

The Founders
Of
American Literature.

Grace Dearest.

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Until the writers of the National period gave their writings to the public, American literature was at a low ebb, and there seemed little prospect of high attainment in the literary direction.

The writers of the National period extending from 1830 to almost the present time may then be truthfully called the Founders of American literature. The dawn of our American literature is the time embraced between 1783 to 1860. It was then that literary demands took the place of other subjects that filled the minds of the people.

Washington Irving at the top of the list of writers, is characterized as one of the most graceful and pleasing of American writers. The greatest number and most noted of his contributions are devoted to history, yet his writings are so varied we cannot apply the title Historian, alone, to him. His works are not noted for their depth of thought, but more for their cheerfulness and gracefulness, their power to furnish amusement and entertainment.

Satanstoe, which was brought out with

the help of J. R. Foulding; is a serial having for its "subject" simply to instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town, and chastigate the age."

With his brother he wrote a comic history of the first settlement of New York. This was issued under the name of A History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker, and is said by critics to be a master piece of humor, and a very original work.

The best of his productions is thought by most critics, to be the Sketch Book — the one on which his success as an author is based. "It is a stroke of genius," says one good critic. The next of his books, Tales of a Traveller, is a collection of European experiences. In 1826 Irving went to Spain, and while there wrote various books on Spanish subjects, among them being The Alhambra, Legends of the Conquest of Spain, Life of Columbus, and Conquest of Grenada.

The Life of Columbus is said to be an accurate piece of history.

Two years after his visit to Spain he travelled in the west, and as a result of his visit, there appeared three books, A Tour of

Prairies, Astoria and Captain Bonneville, while English reminiscences were recalled in Recollections of Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey. Later in life Irving published Mahomet and His Successor, Life of Goldsmith, and Life of Washington. For years he cherished the hope of writing a history of the Conquest of Mexico, but magnanimously relinquished this idea in favor of his contemporary Gilhois Hickling Prescott.

His contributions have been many varied and rich - and he is famous not only here in America, but in Europe and England also; in the latter place his works were praised by Scott, and many Whig and Tory editors.

Blackwood and Edinburgh magazines gave The Sketch Book a hearty welcome. They praised its "grace of style, its depth of pathos, its masterly quality." Of his books, it is truthfully said, "The moral beauty, integrity and generosity of his nature shine through them." He did a work for which the nation could never repay him.

a contemporary of Irving, and one almost equally noted, is James Fenimore Cooper.

An interesting anecdote is connected with the commencement of his literary career.

While reading a novel to his wife, he declared his belief that he could write a better one himself, and he suited the words to action which resulted in the appearance of his novel *Precaution*. This caused but little disturbance in the literary world, but nothing daunted by its public reception, Cooper renewed his efforts and was rewarded with the admiration and respect, not only of his own country, but of Europe, England and some few of the Asiatic countries into whose language his books have been translated.

The Spy is a story of the Revolution, and became famous at once. It is said that it compared so favorably with Scott's waverly novels, Cooper received the name of "American Walter Scott." Other novels following the above were *The Pioneer* and *The Pilot*. When *The Last of the Mohicans* appeared Cooper was acknowledged to be the only American novelist. Other books of note are *The Red Rover*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Prairie*, *Lionel Lincoln*, and *Wyandottowish*.

Besides the novels, he contributed to American literature a naval history of the United States, Lives of American Naval Officers and Sketches of European Travel. At his death, Frons of Manhattan was in press.

"He was the discoverer of a whole new region of romance and its most successful worker." His books teach high principles by lovingly depicting them.

They are characterized by their imagination, and spirit of adventure. In childhood he was an almost constant companion of the Indians whom he portrays so accurately in his writings.

Following these two famous writers, is a group of Historians one of whom and probably the most important is W. H. Prescott, who, besides contributing much of value historically, and gives us some equally as valuable literature.

The most famous of his writings - Ferdinand and Isabella, covers the period of Spanish History from 1469 to the era of Columbus. This noted work is widely known in America and England and is translated into

German, Spanish, and Italian. He got his subject from Dr. Robertson, who, a century before had drawn the attention of the whole world to the power of Charles V in Spain.

Prescott also gave to the world successively *The Conquest of Mexico* and *Conquest of Peru*. The first is a series of military adventures, the second a history of the early traditions of Peru. Other works that gave to Prescott a brilliant reputation are *History of Philip II* and the *Biographical and Critical Miscellanies*. He did not believe in giving dry historical facts but wrote "as his friend Everett wrote speeches."

He has published but one volume aside from his great historical productions; that being one of miscellanies - reviews from the *North American*.

John Lothrop Motley is a historian that follows close upon Prescott. One author calls him "the most powerful of American Historians." His productions are the result of years of action and endeavor.

His first work concerned Holland. Not content with the facts he could procure

in his own country, he went to the Netherlands, delving until a history of the lives of those of the past were resurrected, and gradually became a part of his own life. It was not until then that he wrote the history. This History is composed of three sections - 1st. The Rise of the Dutch Republic, 2nd. The History of the United Netherlands and 3rd. The Life and Death of John of Barneveld. The story begins with the Revolution against Philip II.

"To read these pages is to learn a deep lesson in human nature, as well as to become indelibly impressed with the specific occurrences themselves."

Leaving the Historians we take up the works and contributions of the Founders of American poetry.

At the landing of the Pilgrims there was no American poetry. The people were of the same tongue as England who probably furnished poetry for both countries. Besides this American people were busy getting a home on the new soil, and striving to throw off the heavy yoke laid upon them by their mother country.

The first and greatest poet - William Cullen

Bryant is characterized by his smoothness, purity, depth, feeling, and extreme love of nature. On other subjects that enter into the lives of men, Bryant wrote but little. From Nature came the response to the speakings of his own soul. With Nature he communed, imbibing from her the noble qualities that characterize him, and fitly is he called America's true interpreter of Nature's language.

With Bryant comes the dawn of imagination though his writings show less of the workings of imagination than the poets who followed later.

One of his earliest poems dates the beginning of his fame. This world wide known poem in blank verse is Thalysia. "It brings man and his Creator close together" with nature as a medium. His other poems contain similar thoughts. Among those best known are: The Death of the Flowers, Forest Hymn, The Evening Wind, Land of Dreams, To a Water-fowl, To a Fringed Gentian, An Evening Reverie, Mountain Monument. Stella, is one of his longer poems.

Bryant gives us the most perfect translation of the Iliad ever published.

One of his prose works is entitled *Letters from the East*. He edited the *Talisman*, which it is said, marked a period in American literary culture. He wrote prose articles for magazines continuously. "In his study of Nature he combined the faculty and the vision, the eye of the naturalist, and the imagination of the poet; no man observed the outward show of earth and sky more accurately, no man feels them more vividly, no man describes them more beautifully."

It is not disputed that Bryant is our greatest poet, neither is it denied that Henry W. Longfellow is our most universally loved one. His contributions to literature are mostly in poetry, although there are prose writings also, among them being a collection of sketches called *Outre-Mer and Hyperion* - a romance of European traditions revived by modern sentiment. *Kavanaugh* was published by Longfellow, also essays and translations.

Voices of the Night is the title of his first volume of poems. Longfellow gives to us the first poem embracing the myths and traditions of Indian life in Havaratha. Evangeline is a tale of Acadia, while other tales of life are the Courtship of Miles Standish, and New England Tragedies. Seaside and Fireside, The Golden Legend, Tales of a Wayside Inn, and The Divine Tragedy are only a few of his many poems.

He writes from a loving heart in an earnest, pure, musical, cultured, sympathetic strain. "Longfellow takes a simple childlike hold of life." His lyrical poetry is especially eloquent. Upon Evangeline and Havaratha his fame is secured.

A poetic genius who ranks well with Longfellow is John Greenleaf Whittier. He touches in almost equal degree as Longfellow, responsive chords in our better natures. His poems may be characterized as chivalrous, simple though forcible, and eloquent. His education was not broad, and this lack

is often noted in his writings, though is easily overlooked, so deeply do they enter into the lives of men. He wrote on the questions of life.

He was an extreme abolitionist and his views were made manifest through the medium of his pen. Among his famous poems on this subject are those in *Voices of Freedom*, *In War Time* and *Other Poems*. Of his longer poems may be mentioned *Snow-Bound*, *Tent On The Beach*, - written in the same style as *Canterbury Tales*, and *Among The Hills*.

There was little of prose published by Whittier. The only volume of any importance is *Old Portraits and Modern Sketches*. George S. Hillard writes of him; "Whittier has written much in prose and poetry, and his writings are characterized by earnestness of tone, high moral purpose, and energy of expression." He is a true reformer appealing from a loving heart, but his war poems will be ever forgotten than others he has written.

Poet, essayist and critic — These are the names applied to one of America's greatest scholars, — Ralph Waldo Emerson. He was a "seer and an utterer." The worth of his productions cannot well be estimated. Culture, beauty, great depth of thought, purity, morality, indeed, every elevating and noble quality belongs to this great man and his works, which will ever remain indelible landmarks in the world of literature. It is said whatever Emerson said and wrote came to him intuitively. He is said to have made his first attempt at character portrayal in his Representative Men.

His main achievement is an analysis of Nature.

He gave to the public a collection of essays and lectures touching on many subjects, characteristically headed in the title.

A close neighbor and friend of Emerson — Mr. Alcott — writes, "His books abounded in strong sense, happy humor, keen criticism, subtle insights, noble morals, clothed in chaste and manly diction fresh with the breath of health and progress."

His writings are sure to awaken thought in the diligent reader. His influence has been great and lasting and literature has been enriched ten-fold by his contributions.

Another essayist, critic and poet in the foremost rank of American authors is James Russell Lowell.

His essays are in three volumes viz: *Inside Travels*, *Among my Books*, and *My Study Window* - the last a criticism.

A Fable for Critics is a poetic criticism. With genuine criticism he reviewed all of the American authors, giving to each, his just dues.

The Vision of Sir Launfal is the most popular of his poems.

Begun's Papers - of which there are two series - is composed of satirical poems written in Yankee dialect and criticizing the actions and frauds of the Mexican and Civil War.

A Year's Life is the title of his first volume of poems. These were so favorably received, he was induced to publish a second, *Legend of Brittany*,

Miscellaneous Poems and Sonnets.

Conversations on Some Old Poets - is a book of Essays in dialogue form, in which he gives the views of Chaucer, and Chapman, Ford and other dramatists of literature.

Shorter essays are My Garden Acquaintance, a Good Word for Winter, and On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners.

Surely to this broad fearless writer may be applied his own words, that whoever speaks a crimped word to awaken the free natures in weak and friendless sons of men, is he who will live through ages to come.

Of Hawthorne it is said he gave to the novels its deep interest. "His novels stand alone in their deep concentration of thought upon the motives and spirits of men." He has no equal among American novelists. Imaginative, contemplative, earnest, deep in thought, sympathetic, entertaining, these are his characteristics.

His most famous work which is called a psychological romance, is entitled The Scarlet Letter, and is a study of character.

"It is a drama in which thoughts are acts." A later novel, not less powerful, appeared under the name of *The House of Seven Gables* - a tale of retribution. This Hawthorne calls a romance also. It belongs to the time of the Salem witchcraft, and embraces two-hundred years.

The Snow Image and other twice-told tales are noted for their quaintness.

A *Wonder Book* for boys and girls is a modernized version of old myths and legends. Other books for young people are *Gannafalhin's Chair*, *Biographical Sketches*. From the old home of the Alcotts he wrote *Plytheasle Romance*. *Tanglewood Tales* and *True Stories from History and Biography* are from Hawthorne's pen.

His style is simple, and he has a special fondness for the allegory.

The last of the Founders of American literature though far from least in the nature and extent of his contributions is Oliver Wendell Holmes, "scholar satirist, scientist, humorist, wit, essayist, novelist, biographer, lecturer, poet."

Three novels originated in his fertile brain, Elsie Venner, The Guardian Angel and A Mortal Antipathy, but of much greater importance than these is his series The Breakfast Table - The Autocrat, Professor and Poet.

A later volume is called Over the Teacups, and will bear a sterner criticism than the first three. These books are written in the monologue style in which the author as autocrat, professor and poet, philosophizes on many questions of interest.

Of his poetry there is none but is truly poetry and much is especially noted for its wit. "He is our typical University poet" says Mr. Oldman, while Whittier writes of him, "Holmes writes simply for the amusement of himself and his readers. He deals only with the vanities, the foibles, and the minor faults of mankind, graciously and almost sympathizingly suggesting excuses for folly, which he tosses about on the horns of his ridicule."

Holmes admires best of his own production - The Chambered Nautilus - and writes of it, "If you will remember me by the Chambered Nautilus, your memory will be a monument

I shall think more of than any bronze or marble."

Other representative poems are One-
Was-That, The Last Leaf, The Days, My
Aunt, Aunt Tabatha.

"The greater part of his writings outside
of his purely scientific essays, is pract-
ically the autobiography of his mind and
heart." He has added a valuable portion
to creative literature.

Through the pens of these writers the
world of American literature has be-
come richer, broader, deeper. They have
opened the gateway into an infinitely great
field of work - those who follow must
look to its consummation.