

The National Period of American Literature

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letters among other effects of the shock. If the name of the Knickerbocker school be too large for the little group of authors who followed Diederich, the historian, afar, it may be said that the term was applied to less dignified subjects in the 'ay of its immense popularity and to more worthy ones since.

The New York Evening Post had been established in the first year of the century with a hospitable policy toward letters, as well as a critical spirit which enhanced the honor of appearing in its columns. To gain admittance to those was next to having a book published. On the street and in coffee houses were knots of young men with corresponding ambitions notwithstanding the commercial bias of the city and the material bent of the age. Foremost among them was a banker's clerk who was not so far lost in arithmetical figures that he could not appreciate poetical and even wished that he might "louge upon a rainbow and read Tom Campbell," a sentiment with which a bystander agreed. In this way Fitz-Greene Halleck and Joseph Rodman Drake became acquainted in the spring of 1819, the beginning of a literary companionship as intimate as it was brief, for Drake died the next year.

Judged by what he had begun to do, this young poet was cut down at the opening of a promising career. His early essays found their subjects for satire in the topics of the town, but descriptive and patriotic pieces soon followed, the address to the American flag deserving a higher place than all that have succeeded it. A more remarkable feat was the production in two or three days of "The Culprit Fay" in refutation of an assertion that it would be difficult to write a fairly poem purely imaginative without the aid of human characters. He accomplished this work with no nearer approach to humanity than in these two lines:

For an Ouphe has broken his vestal vow;
He has loved an earthly maid.

The rest is the fanciful account of the consequences of such a high misdemeanor, full of delicate art and the traceries of an imagination at home with the hidden things of nature, itself idealized and peopled with intelligences of the poet's own creating. It is the midsummer night's dream of an airy fancy.

The entire poem should be the delight of children who dwell on the border land of the seen and the unseen.

Halleck survived to write an elegy upon his friend, which shows how far the art had progressed since the days of Mather; also to continue the strain of American verse which the two friends had joined in contributing to the columns of The Evening Post. Afterward he was stirred by the wrongs of suffering Greece to lift up the voice of freedom in "Marco Bozzaris." Whoever has lost a friend of his youth will associate with the recollection of his sorrow the lament of Halleck for his companion, beginning:

Green be the turf above thee,
Friend of my better days!
None knew thee but to love thee
Nor named thee but to praise.

Clement C. Moore has a place among the writers who were inspired by Dutch traditions to produce a Knickerbocker literature. No doubt the theological professor expected to rest his fame upon the first Hebrew and English lexicon compiled in this country or upon his version of Lavinia's "History of George Castriot." Instead, when he is placed among the immortals it will be in recognition of his "Visit From St. Nicholas," which all children know begins:

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

Gullian C. Verplanck was a New Yorker whose services to literature entitle him to mention. First a lawyer, then a politician and afterward a lecturer in divinity, his pen was seldom idle. "Essays on Revealed Religion" and the "Doctrine of Contrasts" were the more substantial results, while "The State Triumvirate" and "The Ceremony of Installation" are in a lighter vein. As a member of congress he was prominent in obtaining the extension of the term of copyright from 28 to 42 years. Later he was associated with Sands and Bryant in The Tullman, a publication containing some of the best writing of the time. In his addresses on art, history and literature and "The Influence and Use of Liberal Studies," and especially on "The American Scholar," he anticipated some of the more recent essayists and orators who have made kindred themes the subjects of high discussion.

William Cullen Bryant may be considered as an adopted member of the Knickerbocker group since he was not born in New York, but on the Hampshire hills of western Massachusetts. However, he was not long in finding his way to the metropolis and to the little circle which made it the literary center of the country at the time. A copy of Irving's "Knickerbocker" had traveled into the lonely village where young Bryant was reading law and gave him a taste of what was possible in lower latitudes. Hitherto his reading had been among the professional books of his father's medical library, varied by the Latin poets, the Greek Testament, Watts' hymns, Pope's "Iliad" and an unusual number of English classics for that period. But meter and rhyme were a part of his nature and blossomed out in juvenile verses, religious and political, to the delight of his father and to his own subsequent chagrin.

To these there were two notable exceptions, left at home when he went away to practice law in Great Barrington. His father found them one day six years afterward when rummaging in a drawer, read them himself and to a neighbor and without asking his son's permission started posthaste for Boston and the editor of The North American Review, then a two-year-old magazine.

If this overland journey of 100 miles was a remarkable instance of paternal pride, there was something to warrant it, for one of the poems was, "Thanatopsis" and the other "An Inscription Upon the Entrance to a Wood." The first of these was enough to establish the youth as a poet of no common order. It came to a reflective people in an age when the shadow of gloom had not entirely passed, having a sad note that appeals to every reader in sober days and raising visions of the sublimity, majesty and vastness of the universe which bring a pleasing awe to the soul of man in the presence of infinity and futurity. It is a poem of the intellect rather than the heart, grand, austere, solemn, a funeral anthem of the human race.

The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
Are shining on the sad abodes of death
Through the still lapse of ages.

But he wrote other poems that readers like better than this requiem of the universe, and in them all is the note of nature, struck by a sympathetic observer not of her graven moods alone, but of the severe and fateful as well. Out of them all, however, he drew lessons of truth or beauty or morals. He finds the law of guidance in the flight of the lone waterfowl across the December sky and of hope in the fringed gentian blossoming on the border of winter. "The Forest Hymn," "The Death of the Flowers," "The Song of the Lover" and others longer or shorter are charged with the bloom of summer and frosts of winter and tinted with the hues of spring and autumn. He inclines to the last season with the sober inheritance from a Puritan ancestry and writes:

The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds and naked woods and meadows brown and sere.

Yet into "The Little People of the Snow" he has put a sympathetic strain, such as is not always found with eulogists of winter and never with shivering grumblers about it. But then he survived the rigors of 20 Cunningham winters before he went to New York and the sultriness of as many summers and thereupon could also write:

The quiet August noon has come,
A slumbersome silence fills the sky;
The fields are still; the woods are dumb;
In glassy sleep the waters lie.

Open the volume of 116 poems anywhere and some phase of nature is presented, usually in her quiet majesty. Sometimes patriotic and national strains appear, as in "The Song of Marion's Men," "The Green Mountain Boys," "Our Country's Call" and "O Mother of a Mighty Race," but the return is speedy to "The White-Footed Deer," "The Hunter of the Prairies" and "The Death of the Flowers." He is pre-eminently the poet of the woods and waters, of earth and sky, of summer and winter, of the times and seasons, the days and the years.

Bryant's verse will always have its own charm for New Englanders and for their descendants, wherever they may live. They love the moods of nature with which the fathers played and fought by turns. The viking blood in their veins still makes them sing:

The winds from off the Norseman's hills
Do shriek a fearsome song;
There's music in the shrieking winds
That blow my bark along.

Besides, there is in his poems the flower of that imagination which, in spite of his pretended indifference, was in the Puritan's soul. It finally blossomed out early in this century like a crocus on the sunny edge of a snow-drift in northwestern Massachusetts. It revealed in the solemn, the sublime, the severe, as the forefathers had for 200 years. Moreover, the first great poet had all their conscientiousness in his performance of his task, even if he did break with their Calvinism. His measure is exact, his rhyme is perfect, and, more than all, his moral tone is without a flaw. There are in it both strength and health.

[Copyright, 1900.]

VI.—The Knickerbocker Group.

NO writer of Irving's genius could spring up in a barren age without inspiring such mediocre talent as might be inclined to lethargy. The mere stirring of fallow ground will send up unsuspected growths, and the awakening which the keen humorist gave the drowsy men of Manhattan started a crop of

LONGEST OF RAILWAYS.

Cost of Great Siberian Road Has Been \$390,000,000.

THIRTY MILES OF BRIDGES.

Total Length of Line, With Branches, Will be 5,542 Miles—Vast Possibilities of the Project.

Russia has practically completed her trans-Siberian Railroad. The following concerning this, the longest of the world's railways, from the Baltimore Sun, will perhaps interest HERALD readers:

The total cost of the railway, constructed by Russians and with Russian money—with all its branches and auxiliary undertakings—amounts to \$390,000,000 of which \$350,000,000 was expended by 1900. The construction began in the reign of Emperor Alexander III, and the first stone was laid at Vladivostok, May 19, 1891, by the then heir apparent Nicholas.

In the interests of transportation and with the object of rendering the stupendous undertaking as inexpensive as possible, the shortest and most direct route was selected, traversing the most fruitful and comparatively populous belt of the country—the granary of Siberia. The railway was begun at both ends, its western terminus being Tcheliabinsk, the last station of the Samara-Zlatoust railway, and a district town in the Province of Orenburg.

By 1900, 3,375 miles of line were laid down. Such results must be considered as highly favorable, especially taking into account, first, the difficulty of laying the permanent way in a country so intersected by rivers as the Provinces of Tomsk and Yenisei and so liable to inundation as the trans-Baikal regions, and secondly, the great number of large rivers to be crossed by the railway, over 30 miles of bridges being required for this purpose. The longest of these bridges is that over the River Yenisei, it being 2,940 feet long, with spans measuring 490 feet. In rapidity of construction the Siberian railway is unequaled, excelling the Canadian railway, 2,920 miles long, which has so much in common with it, and which took 10 years to build.

Direct steam communication is now possible between the European railway net and Vladivostok. The total length of the Siberian railway, with the Manchurian and other branches, which are being pushed to completion, will be 5,542 miles.

From the first, the immediate results of working the railway, as shown by the extent of passenger and goods traffic, exceeded all previous expectations. For three months of 1895 and the years 1896, 1897, 1898 and 1899 there were carried on the southern and central Siberian sections, 3,352,000 passengers and 2,041,000 tons of freight.

By the will of its imperial originator, the construction of the railway was put in close connection with the auxiliary undertakings, the promotion of the colonization and industrial development of Siberia. The Siberian railway opened a door into Siberia, through which a broad stream of emigration poured. The work of emigration has been placed on a proper footing and become strictly regulated.

In order to develop the trade with the countries of the Far East—China and Japan—the railway company has constructed a commercial port at Vladivostok. There is a strong ice-breaking steamer for use in winter, and the port is calculated for an annual turn over of 160,000 tons of goods. The Russo-Chinese Bank has likewise been established. To facilitate the transport of building materials for the eastern Chinese railway, as well as to extend Russian export trade in eastern Asia, the railway company has organized a regular service of steamers along the Pacific and the river Sungari, which flows through the most thickly populated and industrial part of Manchuria. On the shores of the unfrozen Yellow sea, at Talien Wan, one of the termini of the great trans-continental railway, the port and town of Dainy has been established as a free port.

However large the cost of the railway may be, it is insignificant in comparison with the commercial and strategic advantages held out to Russia by the exploitation of the shortest railway route between the Atlantic and the Pacific, in conjunction

with the stimulation of the rich productive powers of a vast country like Siberia and the development of Russia's commercial intercourse with the countries of Eastern Asia.

Novel Writing as an Industry.

There have been more than 200 new novels published in the United States this fall. There have been perhaps five thousand written that the publishers have declined.

The phenomenal popular success of a few writers of fiction during the last few years—some masters of their craft and some mere stage carpenters who set up spectacular scenes—has had the effect of making novel writing appear to be an industry. Few persons used to make it a business; for regarded as an industry it did not pay for the labor it required. But now it is regarded by many as a way to fortune. Lonely women, disappointed teachers, impecunious preachers—these, but not these only, try their hands at it. You never knew whom to suspect. Your physician, even your broker, men in public life, ladies in society—your own grandmother or your own granddaughter for all you know—all these have taken to the secret practice of the craft. For instance, one publishing house, which does not publish many novels, has within a given period received eight hundred volunteered book manuscripts, of which six hundred and fifty were novels. Of these four were accepted for publication. A few such facts as these indicate the extent of the deusion about the profits of the industry. "Father," said a boy of fourteen the other day, "I want you to buy me a copy of the 'Century War-Book.' I'm going to write a novel of the Civil War."

There are other books that the world wants more than it wants novels—histories, biographies, social studies, adventures. These seldom yield sudden fortunes. But there have been men who have made very considerable incomes as historians and biographers. Their incomes have as often come to their children as to themselves; but almost every important historical work has brought a fair reward at last. As a gainful industry novel-writing is not worth the labor it costs. As an art it is one of the noblest and most difficult; and only those who regard it as a great art have any right to undertake it.—World's Work.

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ARE YOU DEAF? ANY HEAD NOISES?



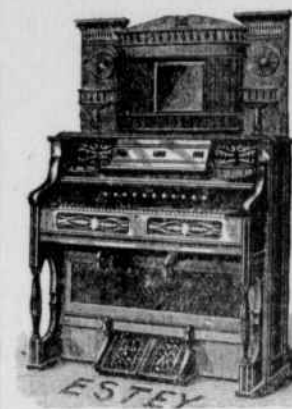
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