

GENERAL REVIEW OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

THE OREGONIAN'S HOME STUDY CIRCLE DIRECTED BY PROF. SEYMOUR EATON

LITERARY TALKS AND REMINISCENCES

The golden age to which nations and individuals look back with longing is the period of their youth; indeed, the very phrase owes its existence to a belief inherent in the race that in youth alone happiness is possible and the creative power active.



Irving at 20.

creations of Poe, even the poems of Bryant, belong to an earlier youth; they are isolated productions, unrelated to each other, related in varying degrees to the life of the country. Bryant alone of these writers survived to live side by side with the group who were up the literary pyramid called the golden age, in which our literature became more compact and homogeneous, confined to one section of the country and having a certain unity of purpose and idea.

It was a time when the struggle for a national existence was over, but the responsibility of establishing a national life remained; when Puritanism had relaxed its hold as a dogma, but the conscience was still braced by its moral power; when the pioneer's ax no longer rang in the forest, but the chopping of firewood was still a daily chore for intellectuals.



Walt Whitman.

youth; when the inward necessity to read and think was scarcely less imperative than the outward obligation to labor, and the good housewife, after storing her pines in the cupboard, opened her Plato and refreshed herself at the storehouse of Greek thought.

The conditions were almost unique in history. There followed something of the Scotch background of religious austerity and simplicity of life; but the Scotch were steeped in traditions; the New Englanders had crossed the sea with no superfluous baggage of this sort, and stood in a new land whose history was the history of individuals not of the race. Even the religious austerity had softened and become a mere tradition. Dr. Channing's eloquence had commended freedom and brotherly love and Unitarianism, spoken of somewhere by the good doctor as only the vestibule of the religion to come, was for the nonce the National church. The people were independent, but in one respect still colonial. English literature was still a mother country for the mind, and it was always with them; they had no new language in which to clothe their new thoughts they had not even, like Burns, a dialect to be raised to the dignity of a language. Their eyes read of the lark and the nightingale while their ear listened to the bobolink and the whip-poor-will. On the one hand culture, on the other freedom of thought. The former made his home in Cambridge; the latter took up his abode in Concord. There was no battle between them as between French classicism and



A. Bronson Alcott.

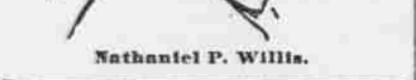
romanticism; their relations were of the friendliest. Both were necessary to the development of the country. But to find the true American spirit and the National type of character we turn to the village of Concord with its farms and meadows, its slow winding rivers and the wooded solitude of Walden close at hand. It was Emerson's own hearthstone, his home for 29 years.

than Emerson's to express the best hope and genius of his country. He carried his culture within; books were an accoutrement to him, he needed no esthetic or traditional surroundings. He established a weather bureau at Concord, in just relation with the stars and the elements, and made his local report of a universal truth. It was an utterance outside party and creed, and it leavened American thought in more ways than can be accurately computed. He urged to self-reliance and courage, bade his countrymen "leave authors' eyes and fetch your own."

No one was less bound by tradition, and yet his had the reverence of one to whom truth is neither old nor new, but eternal. He valued freedom of thought, but it was not, to his mind, a law to be established by act of Congress or by the subversion of all other acts. It was the simple, inalienable right of every man who had it in him to think at all.

All New England came into some sort of touch with Emerson. His long, serene, upright life in Concord was an inspiration. His letters stirred people to a belief in vast spiritual possibilities. They were read from manuscripts in which it mattered little whether he turned over one page or two. His prose is a series of great fragments finding their relation in the unity of the thought which has been and polished them. His poetry is still more condensed, the essence of his fancy with runic tones of its own.

To Thoreau, a native of Concord and another independent spirit, the assertion of freedom was not enough; it needed proclamation. "The world was too much with him" even in Concord; he retired to the banks of Walden and built himself a hut, where he abode for two years, a proceeding which has somehow contrived to give posterity the notion that he passed his entire life in the company of the owls and the squirrels. His hermitage was, however, within a mile or two of Concord, and he was never far from "liking a friendly Indian," as he expressed it, and kept up relations with the Emersons, with Bronson Alcott, whose imprisonment to depression was an attraction to his friends, and with Ellery



Nathaniel P. Willis.

Channing, nephew of the preacher, a poet of meditative verse, with a fine elevated style as well as a writer. For if the conditions called the golden age, in which our literature became more compact and homogeneous, confined to one section of the country and having a certain unity of purpose and idea. To take the right measure of this period it is not enough to read the poems, romances and essays which are its best legacy to us. We must also dip into biography to see under what conditions these works were brought forth, and glance at the lesser fragments of its literature, pages which have been justly thrown out because what they say is better said elsewhere, but which testify to the fact that certain truths had sifted through the common thought and were, often in queer and distorted forms, actually lived as well as written. For if the age was golden, it was not merely because there were a few great lights, but also because there was a high ideal of life and conduct, a love of learning and an effort after it.

It was a time when the struggle for a national existence was over, but the responsibility of establishing a national life remained; when Puritanism had relaxed its hold as a dogma, but the conscience was still braced by its moral power; when the pioneer's ax no longer rang in the forest, but the chopping of firewood was still a daily chore for intellectuals.

It was a theme at once fantastic and poignantly real; it suited his genius and strengthened it. On the stern background of formalism he brought out a great imaginative story, bestowing on it something of the delicate care which Hester gave to embroidering the scarlet letter on her gray gown. The book has its never-to-be-forgotten scenes, like the romances of Victor Hugo, but they are not projected into a forced relief like those of the great French novelist, but are closely interwoven parts of a whole that is singularly harmonious in every detail in perfect keeping. The purity of tone is as flawless as the style. The absence of passion, even of tenderness, is a merit, not a defect, no such note could have been introduced without changing the whole delicate scheme of color, and we do not miss passion in the restrained intensity and truth of the work, the stern pathos of the old creed, which was Hester gave to embroidering the scarlet letter on her gray gown. The book has its never-to-be-forgotten scenes, like the romances of Victor Hugo, but they are not projected into a forced relief like those of the great French novelist, but are closely interwoven parts of a whole that is singularly harmonious in every detail in perfect keeping. The purity of tone is as flawless as the style. The absence of passion, even of tenderness, is a merit, not a defect, no such note could have been introduced without changing the whole delicate scheme of color, and we do not miss passion in the restrained intensity and truth of the work, the stern pathos of the old creed, which was

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lectured, and was the embodiment of New England aspiration and intellectual energy. The story of her marriage in Italy to a young Italian patriot, handsome, but with no intellectual gifts and scant education, was the first installment of a curious serial, the other a brilliant husband and wife perished in a shipwreck two years later while on their way to America.

Note—This study by Miss Sophia Kirk, of Wellesley College, will be concluded on Saturday.

DEMOCRAT AGAINST BRYAN.

Prominent Chicago Man Can't Stand Assault on Business.

Chicago Times-Herald. William T. Baker, ex-president of the Chicago Board of Trade, has sent a brief letter to the Republican National Committee in which he expresses his opposition to the nomination of William Jennings Bryan for president.

Mr. Baker has been known throughout the Northwest as a consistent advocate of the free trade and therefore it is not to be wondered at that he seizes upon the promise of Mr. Bryan that he will "recommend such additional legislation as may be necessary to dissolve every private monopoly which does business outside of the state of its origin," as foreshadowing "a limitation of all successful enterprise within state lines."

The crusade against expansion, hypocritically called "imperialism," Mr. Baker dismisses as an absolute and silly snarl conjured up for this campaign only. He recalls that "expansion has been the policy and practice of the American people since the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock." And he dismisses it with this stinging figure:

Unlike Mr. Olney, Mr. Baker does not free trade, at least of two evils. He chooses between:

Sixteen to One vs. The Gold Standard and the Security of the Dollar. Mr. Baker declares, "I shall vote for McKinley as representing the latter."

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DAILY CITY STATISTICS.

Real Estate Transfers. Mrs. W. J. Smith to W. J. Smith, lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, East Portland Park, September 25, 1900, \$1000.

Births. September 24, boy to the wife of George Starl.

Deaths. Y. Kahn, Japanese, killed in railroad accident at Viento, Wasco County.

Contagious Diseases. Mrs. Gross and daughter, Stephens and Twelfth streets; typhoid.

Marriage Licenses. R. H. Bayley, aged 35, Cowitt County, Washington, and Nellie Butler, aged 20.

Cheers From a Cowboy. HALSEY, Or., Oct. 2.—(To the Editor.)—Hurray for McKinley and the cowboy!

HOSTETTER'S STOMACH BITTERS. Beware of imitations.

OPPOSED TO SURRENDER

ORIGON VETERANS WILL ANSWER COLONEL BRYAN.

Flag Should Not Be Hauled Down in Lands Won by American Arms.

A meeting of veterans of the Civil and Spanish Wars will be held Saturday and Monday to pass resolutions indorsing the policy of the Administration with reference to the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba and Porto Rico.

"The action of the proposed meeting of veterans," said General Summers yesterday, "will be the answer of the soldiers of Oregon to Colonel Bryan's policy of surrender in the Philippines. Veterans of our wars feel that territory gained at the cost of American blood is sacred, and should not be surrendered. We do not want any more flag hauling down in Cleveland gave us enough of it at Honolulu."

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