearty contempt for the extravagances of the Radcliffe school which she expressed throughout "Northanger Abbey" (chaps. 1, xx ff.). Yet in his own period Brown was recognized in England as well as in America. The best reviews took him seriously, Godwin owed a return influence from him, Shelley read him with absorbed attention, Scott borrowed the names of two of his characters. In these facts there is evidence that he was American not only in his acceptance of foreign influence but in his conversion of what he received into a product that was truly his own and truly American. There are more or less distinct hints of Cooper and Poe and Hawthorne in the material and the temper of his writings, and there is more than a hint of Mrs. Stowe and Lew Wallace and the modern purpose-novelists in the grave intention to inculcate "upon mankind the lessons of justice and morality" with which he undertook his labors.

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TOPICS AND PROBLEMS

Read W. L. Cross's "Development of the English Novel" for general characterization of the Gothic romance, and for contemporary reaction against this type of fiction read Jane Austen's "Northanger Abbey," chaps. i, xx ff.

Brown and his work are so remote from the present that they challenge inevitable comparisons with other authors who preceded, accompanied, or followed him in literary history. For example:

Read "Arthur Mervyn," Bk. I, for a comparison in handling similar material with Defoe's "Journal of the Plague Year" and the entries in Pepys's Diary on the plague of 1666.

Read "Arthur Mervyn" for a comparison of subject matter, plot, and purpose with Godwin's "Caleb Williams."

Read "Edgar Huntly" for a comparison as a detective story with any modern story, as, for example, one of Conan Doyle's.

Read the great suspense passages in "Wieland" for a comparison with similar passages in the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.

CHAPTER IX
IRVING AND THE KNICKERBOCKER SCHOOL

The turn to Washington Irving and his chief associates in New York – James Fenimore Cooper and William Cullen Bryant – is a turn from colonial to national America and from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. This is not to say that what they wrote was utterly and dramatically different from what had been written in the colonial period; yet there are many points of clear distinction to be marked. With them, for one thing, New York City first assumed the literary leadership of the country. It was not a permanent conquest, but it was notable as marking the fact that the new country had a dominating city. As a rule the intellectual and artistic life of a country centers about its capital. Athens, Rome, Paris, London, are places through which the voices of Greece, Italy, France, and England have uttered their messages. These cities have held their preëminence, moreover, because, in addition to being the seats of government, they have been the great commercial centers and usually the great ports of their countries. In the United States, then, the final adoption of Washington in the District of Columbia as the national capital was a compromise step; this could not result in bringing to it the additional distinction which natural conditions gave to New York. Washington has never been more than the city where the national business of government is carried on; locating the center for art and literature has been beyond the control of legislative action. For the first third of the nineteenth century New York was the favored city. Here Irving was born, and here Cooper and Bryant came as young men, rather than to the Philadelphia of Franklin and his contemporaries.

For these men of New York, America was an accomplished fact – a nation slowly and awkwardly taking its place among the nations of the world. To be sure, the place that Americans wanted to take, following the advice of George Washington, was one of withdrawal from the turmoil of the Old World and of safety from "entangling alliances" which could ever again bring it into the warfare from which it was so glad to be escaping. The Atlantic was immensely broader in those days than now, for its real breadth is to be measured not in miles but in the number of days that it takes to cross it. When Irving went abroad for the first time in 1803 he was fifty-nine days in passage. To-day one can go round the world in considerably less time, and the average fast Atlantic steamship passage is one tenth of that, while the aëroplane flight has divided the time by ten again. So the early Americans rejoiced in their "magnificent isolation" and wanted to grow up as dignified, respected, but very distant neighbors of the Old World.

It was an unhappy fact, however, that America – or the United States – was not notable for its dignity in the early years of the nineteenth century; for the finest dignity, like charity, "is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly," whereas the new nation was very self-conscious; quickly irritated at foreign criticism, and uncomfortably aware of its own crudities in manner and defects in character. As far as foreign criticism was concerned, there were ample reasons for annoyance in America. Even as early as 1775 John Trumbull[4] had felt that it was hopeless to expect fair treatment at the hands of English reviewers, warning his friends Dwight and Barlow,

> Such men to charm could Homer's muse avail,
> Who read to cavil, and who write to rail;
> When ardent genius pours the bold sublime,
> Carp at the style, or nibble at the rhyme;

[4] Lines addressed to Messrs. Dwight and Barlow.

and the mother country, after the Revolution and the War of 1812, was less inclined than before to deal in compliment. Man after man came over,

> Like Fearon, Ashe, and others we could mention;
> Who paid us friendly visits to abuse
> Our country, and find food for the reviews.[5]

Moreover, all the time that England was criticizing her runaway child, she was maddeningly complacent as to her own virtues. Americans could not strike back with any effect, because they could not make the English feel their blows. So they fretted and fumed for half a century, their discomfort finding its clearest expression in Lowell's lines[6]:

> She *is* some punkins, thet I wun't deny
> (For ain't she some related to you 'n' I?)
> But there's a few small intrists here below
> Outside the counter o' John Bull an' Co,
> An' though they can't conceit how't should be so,
> I guess the Lord druv down Creation's spiles
> 'thout no *gret* helpin' from the British Isles,
> An' could contrive to keep things pooty stiff
> Ef they withdrawed from business in a miff;
> I ha'n't no patience with sech swellin' fellers ez
> Think God can't forge 'thout them to blow the bellerses.

A further reason for uneasiness in the face of foreign comment was that honest Americans were aware that their country suffered from the crudities of youth. It is unpleasant enough for "Seventeen" to be nagged by an unsympathetic maiden aunt, but it is intolerable if she has some ground for her naggings. In small matters as well as great "conscience doth make cowards of us all." In a period of such rapid expansion as prevailed in the young manhood of Irving, Cooper, and Bryant it was unavoidable that most of the population were drawn into business undertakings that were usually eager and hurried and that were often slipshod or even shady. The American colleges and their graduates were not as distinguished as they had been in the earlier colonial days, and the new influence of European culture from the Old World universities was yet to come. In the cities, and notably in New York, the vulgar possessors of mushroom fortunes multiplied rapidly, bringing up vapid daughters like Halleck's "Fanny,"[7] who in all the modern languages was

> Exceedingly well-versed; and had devoted
> To their attainment, far more time than has,
> By the best teachers, lately been allotted;
> For she had taken lessons, twice a week,
> For a full month in each; and she could speak
>
> French and Italian, equally as well
> As Chinese, Portuguese, or German; and,
> What is still more surprising, she could spell

[5] Fitzgreene Halleck, "Fanny," stanza lviii.

[6] Mason and Slidell, ll. 155–165.

[7] "Fanny," stanzas cxxi, cxxii.

Most of our longest English words off-hand;
Was quite familiar in Low Dutch and Spanish,
And thought of studying modern Greek and Danish;

and whose father, a man of newly affected silence that spoke "unutterable things," was established in a mortgaged house filled with servants and "whatever is necessary for a 'genteel liver'" and buttressed with a coach and half a dozen unpaid-for horses. At the same time the countryside was developing a native but not altogether admirable Yankee type. At their best, Halleck[8] wrote,

The people of today
Appear good, honest, quiet men enough
And hospitable too – for ready pay;
With manners like their roads, a little rough,
And hands whose grasp is warm and welcoming, though tough.

And at their worst Whittier[9] looked back a half century, to 1818, and recalled them as

Shrill, querulous women, sour and sullen men,
Untidy, loveless, old before their time,
With scarce a human interest save their own
Monotonous round of small economies,
Or the poor scandal of the neighborhood;

...

Church-goers, fearful of the unseen Powers,
But grumbling over pulpit tax and pew-rent,
Saving, as shrewd economists, their souls
And winter pork, with the least possible outlay
Of salt and sanctity; in daily life
Showing as little actual comprehension
Of Christian charity and love and duty
As if the Sermon on the Mount had been
Outdated like a last year's almanac.

A natural consequence of such criticism from without, and such raw and defective culture within the country, was that American writers of any moment bided their time as patiently as they could, recognizing that for the moment America must be a nation of workers who were

rearing the pedestal, broad-based and grand,
Whereon the fair shapes of the Artist shall stand,
And creating, through labors undaunted and long,
The theme for all Sculpture and Painting and Song.[10]

[8] "Wyoming," stanza iv.

[9] "Among the Hills" (Prelude, 71 ff.).

[10] Lowell, "Fable for Critics."

Finally, it is worth noting that the first three eminent writers in nineteenth-century America were themselves not university products. Bryant withdrew from Williams College at the end of the first year, and Cooper from Yale toward the end of the second. The real education of these two and of Irving, who did not even enter college, was in the world of action rather than in the world of books, and their associates were for the most part men of affairs.

WASHINGTON IRVING

Many of the facts about the boyhood and youth of Washington Irving (1783–1859) are typical of his place and his period as well as true of himself. The first is that he was born (in New York City) of British-American parents, his father a Scotch Presbyterian from the Orkney Islands and his mother an Englishwoman. His father's rigid religious views dominated in the upbringing of himself and his six brothers and sisters. Two nearly inevitable results followed: one, that as a boy he grew to believe that almost everything that was enjoyable was wicked, and the other, that as he came toward manhood he was particularly fond of the pleasures of life. A boy of his capacities in Boston at this time would have been more than likely to go to Harvard College, which was a dominating influence in eastern Massachusetts, but King's College (Columbia) occupied no such position in New York. Irving's higher education began in a law office, and then, when his health seemed to be failing, was continued by travel abroad. The long journey, or series of journeys, that he took from 1804 to 1806 were of the greatest importance. They were important to Irving because he was peculiarly fitted to get the greatest good from such informal education. He was an attractive young fellow, so that it was easy for him to make and to hold friends; and he was blessed with his father's moral balance, so that he did not fall into bad habits. He was so far inclined to laziness that it is doubtful if he would have achieved much if he had gone to college, but he was wide-awake and receptive, so that he absorbed information wherever he went. Furthermore, he had a mind as well as a memory, and he came back to America stocked not merely with a great lot of miscellaneous facts but with a real knowledge of human nature and of human life.

From the day of his return to New York in 1806 to the day of his death, in 1859, Washington Irving had an international point of view and developed steadily into an international character. His first piece of writing was that of a very young man, but a young man of promise. Like the other Americans of his day he had read a good deal of English literature written in the eighteenth century; and among the essayists of that century who had attracted his attention one was Oliver Goldsmith. New York supplied him with his subjects and Goldsmith with his method of attack, for he wrote, in company with one of his brothers and a mutual friend, a series of amusing criticisms on the ways of his townsmen, modeling his *Salmagundi Papers* after Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World*. This was at once independent and imitative. The youthful authors blithely announced in their introductory number that they proposed to "instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town, and castigate the age." In the twenty-two papers that came out at irregular intervals between January, 1807, and January, 1808, they criticized everything that struck their attention, and they had their eyes wide open. The American love of display, the inclination to indulge in fruitless discussion which made the country a "logocracy" rather than a democracy, the lack of both judgment and order which marked their political elections, and their social and literary fashions make just a beginning of the list of subjects held up to genial ridicule. Yet, though the criticism was fair and to the point, it was an old-fashioned kind of comment, the kind that England had been feeding on for the better part of a century, ever since Addison and Steele had made it popular in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Moreover, it was done in an old-fashioned way, for in making Mustapha Rub-a-Dub Keli Khan, the Tripolitan, the foreign commentator on American life as he saw it with a stranger's eyes, they were using a device that was old even before it was employed by the Englishman from whom they borrowed it. The *Salmagundis* are interesting, however, as early representatives of a longish succession of satires on the life of New York, all pleasant and rather pleasantly superficial. Three years later Irving, this time alone, followed up this initial success with his "Knickerbocker's History of New York," not as serious a piece of work as its title at first suggests, for it was a burlesque of a heavy and pretentious history on the same subject which had appeared just before. Like the *Salmagundis* it was vivacious and impertinent, the very clever work of a very young man.

Now for ten years Washington Irving produced nothing as a writer. He was engaged in business with his brothers, and proved himself the most level-headed member of a pretty unbusinesslike combination. In 1815, in connection with one of their many ambitious and unsuccessful schemes, he went abroad, probably without the least suspicion that he would be absent from his own country for seventeen years and that he would return to it as a celebrated writer widely read in two continents. The first step toward his wider reputation came in 1819 with the publication in London of "The Sketch Book," the best known of all his works. This was followed in 1822 by "Bracebridge Hall" and in 1824 by "Tales of a Traveller," both similar in tone and contents to "The Sketch Book." With a reputation as a graceful writer of sketches and stories now thoroughly established, he turned to a more substantial and ambitious form of work in the composition of "The History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus," living and writing in Madrid for the two years before its publication in 1828; and this book he followed quickly, as in the case of "The Sketch Book," with two other productions of the same kind – "The Conquest of Granada" in 1829 and "The Voyages and Discoveries of the Companions of Columbus" in 1831. For three years before his return to America, Irving served as Secretary of Legation to the court of St. James, London, and then came back to enjoy at home a popularity which had been almost wholly earned abroad. Out of his career thus far four main facts deserve attention. First, that his literary work began with two pieces of social satire, written in a boyish, jovial manner which he largely abandoned in later years; second, that his fame was established on works of "The Sketch Book" type, made up of short units, gracefully written, and full of quiet humor and tender sentiment (now and again he continued in this sort of composition up to the end of his life); third, that in his maturer years he resorted to the writing of formal history, and that he followed the first three studies, done in Spain, with "Oliver Goldsmith" in 1849, "Mahomet and his Successors" in 1850, and "The Life of Washington," completed in 1859, the year of his death. To these literary facts should be added a fourth which is both literary and political and of no small significance in history – the fact of Irving's appointment to a post in the foreign diplomatic service. This was to be followed in his own life by his four years as Minister to Spain in 1842–1846, under President Harrison, and in the next fifty years by a distinguished list of other appointments to the consular and diplomatic staffs. No single group has done more to bring honor to the United States in the courts of Europe during the nineteenth century than writers like Irving, Hawthorne, Motley, Howells, Bayard Taylor, Lowell, Hay, and their successors down to Thomas Nelson Page and Brand Whitlock.

To return to "The Sketch Book." By 1818, three years after Irving had gone abroad for the second time, the business in which he had been engaged with his brothers had utterly failed, and he was forced to regard writing not merely as an attractive way of diverting himself but as a possible source of income. The new articles which he then wrote, together with many which had been accumulating in the leisure of his years in England, were soon ready for publication, but they found no English publisher ready to risk putting them out. Even the powerful influence of Sir Walter Scott, Irving's cordial friend, could not prevail at first with John Murray, "the prince of publishers." In 1819 Sidney Smith's contemptuous and famous query, "Who reads an American book?" was fairly representative of the English-reading public. Murray was interested in Irving's manuscript, but did not see any prospect of selling enough books to justify the risk of publication. Irving had wanted the indorsement of Murray's imprint to offset the severity of the kind of English criticism deplored years earlier by John Trumbull (see p. 111). As soon, however, as the sketches were printed in New York in a set of seven modest installments, the attention of English readers was attracted to them, and Irving heard rumors that a "pirated" English edition was to appear. There was no international copyright in those days, and no adequate one until as late as 1899; so that a book printed on one side of the Atlantic was fair game for anyone who chose to steal it on the other. If an author wanted his works to appear correctly and to get his full money return for them, it was necessary for him to go through all the details of publishing independently in both countries. After a great deal of difficulty, therefore,

Irving contrived to get out an English edition through an inefficient publisher, but the success of it was so marked that Murray soon saw the light and from then on was eager to get the English rights for everything that Irving wrote and to pay him in advance five, ten, and, in one case, as much as fifteen thousand dollars.

With the appearance of “The Sketch Book” England arrived at a new answer for Sidney Smith’s question. Irving was sought as a celebrity by the many, in addition to being loved as a charming gentleman by his older friends. Few tributes are more telling than that contained in a letter written many years later by Charles Dickens in which he refers to the delight he took in Irving’s pages when he was “a small and not over particularly well taken care of boy.” Even the austere *Edinburgh Review* indorsed the American as a writer of “great purity and beauty of diction.” From the most feared critic in the English-speaking world to the neglected boy whose father was in debtors’ prison Irving received enough applause quite to turn the head of a less modest man.

“The Sketch Book” includes over thirty papers of four or five different kinds. About fifteen are definite observations on English life and habits as seen in country towns and on country estates. Of the remainder six are literary essays of various kinds; four are in the nature of personal traveling reminiscences; three are the famous short stories – “Rip Van Winkle,” "Sleepy Hollow,“ and the ”The Spectre Bridegroom"; and five so far defy classification as to fall under the convenient category of “miscellaneous.”

As a document in literary history the sixth paper deserves far more notice than is usually conceded to it, for as a rule it is totally neglected. This is entitled “British Writers on America.” The tone of English literary criticism has already been referred to. Irving called attention to the fact that all English writings on America and the Americans were equally ill-natured. He pointed out that ordinarily English readers demanded strictest accuracy from author-travelers; that if a man who wrote a book on the regions of the Upper Nile or the unknown islands of the Yellow Sea was caught in error at a few minor points, he was held up to scorn as careless and unreliable, and another English traveler who could convict him of mistakes or misstatements could completely discredit him. But in marked contrast to this, no such scrupulousness was demanded of visitors to the United States. Books on the new nation in the Western World were written and read to satisfy unfriendly prejudice rather than to supply exact information and honest opinion. Against a continuation of such a practice Irving gave warning, not merely because it was uncharitable but because in time it would estrange the two peoples and lose for England a friend with whom she could not afford to be at loggerheads.

> Is all this to be at end? Is this golden band of kindred sympathies, so rare between nations, to be broken forever? Perhaps it may be for the best. It may dispel an illusion which might have kept us in mental vassalage; which might have interfered occasionally with our true interests, and prevented the growth of proper national pride. But it is hard to give up the kindred tie! and there are feelings dearer than interest – closer to the heart than pride – that will make us cast back a look of regret as we wander farther and farther from the paternal roof, and lament the waywardness of the parent that would repel the affections of the child.

There were probably many other Americans capable of making the warning prophecy so notably fulfilled nearly a hundred years later, though few, perhaps, who would have put it in such temperate language; but Irving went further in following with a warning to his fellow-countrymen:

> Shortsighted and injudicious, however, as the conduct of England may be in this system of aspersion, recrimination on our part would be equally ill-judged… Let us guard particularly against such a temper, for it would double the evil instead of redressing the wrong. Nothing is so easy and inviting as the retort of abuse and sarcasm, but it is a paltry and unprofitable contest… The members of a republic, above all other men, should be candid and dispassionate. They are, individually,

> portions of the sovereign mind and sovereign will, and should be enabled to come to all questions of national concern with calm and unbiased judgments… Let it be the pride of our writers, therefore, discarding all feelings of irritation, and disdaining to retaliate the illiberality of British authors, to speak of the English nation without prejudice and with determined candor.

If there is any justification for calling an American essay "The American Declaration of Literary Independence" the title should be conferred on this neglected number in "The Sketch Book." It was long before either English or American writers were wise enough to follow Irving's counsels, but he himself was always as tactful as he was honest.

"The Sketch Book" as a whole, then, can best be understood as an American's comments on English life and custom, made at a time when "the retort of abuse and sarcasm" would have been quite natural. In the opening paper, as well as in the sixth, there is a gentle reminder that the literary east wind had felt rather sharp and nipping in New York. Irving is describing himself after the fashion of the eighteenth-century essayists at the introduction of a series, and at the end indulges in this little nudge of irony:

> A great man of Europe, thought I, must … be as superior to a great man of America, as a peak of the Alps to a highland of the Hudson; and in this idea I was confirmed by observing the comparative importance and swelling magnitude of many English travelers among us, who, I was assured, were very little people in their own country. I will visit this land of wonders, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated.

His summarized impressions of the typical Englishman are contained in the thirtieth paper, on "John Bull." This keen analysis will bear the closest reading and study, and the more one knows of English history the more interesting it becomes. In this respect it is like "Gulliver's Travels," for it is full of double meanings. To the inattentive or the immature it is simply a picture of a bluff, hearty, quick-tempered, over-conservative average English country gentleman, but to the intelligent and attentive reader this gentleman turns out to be the embodiment of the English government and the British Empire. The character of Parliament, the relation between Church and State, the condition of the national treasury, the attitude of the rulers toward reform legislation and toward the colonies, dependencies, and dominions are all treated with kindly humor by the visiting critic. The picture is by no means a flattering one, but it was Irving's happy gift to be able to indulge in really biting satire and yet to do so in such a courteous and friendly way that his words carried little sting. Part of the concluding paragraph to this essay will illustrate his method of combining justice with mercy:

> Though there may be something rather whimsical in all this, yet I confess I cannot look upon John's situation without strong feelings of interest. With all his odd humors and obstinate prejudices, he is a sterling-hearted old blade. He may not be so wonderfully fine a fellow as he thinks himself, but he is at least twice as good as his neighbors represent him. His virtues are all his own; all plain, home-bred, and unaffected. His very faults smack of the raciness of his good qualities. His extravagance savors of his generosity; his quarrelsomeness of his courage; his credulity of his open faith; his vanity of his pride; and his bluntness of his sincerity. They are all the redundancies of a rich and liberal character.

In this spirit Irving wrote the other sketches of John Bull as he appears in "Rural Life," "The Country Church," "The Inn Kitchen," and the group of five Christmas pictures.

To judge from these eight scenes of English country life, Irving, a visitor from a new and unsettled land, was chiefly fascinated by the evidences of old age and tradition on every side. For this reason, if for no other, he delighted in the customs of the country squires who had not been swept

out of their ancient order by the tide of modern trade. Even the English scenery was in his mind "associated with ideas of order, of quiet, of sober, well-established principles, of hoary usage and reverend custom. Everything seems to be the growth of ages of regular and peaceful existence." As Irving observed it, it was still theof song and story, an England, therefore, beautifully typified in the celebration of the Christmas festivities. There is a touch of autobiography in his comment on the good cheer that prevailed at Bracebridge Hall, – a home that Squire Bracebridge tried to make his children feel was the happiest place in the world, – it was so utterly different from the suppressed family circle over which his Presbyterian father had ruled. As a guest he enjoyed all the picturesque and quaint merrymaking at the Hall, and re-conjured up pictures like those which Addison had previously drawn at Sir Roger de Coverley's. Yet all the while he was aware that the old English gentleman was a costly luxury for England to maintain, that Squire Bracebridge was after all nothing but John Bull, and that John Bull was inclining to lag behind his age. As a student of Goldsmith, Irving had read the thought of it seems to have come back to him while writing for a moment the usurpation of the land by the wealthy disquieted him, but then he consoled himself with the comforting thought that abuses of this sort were "but casual outbreaks in the general system." Irving was writing as an observer who found much to admire in the external beauty of the old order of things, but at the bottom of his American mind it is quite apparent that there was a silent approval of gradual reform in "the good old ways." Squire Bracebridge was delightful to Irving, but on the whole he was a delightful old fogy.

Irving's papers on London – "The Boar's Head Tavern," "Westminster Abbey," and "Little Britain" – are full of a similar reverence for old age in the life of the community. In the same mood in which he laughed at the pranks of the Christmas Lord of Misrule, he made his way to Eastcheap, "that ancient region of wit and wassail, where the very names of the streets relished of good cheer, as Pudding Lane bears testimony even at the present day"; and he took much more evident satisfaction in his recollection of Shakespearean revelries than in his hours in Westminster, the "mingled picture of glory and decay." Once again in "Little Britain" Irving was in more congenial surroundings, for he preferred to smile at the echoes of dead laughter than to shudder at the reminders of vanished greatness.

> Little Britain may truly be called the heart's core of the city; the strong-hold of true John Bullism. It is a fragment of London as it was in its better days, with its antiquated folks and fashions. Here flourish in great preservation many of the holiday games and customs of yore. The inhabitants most religiously eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, hot-cross-buns on Good Friday, and roast goose at Michaelmas; they send love-letters on Valentine's Day, burn the Pope on the fifth of November, and kiss all the girls under the mistletoe at Christmas. Roast beef and plum-pudding are also held in superstitious veneration, and port and sherry maintain their grounds as the only true English wines.

In more than casual respect for such traditions Irving goes on to introduce the rival oracles of Little Britain, to escort us to Wagstaff's and the Roaring Lads, to act as personal conductor to Bartholomew Fairs and a Lord Mayor's Day, and finally to lament the baleful influence of the socially ambitious Misses Lamb and the decline of the choice old games All-Fours, Pope Joan, and Tom-come-tickle-me. It is no wonder that the youthful Dickens loved these papers, for the same England appealed to both Irving and Dickens throughout their lives. It was a rough, boisterous, jolly England, with a good deal of vulgarity which they were ready to forgive and a good many vices which they chose to overlook in favor of its chief virtues – a blunt honesty, a hearty laugh, and a full stomach.

There is another side of old England that was dear to those two – that John Bull could "easily be moved to a sudden tear" (see p. 109, first topic). In the old days of even a hundred years ago men of Saxon stock were much more ready to express themselves than they are to-day, for the accepted manners of the present are comparatively reserved and impassive. If a man was amused he laughed

loud and long; if he was angered he came up with “a word and a blow”; and if his deeper feelings were touched he was not ashamed of a tear. In fact he seemed almost to feel a certain pride in his “sensibility,” as if his power to weep proved that his nature was not destitute of finer feeling and made up for his quickness to wrath and his fondness for a broad joke. In perhaps unconscious recognition of this habit of mind the literature of a century ago contained a great many frank appeals to the reader’s feeling for pathos, appeals which the modern reader would be likely to condemn as unworthily sentimental.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.