

History of American Literature

Reuben Post Halleck

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HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

BY REUBEN POST HALLECK, M.A. (YALE)
AUTHOR OF "HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE"

[Illustration: THE RETURN OF RIP VAN WINKLE]

PREFACE

The wide use of the author's History of English Literature, the favor with which it has been received in all parts of the United States, and the number of earnest requests for a History of American Literature on the same plan, have led to the writing of this book. It has not appeared sooner because the author has followed his rule of making a careful first-hand study, not only of all the matter discussed, but also of a far greater amount, which, although it must be omitted from a condensed textbook, is, nevertheless, necessary as a background for judgment and selection.

The following chapters describe the greatest achievements in American literature from the earliest times until the present. Many pupils fail to obtain a clear idea of great American authors and literary movements because textbook writers and teachers ignore the element of truth in the old adage, "The half is greater than the whole," and dwell too much on minor authors and details, which could reasonably be expected to interest only a specialist. In the following pages especial attention has been paid, not only to the individual work of great authors, but also to literary movements, ideals, and animating principles, and to the relation of all these to English literature.

The author has further aimed to make this work both interesting and suggestive. He has endeavored to present the subject in a way that necessitates the comparison of authors and movements, and leads to stimulating thinking. He has tried to communicate enough of the spirit of our literature to make students eager for a first-hand acquaintance with it, to cause them to investigate for themselves this remarkable American record of spirituality, initiative, and democratic accomplishment. As a guide to such study, there have been placed at the end of each chapter Suggested Readings and still further hints, called Questions and Suggestions. In A Glance Backward, the author emphasizes in brief compass the most important truths that American literature teaches, truths that have resulted in raising the ideals of Americans and in arousing them to greater activity.

Any one who makes an original study of American literature will not be a mere apologist for it. He will marvel at the greatness of the moral lesson, at the fidelity of the presentation of the thought which has molded this nation, and at the peculiar aptness which its great authors have displayed in ministering to the special needs and aspirations of Americans. He will realize that the youth who stops with the indispensable study of English literature is not prepared for American citizenship, because our literature is needed to present the ideals of American life. There may be greater literatures, but none of them can possibly take the place of ours for citizens of this democracy.

The moral element, the most impressive quality in American literature, is continuous from the earliest colonial days until the present. Teachers

should be careful not to obscure this quality. As the English scientist, John Tyndall, has shown in the case of Emerson, this moral stimulus is capable of adding immeasurably to the achievement of the young.

The temptation to slight the colonial period should be resisted. It has too often been the fashion to ask, Why should the student not begin the study of American literature with Washington Irving, the first author read for pure pleasure? The answer is that the student would not then comprehend the stages of growth of the new world ideals, that he would not view our later literature through the proper atmosphere, and that he would lack certain elements necessary for a sympathetic comprehension of the subject.

The seven years employed in the preparation of this work would have been insufficient, had not the author been assisted by his wife, to whom he is indebted not only for invaluable criticism but also for the direct authorship of some of the best matter in this book.

R. P. H.

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HISTORY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

COLONIAL LITERATURE

RELATION TO ENGLISH LITERATURE.--The literature produced in that part of America known as the United States did not begin as an independent literature. The early colonists were Englishmen who brought with them their own language, books, and modes of thought. England had a world-famous literature before her sons established a permanent settlement across the Atlantic. Shakespeare had died four years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. When an American goes to Paris he can neither read the books, nor converse with the citizens, if he knows no language but his own. Let him cross to London, and he will find that, although more than three hundred years have elapsed since the first colonists came to America, he immediately feels at home, so far as the language and literature are concerned.

For nearly two hundred years after the first English settlements in America, the majority of the works read there were written by English authors. The hard struggle necessary to obtain a foothold in a wilderness is not favorable to the early development of a literature. Those who remained in England could not clear away the forest, till the soil, and conquer the Indians, but they could write the books and send them across the ocean. The early settlers were for the most part content to allow English authors to do this. For these reasons it would be surprising if early American literature could vie with that produced in England during the same period.

When Americans began to write in larger numbers, there was at first close adherence to English models. For a while it seemed as if American literature would be only a feeble imitation of these models, but a change finally came, as will be shown in later chapters. It is to be hoped, however, that American writers of the future will never cease to learn from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyan, and Wordsworth.

AMERICAN LITERATURE AN IMPORTANT STUDY.--We should not begin the study of American literature in an apologetic spirit. There should be no attempt to minimize the debt that America owes to English literature, nor to conceal the fact that American literature is young and has not had time to produce as many masterpieces as England gave to the world during a thousand years. However, it is now time also to record the fact that the literature of England gained something from America. Cultivated Englishmen to-day willingly admit that without a study of Cooper, Poe, and Hawthorne no one could give an adequate account of the landmarks of achievement in fiction, written in our common tongue. French critics have even gone so far as to canonize Poe. In a certain field he and Hawthorne occupy a unique place in the world's achievement. Again, men like Bret Harte and Mark Twain are not common in any literature. Foreigners have had American books translated into all the leading languages of the world. It is now more than one hundred years since Franklin, the great American philosopher of the practical, died, and yet several European nations reprint nearly every year some of his sayings, which continue to influence the masses. English

critics, like John Addington Symonds, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Edward Dowden, have testified to the power of the democratic element in our literature and have given the dictum that it cannot be neglected.

Some of the reasons why American literature developed along original lines and thus conveyed a message of its own to the world are to be found in the changed environment and the varying problems and ideals of American life. Even more important than the changed ways of earning a living and the difference in climate, animals, and scenery were the struggles leading to the Revolutionary War, the formation and guidance of the Republic, and the Civil War. All these combined to give individuality to American thought and literature.

Taken as a whole, American literature has accomplished more than might reasonably have been expected. Its study is especially important for us, since the deeds associated with our birthplace must mean more to us than more remarkable achievements of men born under other skies. Our literature, even in its humble beginnings, contains a lesson that no American can afford to miss. Unless we know its ideals and moral aims and are swayed by them, we cannot keep our heritage.

WHY VIRGINIA WAS COLONIZED.--In 1607 the first permanent English colony within the present limits of the United States was planted at Jamestown in Virginia. The colony was founded for commercial reasons by the London Company, an organization formed to secure profits from colonization. The colonists and the company that furnished their ship and outfit expected large profits from the gold mines and the precious stones which were believed to await discovery. Of course, the adventurers were also influenced by the honor and the romantic interest which they thought would result from a successful settlement.

When the expedition sailed from England in December, 1606, Michael Drayton, an Elizabethan poet, wrote verses dedicated "To the Virginian Voyage." These stanzas show the reason for sending the colonizers to Virginia:--

"You brave heroic minds,
Worthy your country's name,
That honor still pursue,
Whilst loit'ring hinds
Lurk here at home with shame,
Go and subdue.

* * * *

And cheerfully at sea,
Success you still entice,
To get the pearl and gold;
And ours to hold
Virginia,
Earth's only paradise."

The majority of the early Virginian colonists were unfit for their task. Contemporary accounts tell of the "many unruly gallants, packed hither by their friends to escape ill destinies." Beggars, vagabonds, indentured servants, kidnapped girls, even convicts, were sent to Jamestown and became the ancestors of some of the "poor white trash" of the South. After the execution of Charles I. in 1649, and the setting up of the Puritan Commonwealth, many of the royalists, or Cavaliers, as they were called, came to Virginia to escape the obnoxious Puritan rule. They became the ancestors of Presidents and statesmen, and of many of the aristocratic families of the South.

The ideals expressed by Captain John Smith, the leader and preserver of the Jamestown colony, are worthy to rank beside those of the colonizers of New England. Looking back at his achievement in Virginia, he wrote, "Then seeing we are not born for ourselves but each to help other ... Seeing honor is our lives' ambition ... and seeing by no means would we be abated of the dignities and glories of our predecessors; let us imitate their virtues to be worthily their successors."

WHY THE PURITANS COLONIZED NEW ENGLAND.--During the period from 1620 to 1640, large numbers of Englishmen migrated to that part of America now known as New England. These emigrants were not impelled by hope of wealth, or ease, or pleasure. They were called Puritans because they wished to purify the Church of England from what seemed to them great abuses; and the purpose of these men in emigrating to America was to lay the foundations of a state built upon their religious principles. These people came for an intangible something--liberty of conscience, a fuller life of the spirit--which has never commanded a price on any stock exchange in the world. They looked beyond

"Things done that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice."

These Puritans had been more than one century in the making. We hear of them in the time of Wycliffe (1324-1384). Their religion was a constant command to put the unseen above the seen, the eternal above the temporal, to satisfy the aspiration of the spirit. James I. (reign, 1603-1625) told them that he would harry them out of the kingdom unless they conformed to the rites of the Established Church. His son and successor Charles I. (reign, 1625-1649) called to his aid Archbishop Laud (1573-1645), a bigoted official of that church. Laud hunted the dissenting clergy like wild beasts, threw them into prison, whipped them in the pillory, branded them, slit their nostrils, and mutilated their ears. JOHN COTTON, pastor of the church of Boston, England, was told that if he had been guilty only of an infraction of certain of the Ten Commandments, he might have been pardoned, but since his crime was Puritanism, he must suffer. He had great trouble in escaping on a ship bound for the New England Boston.

[Illustration: JOHN COTTON]

Professor Tyler says: "New England has perhaps never quite appreciated its great obligations to Archbishop Laud. It was his overmastering hate of nonconformity, it was the vigilance and vigor and consecrated cruelty with which he scoured his own diocese and afterward all England, and hunted down and hunted out the ministers who were committing the unpardonable sin of dissent, that conferred upon the principal colonies of New England their ablest and noblest men."

It should be noted that the Puritan colonization of New England took place in a comparatively brief space of time, during the twenty years from 1620 to 1640. Until 1640 persecution drove the Puritans to New England in multitudes, but in that year they suddenly stopped coming. "During the one hundred and twenty-five years following that date, more persons, it is supposed, went back from the New to the Old England than came from the Old England to the New," says Professor Tyler. The year 1640 marks the assembling of the Long Parliament, which finally brought to the block both Archbishop Laud (1645) and King Charles I. (1649), and chose the great

Puritan, Oliver Cromwell, to lead the Commonwealth.

ELIZABETHAN TRAITS.--The leading men in the colonization of Virginia and New England were born in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603), and they and their descendants showed on this side of the Atlantic those characteristics which made the Elizabethan age preeminent.

In the first place, the Elizabethans possessed initiative. This power consists, first, in having ideas, and secondly, in passing from the ideas to the suggested action. Some people merely dream. The Elizabethans dreamed glorious dreams, which they translated into action. They defeated the Spanish Armada; they circumnavigated the globe; they made it possible for Shakespeare's pen to mold the thought and to influence the actions of the world.

If we except those indentured servants and apprentices who came to America merely because others brought them, we shall find not only that the first colonists were born in an age distinguished for its initiative, but also that they came because they possessed this characteristic in a greater degree than those who remained behind. It was easier for the majority to stay with their friends; hence England was not depopulated. The few came, those who had sufficient initiative to cross three thousand miles of unknown sea, who had the power to dream dreams of a new commonwealth, and the will to embody those dreams in action.

In the second place, the Elizabethans were ingenious, that is, they were imaginative and resourceful. Impelled by the mighty forces of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning which the England of Elizabeth alone felt at one and the same time, the Elizabethans craved and obtained variety of experience, which kept the fountainhead of ingenuity filled. It is instructive to follow the lives of Elizabethans as different as Sir Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain John Smith, and John Winthrop, and to note the varied experiences of each. Yankee ingenuity had an Elizabethan ancestry. The hard conditions of the New World merely gave an opportunity to exercise to the utmost an ingenuity which the colonists brought with them.

In the third place, the Elizabethans were unusually democratic; that is, the different classes mingled together in a marked degree, more than in modern England, more even than in the United States to-day. This intermingling was due in part to increased travel, to the desire born of the New Learning to live as varied and as complete a life as possible, and to the absence of overspecialization among individuals. This chance for varied experience with all sorts and conditions of men enabled Shakespeare to speak to all humanity. All England was represented in his plays. When the Rev. Thomas Hooker, born in the last half of Elizabeth's reign, was made pastor at Hartford, Connecticut, he suggested to his flock a democratic form of government much like that under which we now live.

Let us remember that American life and literature owe their most interesting traits to these three Elizabethan qualities--initiative, ingenuity, and democracy. Let us not forget that the Cambridge University graduate, the cooper, cloth-maker, printer, and blacksmith had the initiative to set out for the New World, the ingenuity to deal with its varied exigencies, and the democratic spirit that enabled them to work side by side, no matter how diverse their former trades, modes of life, and social condition.

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH, 1579-1631

[Illustration: JOHN SMITH]

The hero of the Jamestown colony, and its savior during the first two years, was Captain John Smith, born in Willoughby, Lincolnshire, in 1579, twenty-four years before the death of Elizabeth and thirty-seven before the death of Shakespeare. Smith was a man of Elizabethan stamp,--active, ingenious, imaginative, craving new experiences. While a mere boy, he could not stand the tediousness of ordinary life, and so betook himself to the forest where he could hunt and play knight.

In the first part of his young manhood he crossed the Channel, voyaged in the Mediterranean, fought the Turks, killing three of them in single combat, was taken prisoner and enslaved by the Tartars, killed his inhuman master, escaped into Russia, went thence through Europe to Africa, was in desperate naval battles, returned to England, sailing thence for Virginia, which he reached at the age of twenty-eight.

He soon became president of the Jamestown colony and labored strenuously for its preservation. The first product of his pen in America was *‘A True Relation of Virginia’*, written in 1608, the year in which John Milton was born. The last work written by Smith in America is entitled: *‘A Map of Virginia, with a Description of the Country, the Commodities, People, Government, and Religion’*. His description of the Indians shows his capacity for quickly noting their traits:--

"They are inconstant in everything, but what fear constraineth them to keep. Crafty, timorous, quick of apprehension and very ingenious. Some are of disposition fearful, some bold, most cautious, all savage. Generally covetous of copper, beads, and such like trash. They are soon moved to anger, and so malicious that they seldom forget an injury: they seldom steal one from another, lest their conjurors should reveal it, and so they be pursued and punished. That they are thus feared is certain, but that any can reveal their offences by conjuration I am doubtful."

Smith has often been accused of boasting, and some have said that he was guilty of great exaggeration or something worse, but it is certain that he repeatedly braved hardships, extreme dangers, and captivity among the Indians to provide food for the colony and to survey Virginia. After carefully editing *‘Captain John Smith's Works’* in a volume of 983 pages, Professor Edwin Arber says: "For [our] own part, beginning with doubtfulness and wariness we have gradually come to the unhesitating conviction, not only of Smith's truthfulness, but also that, in regard to all personal matters, he systematically understates rather than exaggerates anything he did."

Although by far the greater part of Smith's literary work was done after he returned to England, yet his two booklets written in America entitle him to a place in colonial literature. He had the Elizabethan love of achievement, and he records his admiration for those whose 'pens writ what their swords did.' He was not an artist with his pen, but our early colonial literature is the richer for his rough narrative and for the description of Virginia and the Indians.

In one sense he gave the Indian to literature, and that is his greatest achievement in literary history. Who has not heard the story of his capture by the Indians, of his rescue from torture and death, by the beautiful Indian maiden, Pocahontas, of her risking her life to save him a second

time from Indian treachery, of her bringing corn and preserving the colony from famine, of her visit to England in 1616, a few weeks after the death of Shakespeare, of her royal reception as a princess, the daughter of an Indian king, of Smith's meeting her again in London, where their romantic story aroused the admiration of the court and the citizens for the brown-eyed princess? It would be difficult to say how many tales of Indian adventure this romantic story of Pocahontas has suggested. It has the honor of being the first of its kind written in the English tongue.

Did Pocahontas actually rescue Captain Smith? In his account of his adventures, written in Virginia in 1608, he does not mention this rescue, but in his later writings he relates it as an actual occurrence. When Pocahontas visited London, this story was current, and there is no evidence that she denied it. Professor Arber says, "To deny the truth of the Pocahontas incident is to create more difficulties than are involved in its acceptance." But literature does not need to ask whether the story of Hamlet or of Pocahontas is true. If this unique story of American adventure is a product of Captain Smith's creative imagination, the literary critic must admit the captain's superior ability in producing a tale of such vitality. If the story is true, then our literature does well to remember whose pen made this truth one of the most persistent of our early romantic heritages. He is as well known for the story of Pocahontas as for all of his other achievements. The man who saved the Virginia colony and who first suggested a new field to the writer of American romance is rightly considered one of the most striking figures in our early history, even if he did return to England in less than three years and end his days there in 1631.

LITERARY ACTIVITY IN VIRGINIA COLONY

A POSSIBLE SUGGESTION FOR SHAKESPEARE'S TEMPEST.--WILLIAM STRACHEY, a contemporary of Shakespeare and secretary of the Virginian colony, wrote at Jamestown and sent to London in 1610 the manuscript of *_A True Repertory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Kt., upon and from the Islands of the Bermudas_*. This is a story of shipwreck on the Bermudas and of escape in small boats. The book is memorable for the description of a storm at sea, and it is possible that it may even have furnished suggestions to Shakespeare for *_The Tempest_*. If so, it is interesting to compare these with what they produced in Shakespeare's mind. Strachey tells how "the sea swelled above the clouds and gave battle unto heaven." He speaks of "an apparition of a little round light, like a faint star, trembling and streaming along with a sparkling blaze, half the height upon the main mast, and shooting sometimes from shroud to shroud." Ariel says to Prospero:--

"I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flam'd amazement: Sometimes I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards, and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join."

Strachey voices the current belief that the Bermudas were harassed by tempests, devils, wicked spirits, and other fearful objects. Shakespeare has Ferdinand with fewer words intensify Strachey's picture:--

"Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here."

The possibility that incidents arising out of Virginian colonization may have turned Shakespeare's attention to "the still vex'd Bermoothes" and given him suggestions for one of his great plays lends added interest to Strachey's True Repertory. But, aside from Shakespeare, this has an interest of its own. It has the Anglo-Saxon touch in depicting the wrath of the sea, and it shows the character of the early American colonists who braved a wrath like this.

[Illustration: GEORGE SANDYS]

POETRY IN THE VIRGINIA COLONY.--GEORGE SANDYS (1577-1644), during his stay in the colony as its treasurer, translated ten books of Ovid's Metamorphoses, sometimes working by the light of a pine knot. This work is rescued from the class of mere translation by its literary art and imaginative interpretation, and it possesses for us an additional interest because of its nativity amid such surroundings. Two lines telling how Philemon

"Took down a flitch of bacon with a prung,
That long had in the smoky chimney hung,"

show that his environment aided him somewhat in the translation. He himself says of this version that it was "bred in the new world, whereof it cannot but participate, especially having wars and tumults to bring it to light, instead of the muses." He was read by both Dryden and Pope in their boyhood, and the form of their verse shows his influence.

The only original poem which merits our attention in the early Virginian colony was found soon after the Revolutionary War in a collection of manuscripts, known as the Burwell Papers. This poem is an elegy on the death of Nathaniel Bacon (1676), a young Virginian patriot and military hero, who resisted the despotic governor, Sir William Berkeley. It was popularly believed that Bacon's mysterious death was due to poison. An unknown friend wrote the elegy in defense of Bacon and his rebellion. These lines from that elegy show a strength unusual in colonial poetry:--

"Virginia's foes,
To whom, for secret crimes, just vengeance owes
Deserved plagues, dreading their just desert,
Corrupted death by Paracelsian art,
Him to destroy . . .
Our arms, though ne'er so strong,
Will want the aid of his commanding tongue,
Which conquered more than Caesar."

DESCRIPTIONS OF VIRGINIA.--ROBERT BEVERLY, clerk of the Council of Virginia, published in London in 1705 a History and Present State of Virginia. This is today a readable account of the colony and its people in the first part of the eighteenth century. This selection shows that in those early days Virginians were noted for what has come to be known as southern hospitality:--

"The inhabitants are very courteous to travellers, who need no other recommendation, but the being human creatures. A stranger has no more to do, but to inquire upon the road where any gentleman or good housekeeper lives, and there he may depend upon being received with hospitality. This good nature is so general among their people, that the gentry, when they

go abroad, order their principal servant to entertain all visitors with everything the plantation affords. And the poor planters who have but one bed, will very often sit up, or lie upon a form or couch all night, to make room for a weary traveller to repose himself after his journey."

[Illustration: WILLIAM BYRD]

COLONEL WILLIAM BYRD (1674-1744), a wealthy Virginian, wrote a *History of the Dividing Line run in the Year 1728*. He was commissioned by the Virginian colony to run a line between it and North Carolina. This book is a record of personal experiences, and is as interesting as its title is forbidding. This selection describes the Dismal Swamp, through which the line ran:--

"Since the surveyors had entered the Dismal they had laid eyes on no living creature; neither bird nor beast, insect nor reptile came in view. Doubtless the eternal shade that broods over this mighty bog and hinders the sunbeams from blessing the ground, makes it an uncomfortable habitation for anything that has life. Not so much as a Zealand frog could endure so aguish a situation. It had one beauty, however, that delighted the eye, though at the expense of all the other senses: the moisture of the soil preserves a continual verdure, and makes every plant an evergreen, but at the same time the foul damp ascends without ceasing, corrupts the air, and renders it unfit for respiration. Not even a turkey buzzard will venture to fly over it, no more than the Italian vultures will fly over the filthy lake Avernus or the birds in the Holy Land over the salt sea where Sodom and Gomorrah formerly stood.

"In these sad circumstances the kindest thing we could do for our suffering friends was to give them a place in the Litany. Our chaplain for his part did his office and rubbed us up with a seasonable sermon. This was quite a new thing to our brethren of North Carolina, who live in a climate where no clergyman can breathe, any more than spiders in Ireland."

These two selections show that American literature, even before the Revolution, came to be something more than an imitation of English literature. They are the product of our soil, and no critic could say that they might as well have been written in London as in Virginia. They also show how much eighteenth-century prose had improved in form. Even in England, modern prose may almost be said to begin with John Dryden, who died at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In addition to improvement in form, we may note the appearance of a new quality--humor. Our earliest writers have few traces of humor because colonization was a serious life and death affair to them.

DIFFERENT LINES OF DEVELOPMENT OF VIRGINIA AND NEW ENGLAND.--As we now go back more than a hundred years to the founding of the Plymouth colony in 1620, we may note that Virginia and New England developed along different lines. We shall find more dwellers in towns, more democracy and mingling of all classes, more popular education, and more literature in New England. The ruling classes of Virginia were mostly descendants of the Cavaliers who had sympathized with monarchy, while the Puritans had fought the Stuart kings and had approved a Commonwealth. In Virginia a wealthy class of landed gentry came to be an increasing power in the political history of the country. The ancestors of George Washington and many others who did inestimable service to the nation were among this class. It was long the fashion for this aristocracy to send their children to England to be educated, while the Puritans trained theirs at home.

[Illustration: EARLY PRINTING PRESS]

New England started a printing press, and was printing books by 1640. In 1671 Sir William Berkeley, governor of Virginia, wrote, "I thank God there are no free schools, nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years; for learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world, and printing has developed them."

Producers of literature need the stimulus of town life. The South was chiefly agricultural. The plantations were large, and the people lived in far greater isolation than in New England, where not only the town, but more especially the church, developed a close social unit.

One other reason served to make it difficult for a poet of the plowman type, like Robert Burns, or for an author from the general working class, like Benjamin Franklin, to arise in the South. Labor was thought degrading, and the laborer did not find the same chance as at the North to learn from close association with the intelligent class.

The reason for this is given by Colonel William Byrd, from whom we have quoted in the preceding section. He wrote in 1736 of the leading men of the South:--

"They import so many negroes hither, that I fear this Colony will some time or other be confirmed by the name of New Guinea. I am sensible of many bad consequences of multiplying these Ethiopians amongst us. They blow up the pride and ruin the industry of our white people, who seeing a rank of poor creatures below them, detest work, for fear it should make them look like slaves."

WILLIAM BRADFORD, 1590-1657

William Bradford was born in 1590 in the Pilgrim district of England, in the Yorkshire village of Austerfield, two miles north of Scrooby. While a child, he attended the religious meetings of the Puritans. At the age of eighteen he gave up a good position in the post service of England, and crossed to Holland to escape religious persecution. His *History of Plymouth Plantation* is not a record of the Puritans as a whole, but only of that branch known as the Pilgrims, who left England for Holland in 1607 and 1608, and who, after remaining there for nearly twelve years, had the initiative to be the first of their band to come to the New World, and to settle at Plymouth in 1620.

For more than thirty years he was governor of the Plymouth colony, and he managed its affairs with the discretion of a Washington and the zeal of a Cromwell. His *History* tells the story of the Pilgrim Fathers from the time of the formation of their two congregations in England, until 1647.

[Illustration: FACSIMILE OF FIRST PARAGRAPH OF BRADFORD'S "HISTORY OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION"]

In 1897 the United States for the first time came into possession of the manuscript of this famous *History of Plymouth Plantation*, which had in some mysterious manner been taken from Boston in colonial times and had found its way into the library of the Lord Bishop of London. Few of the English seem to have read it. Even its custodian miscalled it *The Log of the Mayflower*, although after the ship finally cleared from England, only

five incidents of the voyage are briefly mentioned: the death of a young seaman who cursed the Pilgrims on the voyage and made sport of their misery; the cracking of one of the main beams of the ship; the washing overboard in a storm of a good young man who was providentially saved; the death of a servant; and the sight of Cape Cod. On petition, the Lord Bishop of London generously gave this manuscript of 270 pages to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In a speech at the time of its formal reception, Senator Hoar eloquently summed up the subject matter of the volume as follows:--

"I do not think many Americans will gaze upon it without a little trembling of the lips and a little gathering of mist in the eyes, as they think of the story of suffering, of sorrow, of peril, of exile, of death, and of lofty triumph which that book tells,--which the hand of the great leader and founder of America has traced on those pages. There is nothing like it in human annals since the story of Bethlehem. These Englishmen and English women going out from their homes in beautiful Lincoln and York, wife separated from husband and mother from child in that hurried embarkation for Holland, pursued to the beach by English horsemen; the thirteen years of exile; the life at Amsterdam, 'in alley foul and lane obscure'; the dwelling at Leyden; the embarkation at Delfthaven; the farewell of Robinson; the terrible voyage across the Atlantic; the compact in the harbor; the landing on the rock; the dreadful first winter; the death roll of more than half the number; the days of suffering and of famine; the wakeful night, listening for the yell of wild beast and the war whoop of the savage; the building of the State on those sure foundations which no wave or tempest has ever shaken; the breaking of the new light; the dawning of the new day; the beginning of the new life; the enjoyment of peace with liberty,--of all these things this is the original record by the hand of our beloved father and founder."

In addition to giving matter of unique historical importance, Bradford entertains his readers with an account of Squanto, the Pilgrims' tame Indian, of Miles Standish capturing the "lord of misrule" at Merrymount, and of the failure of an experiment in tilling the soil in common. Bradford says that there was immediate improvement when each family received the full returns from working its own individual plot of ground. He thus philosophizes about this social experiment of the Pilgrims:--

"The experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years, and that amongst godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's and other ancients, applauded by some of later times;----that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a common wealth would make them happy and flourishing.... Let none object this is men's corruption, and nothing to the course itself. I answer, seeing all men have this corruption in them, God in his wisdom saw another course fitter for them."

America need not be ashamed of either the form or the subject matter of her early colonial prose in comparison with that produced in England at the same time.

JOHN WINTHROP, 1588-1649

[Illustration: JOHN WINTHROP]

On March 29, 1630, John Winthrop made the first entry in his Journal on board the ship Arbella, before she left the Isle of Wight for Massachusetts

Bay. This Journal was to continue until a few months before his death in 1649, and was in after times to receive the dignified name of History of New England, although it might more properly still be called his Journal, as its latest editor does indeed style it.

John Winthrop was born in the County of Suffolk, England, in 1588, the year of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. He was a wealthy, well-educated Puritan, the owner of broad estates. As he paced the deck of the Arbella, the night before he sailed for Massachusetts, he knew that he was leaving comfort, home, friends, position, all for liberty of conscience. Few men have ever voluntarily abandoned more than Winthrop, or clung more tenaciously to their ideals.

After a voyage lasting more than two months, he settled with a large number of Puritans on the site of modern Boston. For the principal part of the time from his arrival in 1630 until his death in 1649, he served as governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Not many civil leaders of any age have shown more sagacity, patriotism, and tireless devotion to duty than John Winthrop.

His Journal is a record of contemporaneous events from 1630 to 1648. The early part of this work might with some justice have been called the Log of the Arbella.

[Illustration: FACSIMILE OF BEGINNING OF MS. OF WINTHROP'S "JOURNAL"]

TRANSLITERATION OF FACSIMILE OF WINTHROP'S "JOURNAL"

"ANNO DOMINI 1630, MARCH 29, MONDAY.
"EASTER MONDAY.

"Riding at the Cowes, near the Isle of Wight, in the Arbella, a ship of 350 tons, whereof Capt. Peter Milborne was master, being manned with 52 seamen, and 28 pieces of ordnance, (the wind coming to the N. by W. the evening before,) in the morning there came aboard us Mr. Cradock, the late governor, and the masters of his 2 ships, Capt. John Lowe, master of the Ambrose, and Mr. Nicholas Hurlston, master of the Jewel, and Mr. Thomas Beecher, master of the Talbot."

The entry for Monday, April 12, 1630, is:--

"The wind more large to the N. a stiff gale, with fair weather. In the afternoon less wind, and our people began to grow well again. Our children and others, that were sick and lay groaning in the cabins, we fetched out, and having stretched a rope from the steerage to the main-mast, we made them stand, some of one side and some of the other, and sway it up and down till they were warm, and by this means they soon grew well and merry."

The following entry for June 5, 1644, reflects an interesting side light on the government of Harvard, our first American college:--

"Two of our ministers' sons, being students in the college, robbed two dwelling houses in the night of some fifteen pounds. Being found out, they were ordered by the governors of the college to be there whipped, which was performed by the president himself--yet they were about twenty

years of age; and after they were brought into the court and ordered to twofold satisfaction, or to serve so long for it. We had yet no particular punishment for burglary."

Another entry for 1644 tells of one William Franklin, condemned for causing the death of his apprentice:--

"The case was this. He had taken to apprentice one Nathaniel Sewell, one of those children sent over the last year for the country; the boy had the scurvy and was withal very noisome, and otherwise ill disposed. His master used him with continual rigour and unmerciful correction, and exposed him many times to much cold and wet in the winter season, and used divers acts of rigour towards him, as hanging him in the chimney, etc., and the boy being very poor and weak, he tied him upon an horse and so brought him (sometimes sitting and sometimes hanging down) to Boston, being five miles off, to the magistrates, and by the way the boy calling much for water, would give him none, though he came close by it, so as the boy was near dead when he came to Boston, and died within a few hours after."

Winthrop relates how Franklin appealed the case when he was found guilty, and how the Puritans inflicted the death penalty on him after searching the Bible for a rule on which to base their decision. The most noticeable qualities of this terrible story are its simplicity, its repression, its lack of striving after effect. Winthrop, Bradford, and Bunyan had learned from the 1611 version of the Bible to be content to present any situation as simply as possible and to rely on the facts themselves to secure the effect.

Winthrop's finest piece of prose, Concerning Liberty, appears in an entry for the year 1645. He defines liberty as the power "to do that which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for, with the hazard, not only of your goods, but of your lives, if need be." Winthrop saw clearly what many since his day have failed to see, that a government conducted by the people could not endure, if liberty meant more than this.

Winthrop's Journal records almost anything which seemed important to the colonists. Thus, he tells about storms, fires, peculiar deaths of animals, crimes, trials, Indians, labor troubles, arrival of ships, trading expeditions, troubles with England about the charter, politics, church matters, events that would point a moral, like the selfish refusal of the authorities to loan a quantity of gunpowder to the Plymouth colony and the subsequent destruction of that same powder by an explosion, or the drowning of a child in the well while the parents were visiting on Sunday. In short, this Journal gives valuable information about the civil, religious, and domestic life of the early days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The art of modern prose writing was known neither in England nor in America in Winthrop's time. The wonder is that he told the story of this colony in such good form and that he still holds the interest of the reader so well.

THE RELIGIOUS IDEAL

William Bradford and John Winthrop were governors of two religious commonwealths. We must not forget that the Puritans came to America to secure a higher form of spiritual life. In the reign of Elizabeth, it was thought that the Revival of Learning would cure all ills and unlock the gates of happiness. This hope had met with disappointment. Then Puritanism came, and ushered in a new era of spiritual aspiration for something

better, nobler, and more satisfying than mere intellectual attainments or wealth or earthly power had been able to secure.

The Puritans chose the Bible as the guidebook to their Promised Land. The long sermons to which they listened were chiefly biblical expositions. The Puritans considered the saving of the soul the most important matter, and they neglected whatever form of culture did not directly tend toward that result. They thought that entertaining reading and other forms of amusement were contrivances of the devil to turn the soul's attention away from the Bible. Even beauty and art were considered handmaids of the Evil One. The Bible was read, reread, and constantly studied, and it took the place of secular poetry and prose.

The New England Puritan believed in the theology of John Calvin, who died in 1564. His creed, known as Calvinism, emphasized the importance of the individual, of life's continuous moral struggle, which would land each soul in heaven or hell for all eternity. In the New England Primer, the children were taught the first article of belief, as they learned the letter A:--

[Illustration: LETTER "A" IN NEW ENGLAND PRIMER"]

"In Adam's fall,
We sinned all."

Calvinism stressed the doctrine of foreordination, that certain ones, "the elect," had been foreordained to be saved. THOMAS SHEPHARD (1605-1649), one of the great Puritan clergy, fixed the mathematical ratio of the damned to the elect as "a thousand to one." On the physical side, scientists have pointed out a close correspondence between Calvin's creed and the theory of evolution, which emphasizes the desperate struggle resulting from the survival of the fittest. The "fittest" are the "elect"; those who perish in the contest, the "damned." In the evolutionary struggle, only the few survive, while untold numbers of the unfit, no matter whether seeds of plants, eggs of fish, human beings, or any other form of life, go to the wall.

In spite of the apparent contradiction between free will and foreordination, each individual felt himself fully responsible for the saving of his soul. A firm belief in this tremendous responsibility made each one rise the stronger to meet the other responsibilities of life. Civil responsibility seemed easier to one reared in this school. The initiative bequeathed by Elizabethan times was increased by the Puritans' religion.

Although there were probably as many university men in proportion to the population in early colonial Massachusetts as in England, the strength and direction of their religious ideals helped to turn their energy into activities outside the field of pure literature. In course of time, however, Nathaniel Hawthorne appeared to give lasting literary expression to this life.

THE NEW ENGLAND CLERGY.--The clergy occupied a leading place in both the civil and religious life of New England. They were men of energy and ability, who could lead their congregations to Holland or to the wilds of New England. For the purpose in hand the world has never seen superior leaders. Many of them were graduates of Cambridge University, England. Their great authority was based on character, education, and natural ability. A contemporary historian said of John Cotton, who came as pastor

from the old to the new Boston in 1633, that whatever he "delivered in the pulpit was soon put into an order of court ... or set up as a practice in the church."

The sermons, from two to four hours long, took the place of magazines, newspapers, and modern musical and theatrical entertainments. The church members were accustomed to hard thinking and they enjoyed it as a mental exercise. Their minds had not been rendered flabby by such a diet of miscellaneous trash or sensational matter as confronts modern readers. Many of the congregation went with notebooks to record the different heads and the most striking thoughts in the sermon, such, for instance, as the following on the dangers of idleness:--

"Whilst the stream keeps running, it keeps clear; but let it stand still, it breeds frogs and toads and all manner of filth. So while you keep going, you keep clear."

The sermons were often doctrinal, metaphysical, and extremely dry, but it is a mistake to conclude that the clergy did not speak on topics of current interest. Winthrop in his Journal for 1639 relates how the Rev. John Cotton discussed whether a certain shopkeeper, who had been arraigned before the court for extortion, for having taken "in some small things, above two for one," was guilty of sin and should be excommunicated from the church, or only publicly admonished. Cotton prescribed admonition and he laid down a code of ethics for the guidance of sellers.

With the exception of Roger Williams (1604?-1683), who had the modern point of view in insisting on complete "soul liberty," on the right of every man to think as he pleased on matters of religion, the Puritan clergy were not tolerant of other forms of worship. They said that they came to New England in order to worship God as they pleased. They never made the slightest pretense of establishing a commonwealth where another could worship as he pleased, because they feared that such a privilege might lead to a return of the persecution from which they had fled. If those came who thought differently about religion, they were told that there was sufficient room elsewhere, in Rhode Island, for instance, whither Roger Williams went after he was banished from Salem. The history of the Puritan clergy would have been more pleasing had they been more tolerant, less narrow, more modern, like Roger Williams. Yet perhaps it is best not to complain overmuch of the strange and somewhat repellent architecture of the bridge which bore us over the stream dividing the desert of royal and ecclesiastical tyranny from the Promised Land of our Republic. Let us not forget that the clergy insisted on popular education; that wherever there was a clergyman, there was almost certain to be a school, even if he had to teach it himself, and that the clergy generally spoke and acted as if they would rather be "free among the dead than slaves among the living."

POETRY

The trend of Puritan theology and the hard conditions of life did not encourage the production of poetry. The Puritans even wondered if singing in church was not an exercise which turned the mind from God. The Rev. John Cotton investigated the question carefully under four main heads and six subheads, and he cited scriptural authority to show that Paul and Silas (Acts, xvi., 25) had sung a Psalm in the prison. Cotton therefore concluded that the Psalms might be sung in church.

[Illustration: FACSIMILE OF TITLE-PAGE TO "BAY PSALM BOOK"]

BAY PSALM BOOK.--"The divines in the country" joined to translate "into English metre" the whole book of _Psalms_ from the original Hebrew, and they probably made the worst metrical translation in existence. In their preface to this work, known as the _Bay Psalm Book_ (1640), the first book of verse printed in the British American colonies, they explained that they did not strive for a more poetic translation because "God's altar needs not our polishings." The following verses from _Psalm_ cxxxvii. are a sample of the so-called metrical translation which the Puritans sang:--

"1. The rivers on of Babilon
there-when wee did sit downe:
yea even then wee mourned, when
wee remembered Sion.

"2. Our Harps wee did it hang amid,
upon the willow tree.

"3. Because there they that us away
led in captivitee,
Requir'd of us a song, & thus
askt mirth: us waste who laid,
sing us among a Sion's song,
unto us then they said."

MICHAEL WIGGLESWORTH (1631-1705).--This Harvard graduate and Puritan preacher published in 1662 a poem setting forth some of the tenets of Calvinistic theology. This poem, entitled _The Day of Doom, or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment_, had the largest circulation of any colonial poem. The following lines represent a throng of infants at the left hand of the final Judge, pleading against the sentence of infant damnation:--

"Not we, but he ate of the tree,
whose fruit was interdicted;
Yet on us all of his sad fall
the punishment's inflicted.
How could we sin that had not been,
or how is his sin our,
Without consent, which to prevent
we never had the pow'r?"

Wigglesworth represents the Almighty as replying:--

"You sinners are, and such a share
as sinners may expect;
Such you shall have, for I do save
none but mine own Elect.
Yet to compare your sin with their
who liv'd a longer time,
I do confess yours is much less,
though every sin's a crime.

"A crime it is, therefore in bliss
you may not hope to dwell;
But unto you I shall allow
the easiest room in Hell."

When we read verse like this, we realize how fortunate the Puritanism of

Old England was to have one great poet schooled in the love of both morality and beauty. John Milton's poetry shows not only his sublimity and high ideals, but also his admiration for beauty, music, and art. Wigglesworth's verse is inferior to much of the ballad doggerel, but it has a swing and a directness fitted to catch the popular ear and to lodge in the memory. While some of his work seems humorous to us, it would not have made that impression on the early Puritans. At the same time, we must not rely on verse like this for our understanding of their outlook on life and death. Beside Wigglesworth's lines we should place the epitaph, "Reserved for a Glorious Resurrection," composed by the great orthodox Puritan clergyman, Cotton Mather (p. 46), for his own infant, which died unbaptized when four days old. It is well to remember that both the Puritans and their clergy had a quiet way of believing that God had reserved to himself the final interpretation of his own word.

ANNE BRADSTREET (1612-1672).--Colonial New England's best poet, or "The Tenth Muse," as she was called by her friends, was a daughter of the Puritan governor, Thomas Dudley, and became the wife of another Puritan governor, Simon Bradstreet, with whom she came to New England in 1630. Although she was born before the death of Shakespeare, she seems never to have studied the works of that great dramatist. Her models were what Milton called the "fantastics," a school of poets who mistook for manifestations of poetic power, far-fetched and strained metaphors, oddities of expression, remote comparisons, conceits, and strange groupings of thought. She had especially studied Sylvester's paraphrase of *The Divine Weeks and Works* of the French poet Du Bartas, and probably also the works of poets like George Herbert (1593-1633), of the English fantastic school. This paraphrase of Du Bartas was published in a folio of 1215 pages, a few years before Mrs. Bradstreet came to America. This book shows the taste which prevailed in England in the latter part of the first third of the seventeenth century, before Milton came into the ascendancy. The fantastic comparison between the "Spirit Eternal," brooding upon chaos, and a hen, is shown in these lines from Du Bartas:--

"Or as a Hen that fain would hatch a brood
(Some of her own, some of adoptive blood)
Sits close thereon, and with her lively heat,
Of yellow-white balls, doth live birds beget:
Even in such sort seemed the Spirit Eternal
To brood upon this Gulf with care paternal."

A contemporary critic thought that he was giving her early work high praise when he called her "a right Du Bartas girl." One of her early poems is *The Four Elements*, where Fire, Air, Earth, and Water

"... did contest
Which was the strongest, noblest, and the best,
Who was of greatest use and mightiest force."

Such a debate could never be decided, but the subject was well suited to the fantastic school of poets because it afforded an opportunity for much ingenuity of argument and for far-fetched comparisons, which led nowhere.

Late in life, in her poem, *Contemplations*, she wrote some genuine poetry, little marred by imitation of the fantastic school. Spenser seems to have become her master in later years. No one without genuine poetic ability could have written such lines as:--

"I heard the merry grasshopper then sing,

The black-clad cricket bear a second part,
They kept one tune, and played on the same string,
Seeming to glory in their little art."

These lines show both poetic ease and power:--

"The mariner that on smooth waves doth glide
Sings merrily, and steers his bark with ease,
As if he had command of wind and tide,
And now become great master of the seas."

The comparative excellence of her work in such an atmosphere and amid the domestic cares incident to rearing eight children is remarkable.

NATHANIEL WARD, 1578?-1652

[Illustration: FACSIMILE OF TITLE PAGE TO WARD'S
"SIMPLE COBBLER OF AGAWAM"]

In 1647 Nathaniel Ward, who had been educated for the law, but who afterward became a clergyman, published a strange work known as *The Simple Cobbler of Agawam, in America* "willing," as the sub-title continues, "to help mend his native country, lamentably tattered, both in the upper leather and sole, with all the honest stitches he can take." He had been assistant pastor at Agawam (Ipswich) until ill health caused him to resign. He then busied himself in compiling a code of laws and in other writing before he returned to England in 1647. The following two sentences from his unique book show two points of the religious faith of the Puritans: (1) the belief in a personal devil always actively seeking the destruction of mankind, and (2) the assumption that the vitals of the "elect" are safe from the mortal sting of sin.

"Satan is now in his passions, he feels his passion approaching, he loves to fish in roiled waters. Though that dragon cannot sting the vitals of the elect mortally, yet that Beelzebub can fly-blow their intellectuals miserably."

He is often a bitter satirist, a sort of colonial Carlyle, as this attack on woman shows:--

"I honor the woman that can honor herself with her attire; a good text always deserves a fair margin; I am not much offended if I see a trim far trimmer than she that wears it. In a word, whatever Christianity or civility will allow, I can afford with London measure: but when I hear a nugiperous gentledame inquire what dress the Queen is in this week: what the nudiustertian fashion of the Court; I mean the very newest; with egg to be in it in all haste, whatever it be; I look at her as the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of a quarter of a cipher, the epitome of nothing, fitter to be kicked, if she were of a kickable substance, than either honored or humored."

He does not hesitate to coin a word. The preceding short selection introduces us to "nugiperous" and "nudiustertian." Next, he calls the women's tailor-made gowns "the very pettitoes of infirmity, the giblets of perquisquilian toys."

The spirit of a reformer always sees work to be done, and Ward emphasized three remedies for mid-seventeenth-century ills: (1) Stop toleration of

departure from religious truth; (2) banish the frivolities of women and men; and (3) bring the civil war in England to a just end. In proportion to the population, his *Simple Cobbler*, designed to mend human ways, was probably as widely read as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* in later days.

In criticism, Ward deserves to be remembered for these two lines:--

"Poetry's a gift wherein but few excel;
He doth very ill that doth not passing well."

SAMUEL SEWALL, 1652-1730

There was born in 1652 at Bishopstoke, Hampshire, England, a boy who sailed for New England when he was nine years old, and who became our greatest colonial diarist. This was Samuel Sewall, who graduated from Harvard in 1671 and finally became chief justice of Massachusetts.

[Illustration: SAMUEL SEWALL]

His *Diary* runs with some breaks from 1673 to 1729, the year before his death. Good diaries are scarce in any literature. Those who keep them seldom commit to writing many of the most interesting events and secrets of their lives. This failing makes the majority of diaries and memoirs very dry, but this fault cannot be found with Samuel Sewall. His *Diary* will more and more prove a mine of wealth to the future writers of our literature, to our dramatists, novelists, poets, as well as to our historians. The early chronicles and stories on which Shakespeare founded many of his plays were no more serviceable to him than this *Diary* may prove to a coming American writer with a genius like Hawthorne's.

In Sewall's *Diary* we at once feel that we are close to life. The following entry brings us face to face with the children in a Puritan household:--

"Nov. 6, 1692. Joseph threw a knop of brass and hit his sister Betty on the forehead so as to make it bleed and swell; upon which, and for his playing at Prayer-time, and eating when Return Thanks, I whipped him pretty smartly. When I first went in (called by his Grandmother) he sought to shadow and hide himself from me behind the head of the cradle: which gave me the sorrowful remembrance of Adam's carriage."

Sewall was one of the seven judges who sentenced nineteen persons to be put to death for witchcraft at Salem. After this terrible delusion had passed, he had the manliness to rise in church before all the members, and after acknowledging "the blame and shame of his decision," call for "prayers that God who has an unlimited authority would pardon that sin."

Sewall's *Diary* is best known for its faithful chronicle of his courtship of Mrs. Catharine Winthrop. Both had been married twice before, and both had grown children. He was sixty-nine and she fifty-six. No record of any other Puritan courtship so unique as this has been given to the world. He began his formal courtship of Mrs. Winthrop, October 1, 1720. His *Diary* contains records of each visit, of what they said to each other, of the Sermons, cake, and gingerbread that he gave her, of the healths that he drank to her, the lump of sugar that she gave him, of how they "went into the best room, and clos'd the shutters."

"Nov. 2. Gave her about 1/2 pound of sugar almonds, cost 3 shillings per

[pound]. Carried them on Monday. She seem'd pleas'd with them, ask'd what they cost. Spake of giving her a hundred pounds per annum if I died before her. Ask'd her what sum she would give me, if she should die first?"

"Monday, Nov. 7. I went to Mad. Winthrop; found her rocking her little Katy in the cradle. I excused my coming so late (near eight). She set me an arm'd chair and cushion; and so the cradle was between her arm'd chair and mine. Gave her the remnant of my almonds. She did not eat of them as before.... The fire was come to one short brand besides the block, which brand was set up in end; at last it fell to pieces and no recruit was made.... Took leave of her.... Her dress was not so clean as sometime it had been. Jehovah jireh!"

Acute men have written essays to account for the aristocratic Mrs. Winthrop's refusal of Chief-Justice Sewall. Some have said that it was due to his aversion to slavery and to his refusal to allow her to keep her slaves. This episode is only a small part of a rich storehouse. The greater part of the Diary contains only the raw materials of literature, yet some of it is real literature, and it ranks among the great diaries of the world.

COTTON MATHER, 1663-1728

[Illustration: COTTON MATHER]

LIFE AND PERSONALITY.--Cotton Mather, grandson of the Rev. John Cotton (p. 14), and the most distinguished of the old type of Puritan clergymen, was born in Boston and died in his native city, without ever having traveled a hundred miles from it. He entered Harvard at the age of eleven, and took the bachelor's degree at fifteen. His life shows such an overemphasis of certain Puritan traits as almost to presage the coming decline of clerical influence. He says that at the age of only seven or eight he not only composed forms of prayer for his schoolmates, but also obliged them to pray, although some of them cuffed him for his pains. At fourteen he began a series of fasts to crucify the flesh, increase his holiness, and bring him nearer to God.

He endeavored never to waste a minute. In his study, where he often worked sixteen hours a day, he had in large letters the sign, "BE SHORT," to greet the eyes of visitors. The amount of writing which he did almost baffles belief. His published works, numbering about four hundred, include sermons, essays, and books. During all of his adult life, he also preached in the North Church of Boston.

He was a religious "fantastic" (p. 40), that is, he made far-fetched applications of religious truth. A tall man suggested to him high attainments in Christianity; washing his hands, the desirability of a clean heart.

Although Cotton Mather became the most famous clergyman of colonial New England, he was disappointed in two of his life's ambitions. He failed to become president of Harvard and to bring New England back in religious matters to the first halcyon days of the colony. On the contrary, he lived to see Puritan theocracy suffer a great decline. His fantastic and strained application of religious truth, his overemphasis of many things, and especially his conduct in zealously aiding and abetting the Salem witchcraft murders, were no mean factors in causing that decline.

His intentions were certainly good. He was an apostle of altruism, and he tried to improve each opportunity for doing good in everyday life. He trained his children to do acts of kindness for other children. His *Essays to Do Good* were a powerful influence on the life of Benjamin Franklin. Cotton Mather would not have lived in vain if he had done nothing else except to help mold Franklin for the service of his country; but this is only one of Mather's achievements. We must next pass to his great work in literature.

THE MAGNALIA.--This "prose epic of New England Puritanism," the most famous of Mather's many works, is a large folio volume entitled *Magnalia Christi Americana: or the Ecclesiastical History of New England*. It was published in London in 1702, two years after Dryden's death.

The book is a remarkable compound of whatever seemed to the author most striking in early New England history. His point of view was of course religious. The work contains a rich store of biography of the early clergy, magistrates, and governors, of the lives of eleven of the clerical graduates of Harvard, of the faith, discipline, and government of the New England churches, of remarkable manifestations of the divine providence, and of the "Way of the Lord" among the churches and the Indians.

We may to-day turn to the *Magnalia* for vivid accounts of early New England life. Mather has a way of selecting and expressing facts in such a way as to cause them to lodge in the memory. These two facts about John Cotton give us a vivid impression of the influence of the early clergy:--

"The keeper of the inn where he did use to lodge, when he came to Derby, would profanely say to his companions, that he wished Mr. Cotton were gone out of his house, for he was not able to swear while that man was under his roof....

"The Sabbath he began the evening before, for which keeping of the Sabbath from evening to evening he wrote arguments before his coming to New England; and I suppose 'twas from his reason and practice that the Christians of New England have generally done so too."

We read that the daily vocation of Thomas Shepard, the first pastor at Cambridge, Massachusetts, was, to quote Mather's noble phrase, "*A Trembling Walk with God*." He speaks of the choleric disposition of Thomas Hooker, the great Hartford clergyman, and says it was "useful unto him," because "he had ordinarily as much government of his choler as a man has of a mastiff dog in a chain; he 'could let out his dog, and pull in his dog, as he pleased.'" Some of Mather's prose causes modern readers to wonder if he was not a humorist. He says that a fire in the college buildings in some mysterious way influenced the President of Harvard to shorten one of his long prayers, and gravely adds, "that if the devotions had held three minutes longer, the Colledge had been irrecoverably laid in ashes." One does not feel sure that Mather saw the humor in this demonstration of practical religion. It is also doubtful whether he is intentionally humorous in his most fantastic prose, such, for instance, as his likening the Rev. Mr. Partridge to the bird of that name, who, because he "had no defence neither of beak nor claw," took "a flight over the ocean" to escape his ecclesiastical hunters, and finally "took wing to become a bird of paradise, along with the winged seraphim of heaven."

Such fantastic conceits, which for a period blighted the literature of the leading European nations, had their last great exponent in Cotton Mather.

Minor writers still indulge in these conceits, and find willing readers among the uneducated, the tired, and those who are bored when they are required to do more than skim the surface of things. John Seccomb, a Harvard graduate of 1728, the year in which Mather died, then gained fame from such lines as:--

"A furrowed brow,
Where corn might grow,"

but the best prose and poetry have for a long time won their readers for other qualities. Even the taste of the next generation showed a change, for Cotton Mather's son, Samuel, noted as a blemish his father's "straining for far-fetched and dear-bought hints." Cotton Mather's most repellent habit to modern readers is his overloading his pages with quotations in foreign languages, especially in Latin. He thus makes a pedantic display of his wide reading.

He is not always accurate in his presentation of historical or biographical matter, but in spite of all that can be said against the Magnalia, it is a vigorous presentation of much that we should not willingly let die. In fact, when we read the early history of New England, we are frequently getting from the Magnalia many things in changed form without ever suspecting the source.

JONATHAN EDWARDS, 1703-1758

LIFE AND WRITINGS.--Jonathan Edwards, who ranks among the world's greatest theologians and metaphysicians, was born in 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. Like Cotton Mather, Edwards was precocious, entering Yale before he was thirteen. The year previous to his going to college, he wrote a paper on spiders, showing careful scientific observation and argument. This paper has been called "one of the rarest specimens of precocious scientific genius on record." At fourteen, he read Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding, receiving from it, he says, higher pleasure "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly discovered treasure." Before he was seventeen, he had graduated from Yale, and he had become a tutor there before he was twenty-one.

Like Dante, he had a Beatrice. Thinking of her, he wrote this prose hymn of a maiden's love for the Divine Power:--

"They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that great Being who made and rules the world, and there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything except to meditate on Him, that she expects after a while to be received up where He is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven, being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from Him always. She will sometimes go about from place to place singing sweetly, and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure, and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have some one invisible always conversing with her"

[Illustration: MEMORIAL TABLET TO JONATHAN EDWARDS
(First Church, Northampton, Mass)]

Jonathan Edwards thus places before us Sarah Pierrepont, a New England

Puritan maiden. To note the similarity of thought between the Old Puritan England and the New, let us turn to the maiden in Milton's Comus:--

"A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal."

Unlike Dante, Edwards married his Beatrice at the age of seventeen. In 1727, the year of his marriage, he became pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts. With the aid of his wife, he inaugurated the greatest religious revival of the century, known as the "Great Awakening," which spread to other colonial churches, crossed the ocean, and stimulated Wesley to call sinners to repentance.

Early in life, Edwards formed a series of resolutions, three of which are:--

"To live with all my might, while I do live."

"Never to do anything, which, if I should see in another, I should count a just occasion to despise him for, or to think any way the more meanly of him."

"Never, henceforward, till I die, to act as if I were any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's."

He earnestly tried to keep these resolutions until the end. After a successful pastorate of twenty-three years at Northampton, the church dismissed him for no fault of his own.

Like Dante, he was driven into exile, and he went from Northampton to the frontier town of Stockbridge, where he remained for seven years as a missionary to the Indians. His wife and daughters did their utmost to add to the family income, and some contributions were sent him from Scotland, but he was so poor that he wrote his books on the backs of letters and on the blank margins cut from newspapers. His fame was not swallowed up in the wilderness. Princeton College called him to its presidency in 1757. He died in that office in 1758, after less than three months' service in his new position. His wife was still in Stockbridge when he passed away. "Tell her," he said to his daughter, "that the uncommon union which has so long subsisted between us has been of such a nature as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue forever." In September of the same year she came to lie beside him in the graveyard at Princeton.

In 1900, the church that had dismissed him one hundred and fifty years before placed on its walls a bronze tablet in his memory, with the noble inscription from Malachi ii., 6.

As a writer, Jonathan Edwards won fame in three fields. He is (1) America's greatest metaphysician, (2) her greatest theologian, and (3) a unique poetic interpreter of the universe as a manifestation of the divine love.

His best known metaphysical work is The Freedom of the Will (1754). The

central point of this work is that the will is determined by the strongest motive, that it is "repugnant to reason that one act of the will should come into existence without a cause." He boldly says that God is free to do only what is right. Edwards emphasizes the higher freedom, gained through repeated acts of the right kind, until both the inclination and the power to do wrong disappear.

As a theologian, America has not yet produced his superior. His *Treatise concerning the Religious Affections*, his account of the Great Awakening, called *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, and *Thoughts on the Revival*, as well as his more distinctly technical theological works, show his ability in this field. Unfortunately, he did not rise superior to the Puritan custom of preaching about hell fire. He delivered on that subject a sermon which causes modern readers to shudder; but this, although the most often quoted, is the least typical of the man and his writings. Those in search of really typical statements of his theology will find them in such specimens as, "God and real existence is the same. God is and there is nothing else." He was a theological idealist, believing that all the varied phenomena of the universe are "constantly proceeding from God, as light from the sun." Such statements suggest Shelley's lines, which tell how

"... the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear."

Dr. Allen, Edwards's biographer and critic, and a careful student of his unpublished, as well as of his published, writings, says, "He was at his best and greatest, most original and creative, when he described the divine love." Such passages as the following, and also the one quoted on page 51, show this quality:--

"When we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see His love and purity.
So the green trees and fields and singing of birds are the emanations of
His infinite joy and benignity. The easiness and naturalness of trees and
vines are shadows of His beauty and loveliness."

His favorite text was, "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys," and his favorite words were "sweet and bright."

ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE PERIOD

The great English writers between the colonization of Jamestown in 1607 and the outbreak of the French and Indian War in 1754 are: (1) JOHN MILTON (1608-1674), the great poetic spokesman of Puritan England, whose *Comus* is addressed to those, who:--

"... by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key
That opes the palace of eternity,"

whose *Sonnets* breathe a purposeful prayer to live this life as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye, and whose *Paradise Lost* is the colossal epic of the loss of Eden through sin; (2) JOHN BUNYAN (1628-1688), whose *Pilgrim's Progress* addressed itself in simple, earnest English to each individual human being, telling him what he must do to escape the City of Destruction and to reach the City of All Delight; (3) JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700), a master in the field of satiric and didactic verse and one of

the pioneers in the field of modern prose criticism; (4) ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744), another poet of the satiric and didactic school, who exalted form above matter, and wrote polished couplets which have been models for so many inferior poets; (5) the essayists, RICHARD STEELE (1672-1729) and JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719), the latter being especially noted for the easy, flowing prose of his papers in the *Spectator*; (6) JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745), a master of prose satire, whose *Gulliver's Travels* has not lost its fascination; (7) DANIEL DEFOE (1661?-1731) whose *Robinson Crusoe* continues to increase in popularity; (8) SAMUEL RICHARDSON (1689-1761), and HENRY FIELDING (1707-1754), the two great mid-eighteenth-century novelists.

The colonial literature of this period was influenced only in a very minor degree by the work of these men, for a generation usually passed before the influence of contemporary English authors appeared in American literature. In the next chapter, we shall see evidences of the influence of Pope. Benjamin Franklin will tell us how Bunyan and Addison were his teachers, and the early fiction will show its indebtedness to the work of Samuel Richardson.

LEADING HISTORICAL FACTS

Virginia and Massachusetts produced the most of our colonial literature. There were, however, thirteen colonies stretched along the seaboard from Georgia (1733), the last to be founded, to Canada. Although these colonies were established under different grants or charters, and although some had more liberty and suffered less from the interference of England than others, it is nevertheless true that every colony was a school for a self-governing democracy. No colonies elsewhere in the world had the same amount of liberty. This period was a necessary preparation for the coming republic.

We must not suppose that there was complete liberty in those days. Such a state has not been reached even in the twentieth century. The early government of Virginia was largely aristocratic; that of Massachusetts, theocratic. Virginia persecuted the Puritans. The early settlers of Massachusetts drove out Roger Williams and hanged Quakers. New York persecuted those who did not join the Church of England. The central truth, however, is that these thirteen colonies were making the greatest of all world experiments in democracy and liberty.

The important colony of New Netherland (New York) was settled by the Dutch early in the seventeenth century. They established an aristocracy with great landed estates along the Hudson. The student of literature is specially interested in this colony because Washington Irving (p. 112) has invested it with a halo of romance. He shows us the sturdy Knickerbockers, the Van Cortlands, the Van Dycks, the Van Wycks, and other chivalrous Dutch burghers, sitting in perfect silence, puffing their pipes, and thinking of nothing for hours together in those "days of simplicity and sunshine." For literary reasons it is well that this was not made an English colony until the Duke of York took possession of it in 1664.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the colonists in the middle and northern part of the country divided their energies almost equally between trade and agriculture. At the South, agriculture was the chief occupation and tobacco and rice were the two leading staples. These were produced principally by the labor of negro slaves. There were also many indentured servants at the South, where the dividing lines between the different classes were most strongly marked.

Up to 1700 the history of each colony is practically that of a separate unit. Almost all the colonies had trouble with Indians and royal governors. Pirates, rapacious politicians, religious matters, or witchcraft were sometimes sources of disturbance. All knew the hard labor and the privations involved in subduing the wilderness and making permanent settlements in a new land. History tells of the abandonment of many other colonies and of the subjugation of many other races, but no difficulty and no foe daunted this Anglo-Saxon stock.

In 1700 the population of New England was estimated at about one hundred and ten thousand. In 1754, the beginning of the French and Indian War, Connecticut alone had that number, while all New England probably had at this time nearly four hundred thousand. The middle colonies began the eighteenth century with about fifty-nine thousand and grew by the middle of the century to about three hundred and fifty-five thousand. During the same period, the southern group increased from about ninety thousand to six hundred thousand. By 1750 the thirteen colonies probably had a total population of nearly fourteen hundred thousand. Since no census was taken until 1790, these figures are only approximately correct.

Such development serves to show the trend of coming events. This remarkable increase in population soon caused numbers to go farther west. This movement resulted in collision with the French, who were at this time holding the central part of the country, from the Gulf into Canada. One other result followed. The colonies began to seem valuable to England because they furnished a market for English manufactures and a carrying trade for English ships. The previous comparative insignificance of the colonies and the trouble in England had served to protect them, but their trade had now assumed a proportion that made the mother country realize what a valuable commercial asset she would have if she regulated the colonies in her own interest.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have traced the history of American colonial literature from the foundation of the Jamestown Colony until 1754. Before 1607 Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare had written, and before 1620 the King James version of the Bible had been produced. England had, therefore, a wonderful literature before her colonies came to America. They were the heirs of all that the English race had previously accomplished; and they brought to these shores an Elizabethan initiative, ingenuity, and democratic spirit.

The Virginia colony was founded, as colonies usually are, for a commercial reason. The Virginians and the other southern colonists lived more by agriculture, were more widely scattered, had fewer schools, more slaves, and less town life than the New Englanders. Under the influence of a commanding clergy, common schools, and the stimulus of town life, the New England colony produced more literature.

The chief early writers of Virginia are: (1) Captain John Smith, who described the country and the Indians, and gave to literature the story of Pocahontas, thereby disclosing a new world to the imagination of writers; (2) William Strachey, who outranks contemporary colonial writers in describing the wrath of the sea, and who may even have furnished a suggestion to Shakespeare for The Tempest; (3) two poets, (a) George Sandys, who translated part of Ovid, and (b) the unknown author of the

elegy on Nathaniel Bacon; and (4) Robert Beverly and William Byrd, who gave interesting descriptions of early Virginia.

The chief colonial writers of New England are: (1) William Bradford, whose *History of Plymouth Plantation* tells the story of the first Pilgrim colony; (2) John Winthrop, who wrote in his *Journal* the early history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony; (3) the poets, including (a) the translators of the *Bay Psalm Book*, the first volume of so-called verse printed in the British American colonies, (b) Wigglesworth, whose *Day of Doom*, was a poetic exposition of Calvinistic theology, (c) Anne Bradstreet, who wrote a small amount of genuine poetry, after she had passed from the influence of the "fantastic" school of poets; (4) Nathaniel Ward, the author of *The Simple Cobbler of Agawam*, an attempt to mend human ways; (5) Samuel Sewall, New England's greatest colonial diarist; (6) Cotton Mather, the most famous clerical writer, whose *Magnalia* is a compound of early colonial history and biography, sometimes written in a "fantastic" style; (7) Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest metaphysician and theologian, who maintained that the action of the human will is determined by the strongest motive, that the substance of this universe is nothing but "the divine Idea," communicated to human consciousness, and who could invest spiritual truth with the beauty of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys.

The New England colonist came to America because of religious feeling. His religion was to him a matter of eternal life or eternal de