THE · WORLD'S GREAT · CLASSICS

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INCLUDING BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL SKETCHES

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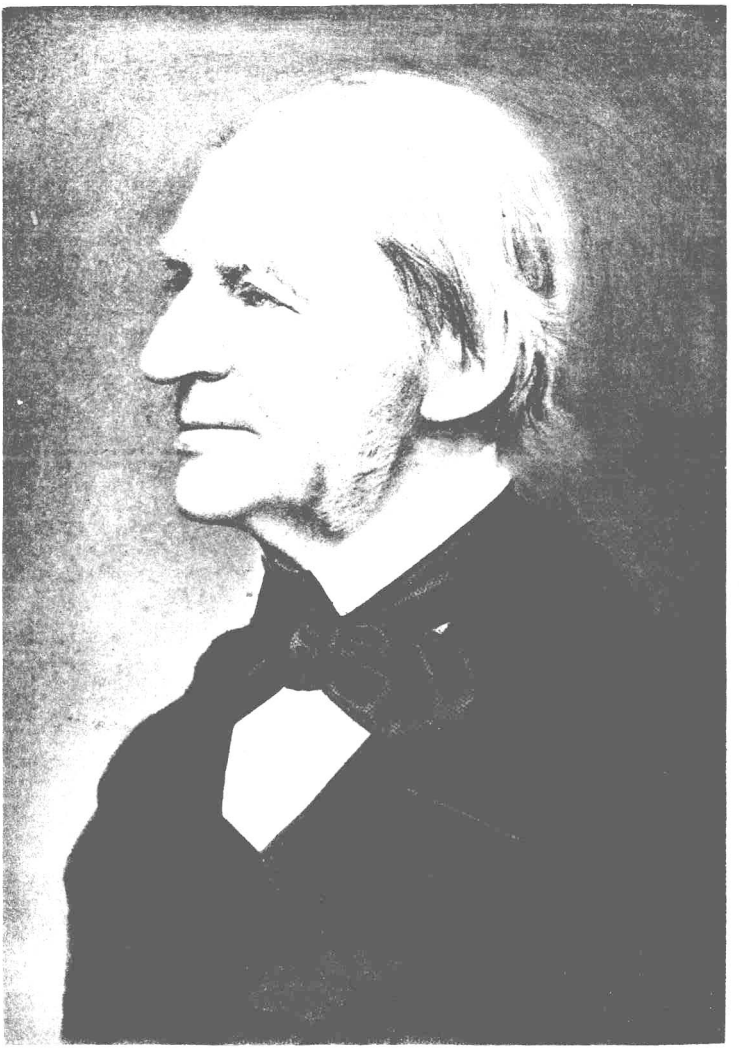

SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

THE earliest American essayists were the clergymen. Those first days of the great republic were religious days. And although the pulpit was eminently spiritual, and fervid, and the devil was duly excoriated, and lessons of faith and humility were inculcated, yet those hour-long homilies were not all theology. Ethics, and manners, and social and national progress were discussed in sermons, which were in reality well-rounded essays. So that the influence of the pulpit became not only moral, but intellectual and even literary, as well. And the lecturers who came later, what was their mission but to spread the influence of the essay? Apart from polemics and in addition to politics and partisanship, they presented to well-filled halls throughout the country essays, essays, nothing but essays. And now the magazines, which visit every fireside, continue the cult and keep it well apace with poetry and fiction, far surpassing the former indeed in worth and quality. The essay then has ever been near to the American heart, has ever basked in public favor. And from the contingencies of our early days it could start full-panoplied and well-equipped. It had the culture of France and England as a fulcrum, and proceeded by main force to lift the taste of our early citizens from the merely utilitarian and the grubbing commonplace to a conception of the graceful and the beautiful. It was necessarily formative and educational. Its task was premeasured, foreordered. Those among the first essayists who were not in the pulpit might well have been, for they were ethical guides and pathfinders. And the statesmen and historians and poets who came to swell the list; they all wore the robe of the prophet and the teacher, even when dallying with lighter themes. It is well for our literature that the essayists have spoken. For whether one points to poetry or fiction or history or theology or science, in no category will he find an achievement of supremacy excelling that which the es-

sayists have attained. Take even the greatest exemplars of our poetry and fiction, Poe and Hawthorne, in their lonely majesty of leadership. Their essays fall not far short of their lyrics and romances. To use a geographical metaphor, Poe's life was bounded on the north by sorrow, on the east by poverty, on the south by aspiration and on the west by calumny; his genius was unbounded. There are literary hyenas still prowling about his grave. But his pensive brow wears the garland of immortality. His soul was music and his very life-blood was purest art. His ear caught the cadences of that higher harmony which poets hear above the world's turmoil. In spite of detraction he is safely enshrined in memory while poetry shall live. Young poets will always have tears and roses for his grave.

And dreamy, inquisitve Hawthorne, probing and searching the human heart! There is the majesty of the seer about him. He takes one by the hand and leads him through enchanted palaces of art and whispers of the mysteries of life, and discloses the well-springs of character and motive. A favorite of the gods was he, dwelling high upon Olympus. Fancy his life at Salem among those quiet folk; shall we call them pygmies?

Bryant's style was pure and cold as a rivulet among his native hills. He was Nature's adept, knowing the language of flower and field and forest, the interpreter of natural beauty. A sweet, unruffled, high-bred quietude possessed him. He had the direct simplicity of Burns, with the lofty dignity of Wordsworth. He respected himself and his fellow-man, and dwelt ever "near to Nature's heart."

In Emerson the essay touched its highest pinnacle. Here is a teacher sent from God. His influence upon the people was incalculable and still is immeasurable. He had a high lesson for the people, and he taught it. His wisdom was needed. His exhortative utterances helped to stimulate the plodding common soul and raise it to loftier regions of thought and action. "Hitch your wagon to a star;" there is a dictum one could not by any chance forget. It burns into the memory and becomes a part of it. It is not merely remembered, it is assimilated, incorporated, absorbed. Emerson was a preacher in his essays. Humanity, morality, patriotism, these were his burdens, and he bore them to the end. He made the rostrum a second pulpit. He made culture a religion. He delved into the eternal verities,

and refined the gold of thought for the many. He threshed and winnowed and garnered the golden grain of progress and high thinking, and gave it to the people. To-day hardly an essayist will dispute his leadership. His works will remain a storehouse of Christian ethics and promptings to high endeavor and a noble philosophy.

"A sweet and gentle soul," Emerson called Longfellow. To be loved by the young, ah, that is a great thing! Before the stress of the decades has wearied the heart and dimmed with tears the eyes expectant, to be then the chosen friend of youth, pure and holy in its Heavenly aspirations and its turnings toward the light! So is it with Longfellow, who sang in lute-tones, bard of the gentle, the musing, the refined. He was not sublime, he was more—he was human. The youth of the future will hold him to their hearts, as it gladly does in these current days of storm and stress.

Readers of the rising generation will never realize the extraordinary influence of Mrs. Stowe. Her cry was an evangel, a clarion-call, a battle hymn. The North and the South, reading her words, saw the camp-fires afar, heard the tread of serried columns, felt the onset of marshalled hosts. Into forty languages her book was translated. It was a golden bugle sounding the charge, but its notes have long since been hushed into the diapason of God-given fraternal peace, happy, forgiving national union and joyous concord.

Holmes was a born essayist. If Pope "lisped in numbers, for the numbers came," so the smiling philosopher of the breakfast-table wrote essays as naturally as the sun shines or the waters flow. Brilliant as a poet and novelist, able and beloved as a technical instructor, yet it was those cheery, bonny, playful papers, filled with the keenest wit and deepest feeling, recurring from month to month, essays in all but strict form, which endeared him to all hearts and made him indeed an autocrat.

"A gentleman of the old school;" how often do we hear this term misapplied! But it fits Curtis as gracefully as the folds of a toga enwrapped the form of a Roman senator. Here are courtliness and stately ease. Here is urbanity as dignified as an old court minuet. Here is a suggestion of the modern equivalent to "ruffs and cuffs, and farthingales and things." A sweet serenity and perfect taste pervade his pages, a charm like the odor

of lavender which lingers about an ancient, forgotten, garret-hidden escritoire.

It is difficult for the present writer to speak of Whitman. In the first place, it seems to him something like praising Shakespeare, which appears not altogether a novel thing to do. And in the second place, he realizes that the "Whitman cult" is somewhat in advance of the times. But it is his belief that the coming centuries will place Walt Whitman high on the list of glorious names, the first voice of a united, crystallized, original America, a bard who sang democracy, our great citizenship, God-love, and the comradeship of the throbbing, suffering, hoping, majestic human heart.

Chauncey B. Starkweather

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

1706—1790

Benjamin Franklin was a statesman, a scientist, a philosopher, a philanthropist, and a man of affairs as well as a man of letters. In each capacity he achieved something more than ordinary success. Of a career so many-sided only a brief summary can here be given. He was born at Boston in 1706, and was the youngest of seventeen children. His father, a tallow-chandler, was a practical man, but to provide anything beyond an ordinary school education for his youngest son was beyond his means. Thus we find Franklin at the age of twelve apprenticed to his brother James, who printed and published the Boston "Gazette," the second newspaper published in America. At this period he was an eager reader, and whatever he read impressed him deeply, especially a volume of "The Spectator," which led him to cultivate Addison's delightful style. In a short time he began a series of anonymous contributions to his brother's paper, but the latter proving too hard a master he ran away and went to Philadelphia, where he began life for himself. A trip to London followed, but he was soon back in Philadelphia, and established himself as a printer in 1726.

Three years later he became the publisher and proprietor of the "Pennsylvania Gazette." For this publication Franklin, who was almost its sole contributor, wrote a large number of essays in the Addisonian vein. In 1732 he founded "Poor Richard's Almanac." This publication immediately attained a large circulation, and gave Franklin both fame and wealth. Its humor was genuine and irresistible, but what gave the work its greatest popularity and its enduring fame was the collection of wise says and homely proverbs. While he did not claim entire originality for this work, it is conceded that the homely epigrammatic form that constitutes its chief charm was entirely his own. In 1758, during a period of unusual financial depression, Franklin made selections from this work, and published them in the form of a sermon by "Father Abraham." This was at once received with universal favor, was published in numerious editions in English, went through thirty editions in French, and was also translated into many other languages. It is best known under the title "The Way to Wealth," and is thoroughly characteristic of Franklin's style.

During this period the many-sidedness of Franklin's activity was amazing. He founded the Philadelphia library, the first subscription library in America; was one of the chief organizers of the educational institution afterwards known as the University of Pennsylvania; became Deputy Postmaster-General in 1753, and as such greatly improved the postal system of the colonies; and finally made his immortal discoveries in electricity. The work of Franklin in behalf of American independence is a matter of history. As early as 1754 he proposed a union of the colonies against the French and Indians. From 1757 to 1775 he was, except for a few months, the agent of Pennsylvania in England. From 1776 to 1785 he represented the American colonies in France, first as the agent of the revolutionary government, later as Minister of the United States. His work in this capacity was in its bearing and final results equalled only by that of Washington's armies. He was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the treaty of alliance with France, and the treaty of peace. While in France he resumed literary work, and wrote for the amusement of his friends his charming "Bagatelles," of which "The Morals of Chess" is a good example. During this period he wrote his unfinished "Autobiography," the most important of his larger works. He continued active and influential till his death, in 1790, at the age of eighty-four.

THE WAY TO WEALTH

COURTEOUS reader, I have heard that nothing gives an author so great pleasure as to find his works respectfully quoted by others. Judge, then, how much I must have been gratified by an incident I am going to relate to you. I stopped my horse lately where a great number of people were collected at an auction of merchants' goods. The hour of the sale not being come, they were conversing on the badness of the times; and one of the company called to a plain, clean, old man, with white locks, "Pray, Father Abraham, what think you of the times? Will not these heavy taxes quite ruin the country? How shall we ever be able to pay them? What would you advise us to?" Father Abraham stood up and replied, "If you would have my advice, I will give it you in short; for 'A word to the wise is enough,' as Poor Richard says." They joined in desiring him to speak his mind, and gathering round him, he proceeded as follows:

"Friends," said he, "the taxes are indeed very heavy, and, if those laid on by the government were the only ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly; and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an abatement. However, let us hearken to good advice, and something may be done for us; 'God helps them that help themselves,' as Poor Richard says.

"I. It would be thought a hard government, that should tax its people one-tenth part of their time, to be employed in its service; but idleness taxes many of us much more; sloth, by bringing on diseases, absolutely shortens life. 'Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than labor wears; while the used key is always bright,' as Poor Richard says. 'But dost thou love life, then

do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of,' as Poor Richard says. How much more than is necessary do we spend in sleep, forgetting, that 'The sleeping fox catches no poultry'; and that 'There will be sleeping enough in the grave,' as Poor Richard says.

"'If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be,' as Poor Richard says, 'the greatest prodigality'; since, as he elsewhere tells us, 'Lost time is never found again; and what we call time enough, always proves little enough.' Let us then up and be doing, and doing to the purpose; so by diligence shall we do more with less perplexity. 'Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy'; and 'He that riseth late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night'; while 'Laziness travels so slowly, that Poverty soon overtakes him. Drive thy business, let not that drive thee'; and 'Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,' as Poor Richard says.

"So what signifies wishing and hoping for better times? We may make these times better, if we bestir ourselves. 'Industry need not wish, and he that lives upon hopes will die fasting. There are no gains without pains; then help, hands, for I have no lands'; or, if I have, they are smartly taxed. 'He that hath a trade hath an estate; and he that hath a calling, hath an office of profit and honor,' as Poor Richard says; but then the trade must be worked at, and the calling followed, or neither the estate nor the office will enable us to pay our taxes. If we are industrious, we shall never starve; for, 'At the workingman's house hunger looks in, but dares not enter.' Nor will the bailiff or the constable enter, for 'Industry pays debts, while despair increaseth them.' What though you have found no treasure, nor has any rich relation left you a legacy, 'Diligence is the mother of good luck, and God gives all things to industry. Then plough deep while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell and to keep.' Work while it is called to-day, for you know not how much you may be hindered to-morrow. 'One to-day is worth two to-morrows,' as Poor Richard says; and further, 'Never leave that till to-morrow which you can do to-day.' If you were a servant, would you not be ashamed that a good master should catch you idle? Are you then your own master? Be ashamed to catch yourself idle, when there is so

much to be done for yourself, your family, your country, and your king. Handle your tools without mittens; remember, that 'The cat in gloves catches no mice,' as Poor Richard says. It is true there is much to be done, and perhaps you are weak-handed; but stick to it steadily, and you will see great effects; for 'Constant dropping wears away stones'; and 'By diligence and patience the mouse ate in two the cable'; and 'Little strokes fell great oaks.'

"Methinks I hear some of you say, 'Must a man afford himself no leisure?' I will tell thee, my friend, what Poor Richard says: 'Employ thy time well, if thou meanest to gain leisure; and, since thou art not sure of a minute, throw not away an hour.' Leisure is time for doing something useful; this leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy man never; for 'A life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things. Many, without labor, would live by their wits only, but they break for want of stock'; whereas, industry gives comfort, and plenty, and respect. 'Fly pleasures, and they will follow you. The diligent spinner has a large shift; and now I have a sheep and a cow, everybody bids me good morrow.'

"II. But with our industry we must likewise be steady, settled, and careful, and oversee our own affairs, with our own eyes, and not trust too much to others; for, as Poor Richard says,

> 'I never saw an oft-removed tree,
> Nor yet an oft-removed family,
> That throve so well as those that settled be.'

And again, 'Three removes are as bad as a fire'; and again, 'Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee'; and again, 'If you would have your business done, go; if not, send.' And again,

> 'He that by the plough would thrive,
> Himself must either hold or drive.'

And again, 'The eye of a master will do more work than both his hands'; and again, 'Want of care does us more damage than want of knowledge'; and again, 'Not to oversee workmen is to leave them your purse open.' Trusting too much to others' care is the ruin of many; for 'In the affairs of this world men are saved, not by faith, but by the want of it'; but a man's

own care is profitable; for, 'If you would have a faithful servant, and one that you like, serve yourself. A little neglect may breed great mischief; for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy; all for want of a little care about a horseshoe nail.'

"III. So much for industry, my friends, and attention to one's own business; but to these we must add frugality, if we would make our industry more certainly successful. A man may, if he knows not how to save as he gets, keep his nose all his life to the grindstone, and die not worth a groat at last. 'A fat kitchen makes a lean will'; and

> 'Many estates are spent in the getting,
> Since women for tea forsook spinning and knitting,
> And men for punch forsook hewing and splitting.'

'If you would be wealthy, think of saving as well as of getting. The Indies have not made Spain rich, because her outgoes are greater than her incomes.'

"Away then with your expensive follies, and you will not then have so much cause to complain of hard times, heavy taxes, and chargeable families; for

> 'Women and wine, game and deceit,
> Make the wealth small and the want great.'

And further, 'What maintains one vice would bring up two children.' You may think, perhaps, that a little tea, or a little punch now and then, diet a little more costly, clothes a little finer, and a little entertainment now and then, can be no great matter; but remember, 'Many a little makes a mickle.' Beware of little expenses; 'A small leak will sink a great ship,' as Poor Richard says; and again, 'Who dainties love, shall beggars prove'; and moreover, 'Fools make feasts, and wise men eat them.'

"Here you are all got together at this sale of fineries and knick-knacks. You call them goods; but, if you do not take care, they will prove evils to some of you. You expect they will be sold cheap, and perhaps they may for less than they cost; but, if you have no occasion for them, they must be dear to you. Remember what Poor Richard says: 'Buy what thou hast no