

T H E
Riverside Library

The Little Book of
American Poets

1787—1900

Edited by

JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE



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THE TEST

*I hung my verses in the wind,
Time and tide their faults may find.
All were winnowed through and through,
Five lines lasted sound and true;
Five were smelted in a pot
Than the South more fierce and hot;
These the siroc could not melt,
Fire their fiercer flaming felt,
And the meaning was more white
Than July's meridian light.
Sunshine cannot bleach the snow,
Nor time unmake what poets know.
Have you eyes to find the five
Which five hundred did survive?*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

PREFACE

The Little Book of American Poets is designed as a companion volume to *The Little Book of Modern Verse*, the former covering the nineteenth century as the latter covers the twentieth. Each volume is complete in itself, but together they form a compendium of American poetry from the period of Philip Freneau to the present.

It is not the scheme of the volume to make a detailed survey of American verse, since Stedman and others have done this in collections which still remain authoritative, but rather to garner those poems which time has winnowed from the mass, to present in compact form some of the finer and more enduring things in our poetic literature.

It must be remembered that the technique of poetry changes and that work excellent, even supreme, in its own period, may not meet the standard of ours. Such a standard, however, should not be applied to it. Any art must be judged as the expression of its time, by its value as interpreting the age which produced it. Form changes less, perhaps, from period to period, than the vision, the spirit of the age. The poet of to-day is concerned with themes unknown to the poet of yesterday. The subject-matter of poetry has, indeed, undergone so radical a change that it will be interesting to note the diversity in content of *The Little Book of American Poets* and *The Little Book of Modern Verse*.

To represent the nineteenth century more ade-

quately, several poets included in the former collection, whose work has fallen almost equally within the two periods, are repeated in this volume. The selections, however, are distinct. Preference in space in this collection has naturally been given to those not included in the other, and if the representation of any contemporary poet seem inadequate, it will be found that his work is much more fully presented in *The Little Book of Modern Verse*.

JESSIE B. RITTENHOUSE.

August, 1915.

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