

Thesis.

The Progress of American
Historical Literature.

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Literature begins in man's efforts to express the activities of life; thus the early expressions of a people would naturally be those of parents of families, colonies ^{and} states. But in the beginning the expression is necessarily rude, in that the efforts must be put into manual labor to provide shelter from the elements, ^{and} sustenance from the latent soil. The labors of the founders of a state are rather to do than to think.

Our forefathers came to a land that conquest gave no homes, cultivated fields, waving vineyards, stacks, or overflowing granaries. And these necessities were to be had only from incessant toil. The colonies being thus absorbed in the struggle for life, looked to the mother country for the higher activities of life for the food of thought. The Mayflower, with her load of pioneers, brought to the shores of America what the student of literature

can see to be a more valuable
sion to modern Americanism
than any material substance that
could have come from the European
sail - Puritanism. Puritanism with
her spirit of independance & re-
ligious freedom, had with it that
activity of thought in which can
be found the rude material for
the ~~basis of~~ ^{basis of} not only our nation,
but vast historical literature.

Rude as may be the works
of the early pioneers of thought
Puritanism, we must admit
was a stimulus for history. At
no time did the theologians
cease to chronicle events in their
diaries and journals; and these
with historical narratives & de-
scriptions, which were mingled
in their theological works, much
resembled the meshes in a fabric.
By the wear of time the fabric
gave place to the meshes, and
from this - as a basis, the un-
climax'd historical literature of

America has grown to its present Altitude.

That history begins in obscurity can hardly be said of America. Besides the mother country to make history, the chroniclers or annalists were minutely recording the passing events - thus laying from the beginning a macadamized road of history.

The New England was the most-productive of the colonies in history she, nevertheless, was not the earliest. Capt. John Smith may be said to be the first American annalist - may be so called, as he was daring, restless, & of too vivid an imagination to tell the truth, his works tho' voluminous, are of little value for historical sources. He was author of many books of the annal-narrative type; but none of them are of readable character.

Notwithstanding New England's tardiness, they nevertheless, some of them, recognized the historical

significance of their position; the result of which is - an authentic source for material. The first journalist & historian - deserves the name, was Wm Bradford. His work, the "History of Plymouth Plantation", from 1631 to 1646, is a trust-worthy methodical chronicle of that early decade of history. It is as he says "in plaine stile with singular regard unto ye simple truth in all things"; - and for this reason it has been a valuable source for history.

Contemporary with Bradford was Edward Winslow. He kept a truthful journal of events from 1620 to 21; and was author of three historical & historical-theological works of probably less importance but nevertheless of some value. Tho' John Winthrop was wiser, & a superior rhetorician to Bradford, his "History of New England from 1630 to 1649", it must be admitted, is of less readable character. The work, however, as the man, is

truthful & faithful; and is truly an indispensable stone to the underground foundation of American history.

Of the less important historians of the colonial period, may be mentioned Nathaniel Morton, who based on Bradford's journal his "New England Memorial." Samuel Dival may be mentioned as the most faithful and least tedious of the diarists of this epoch. His journal is attractive, & readable, & keenly portrays the life of his time.

His fate in all life, that great emergencies arouse latent powers. History had continued on with its annalists, chroniclers & diarists, in the same bulky and uninteresting way, till Providence called for the utmost powers of man, and from out this chaotic mass of minds she made heroes, orators, & statesmen that attracted the eyes of the world. The latent powers of man once brought forth would continue

developing and expanding. After the blade was laid aside, after the echoes of war had ceased, after men had tried and proved their strength and wisdom, ^{and} after the nation was launched in the sea of independence ^{and} freedom, Literature came forth independent; original ^{and} self-confident in its strength.

The works of Thomas Hutchinson (1716-1780) marks the beginning of the new era of historical literature of America. But Jeremy Belknap (1744-1798) Bryant said was first to make American history interesting. The works of the annalists Abiel Holmes, ^{and} Hannah Adams are of considerable historic value; especially the latter in that it consists of papers of the Adamse family dating from the French war to the conference of Geneva.

Gordon ^{and} Ramsay by their works authenticated by researches of the government archives, rescued, from the flames of 1800 ^{and} 1814 at Wash-

ington, valuable material that would otherwise have been lost. Of these two Ramsay was decidedly the more literary; and he is said to be the best of the Revolutionary period.

The writers of this period can not be said to be the most interesting or faithful. Generally little pains was taken as to the authenticity of the material; but such as the papers of the Adamses family, ^{and} the works of Ramsay may be safely relied on, and they have been an historical spring bubbling up to their successors.

The beginning of interest in the movement of our nation can be traced to the works and influence of the triumvirate Jared Sparks, Peter Force, ^{and} George Bancroft.

Jared Sparks (1789-1866), a voluminous writer, was more a diligent ^{and} accurate collector of material than an attractive historian. His works were mostly historical biog-

ographies; of which his "Works & Life of Benjamin Franklin" has stood as authority till recently. Sparks can not be said to be an historian in the highest sense; but he had the patient & sure spirit of a student, to search every possible crevice for material. For this his works have a high historical value.

It may be questioned as to whether Col. Faree may stand as an important historian. His works are unattractive & uncertain, as he was simply a master & one who failed to superposition or to consider the value of authentication. But his influence is evident on the student of history, as his search was ceaseless & diligent;—so thorough he was, that he interviewed survivors of the Revolution so as to get the story direct.

But the historian, that carried the art of historical representation

and philosophy to a higher degree of perfection than any American or English writer, was George Bancroft. He was eminently - a modern philosophic historian. His labors were given solely to the history of our nation through its Colonial ^{and} Revolutionary period; and it bids fair to be as permanent in the fields of literature, as the works of Macaulay, Gibbons ^{and} Hume. He spared no pains in the search of material, nor no labor in the working of the material. Bancroft has not the brilliant rhetorical effect of Macaulay, nor the painting of Motley or Prescott; but he adds sentence after sentence of serious ^{and} unornamented expressions of facts ^{and} thoughts - compact, easy, ^{and} attractive.

Contemporary with Bancroft, and an antagonist to his theory, was Richard Hildreth (1807-1885). He wrote an history of the United States, that as a book of refer-

ence stands first among historians. It is simply a short concise statement of events in chronological order. A work that has been surpassed in the field is a "History of New England" by John Palfrey (1796-1881). It is a simple but penetrating, ^{and} a faithful exposition of especially the Puritan character.

The popularity of Scott's works, ^{and} the attractiveness of Macaulay's picturesque history - the monument to his theory - has their influence in brightening the historical works of American writers. It brought the novel so close to history, ^{and} made history so novel-like, that the two has been so dovetailed as to be almost inseparable.

The first in the field, too early to be influenced by Macaulay but not by Scott, was Washington Irving. He was not only the first in the field, but was

so much master of his position, that he stands practically at the head yet; He may be classed as histo-novelist - i.e. possessing more novel feature than history. But his "Conquest of Granada", the "Life of Columbus", & "Life of Washington", at least, has an historical value that would place him with historians. Tho' he lacked sharp precision, he was picturesque, lucid, & musical in his style; and tho' fiction his works are the fruits of the diligent study of an historian.

Peculiar, as it may seem, it is nevertheless a probable & possible fact - that were it not for the generosity of Irving the two great contemporary historians, Prescott & Motley would never have been heard of. To Prescott he generously surrendered the Spanish field; - and at the same time that Prescott was working on "Philip II", Motley was contain -

plating the "Rise of the Dutch Republic." The results of an interview of Motley with Prescott is Motley's works in the Dutch field that he assures us would never have been written had Prescott seen a conflict of the two subjects.

Prescott's works are more of the novel-history style; therefore they possess an historical value as well as literary. His style is more of the Macaulay type and less philosophical than Bancroft. Tho' they are imaginative and glow with word painting, the truth has not been sacrificed; but they have gained impressiveness and fascination of a narrative. His more valuable works are in the Spanish American field, and there they are classic. They are the "Conquest of Mexico" and "The Conquest of Peru". His "Ferdinand" and "Isabella" and "Philip II" are among the most valuable American works on

foreign subjects.

Tho' Hofly may be classed as a novel-historian, he is nevertheless the most powerful of American historians. Being as interesting as fiction, picturesque & attractive, his works are decidedly of the novel feature. But they are the works of a scholar that is deeply versed in political science, in knowledge of human nature, & in ethical and religious philosophy. The works are the fruits of years of diligent study; and are the outflow from a person overjoyous from the fascination of the subject. It seems as he said that he wrote history because he could not help it. Sure American history has no better monument to stand for her past genius than the "Rise of the Dutch Republic", the "History of United Provinces", & the "Life and death of John of Barneveldt".

Contemporary with Americas great historians, & so peculiar in the field as to

he worthy of mention is George Ticknor (1791-1871). His "History of Spanish Literature" is one that holds a place among the histories of the world.

The modern historical writers are numerous; - and they can be said to have an equal footing with any of the world. An historian that has lately sunk behind the horizon of activities stands at the head of the list. Like his great predecessors he combined the talent of an historian with that of a novelist. Francis Parkman (1823-1893) had a romantic, adventurous spirit with a poet's vein. And thus it would seem, he fell heir to the work that was naturally adapted to him - The French and Indian War. His scope was broad, and tho' he had not the might of former historians, he had the attractiveness, & historical perspective. Among his best works are "The Conspiracy of Pontiac", "France and England in the New World", & "The Jesuits in North Amer-

ica in the Seventeenth Century."

Herbert Howe Bancroft deserves mention as an historian in that he edited in 40 volumes an history of the Pacific States, that is to the student or writer, a valuable encyclopedia. John Drake, the scholar & philosopher, according to the review of the volumes published, promises to give a valuable work on "The History of American People". Of modern historians John Bach McMaster is ranked as one of the strongest. His "History of the People of the United States", in regard to the character of the work holds a place in American history as Green's "History of English People" in English. The action is luminous, flowing & attractive.

The works of the recent writers are fully up to the standard. They are numerous & diversified, thus showing the growth of the historical field. "The Tariff History of the United States" by Tansig; "The Economic History of Virginia in 17 Century" by Philip

Alexander Bruce; "The Pilgrim Fathers in New England & their Puritan Successors" by John Brown; "John Bunyan, his Life & Works" James Baxter; & "The Faith of the American Nation" Harry Pratt Judson - these are a few of the many strong works of recent times.

The new world ushered in as it was by chivalry & romance, reared by butchery & savage warfare, taught by foreign foes, & freed by independence & Liberty - the new world grown to zenith of manhood among these environment of dramatic points, furnishes the best field for historical work of the modern world. And fully equal to the occasion, has been the genius of the Americans. They came from a line of thinkers, endowed with a spirit of freedom & independence; and by the adaptation to the accelerating necessities of new life, they were fully taught by nature for masters in the new field. Their genius has been not only masters in

our own nation but they have
with equal success mastered such
as they attempted beyond the nat-
ion of birth. And their historical
works have become the most im-
portant factor in our national
literature. As truly as the drama
was the spirit of the Elizabethan age,
so history is the spirit of our
age; and being thus, history has
drawn into its field the most-
scholarly, ^{and} strongest men of the
times. They stand among the
historians, ancient ^{and} modern,
as this nation stands among
the nations of the world,