

## BOOK IV.

### THE ENGLISH LITERATURE OF AMERICA

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

A. D. 1700 to 1800.

THE AGE OF FRANKLIN, JEFFERSON, AND HAMILTON.

#### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

1. THE YOUNG AMERICAN REPUBLIC. — The incomparable *Christopher Columbus* made known to Europe that a New World lay across the Atlantic. Spain, France, England, and other nations were not slow in sending out expeditions for the purpose of further discovery and exploration. Colonization followed. No permanent English settlement, however, was made before the seventeenth century, when a party of colonists stepped ashore on the banks of the James River, Virginia, and began to build Jamestown in 1607. One hundred and two English Puritans landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620, and that was the starting-point of New England. The Catholic colony of Maryland—the first home of religious freedom in America—was founded by *Lord Baltimore*, in 1634. The Dutch settled New York, and

in 1626 Manhattan Island was bought from the Indians for twenty-four dollars. Pennsylvania was first colonized by Quakers under *William Penn*, in 1682. Georgia, the last of the thirteen English colonies, was settled in 1733.

The immortal labors of the Catholic missionaries among the Indians form undoubtedly the first and brightest chapter in our history. *White* was the apostle of Maryland ; \* *Jogues* toiled among the Iroquois of New York, and gave his life for the true faith ; and while opening heaven to the red man, *Marquette* discovered the Mississippi. The names of these and other illustrious priests are to this day household words. †

The first event that drew the thirteen English colonies closely together, and served to reveal their united power, was the French and Indian war, which began in 1755. The same event gave *George Washington* his early military experience. It was a fierce conflict. For a time, under the skilled leadership of *Montcalm*, fortune seemed to favor the French ; but after battling for seven years, the fleur-de-lis disappeared from Canada. France made over to England all her possessions east of the Mississippi. England was mistress of North America.

*Montcalm* had the keenness to foresee and to foretell that as soon as the English colonists in America were relieved of the presence of a hostile French neighbor they would feel themselves independent of English protection, and that revolt, sooner or later, would be the result of that feeling. He was right.

\* Father *White* set up the first printing-press in the English Colonies, but even the historian *Bancroft* ignores the fact so honorable to the illustrious Jesuit.

† See *The Catholic Pioneers of America*.

England soon began to lord it with a high hand over the Americans. Resistance followed. And fifteen years after the roar of the last cannon fired on the Plains of Abraham, at Quebec, had died away, the heroism of brave men made Bunker Hill ever famous in the annals of this Republic. The *Declaration of Independence* became a fact on July 4th, 1776.

The war of the Revolution lasted eight years to a day, and no conflict of modern times has had such happy results. The aid of France was essential to our success. Providence sent that "friend in need" at the right moment. The English flag—emblem of a tyrannical power—disappeared in 1783, from Maine to Georgia, and the *Stars and Stripes* waved gracefully over a new land—"the land of the free and the home of the brave."

In 1787 the *Constitution of the United States* was drawn up at a convention held in Philadelphia, of which Washington was president. After much discussion it was ratified by all the States. Washington was elected first President in 1782, and his two terms of office and that of John Adams carry us to the close of the eighteenth century.

2. SOME OF THE AGENTS THAT INFLUENCED EARLY AMERICAN LITERATURE.—It is not hard to understand that the circumstances which surrounded the first American colonists were quite unfavorable to literary work—especially literary work of a high order. The pen is no doubt a mighty power in old communities, but in new settlements the axe, gun, spade, and plough are the leading instruments of progress. The pioneers of the New World had to subdue a rude, wild continent. Vast forests were to be cut down. New homes had to be erected. The wants of the hour were imperative.

The majority of the early settlers were simply transplanted, Protestant Englishmen; and the books they wrote, the colleges\* they founded, the bitter religious intolerance † they exhibited—all go to prove that they were at best clever imitators. There is not a single work in the literature of the whole colonial period that calls for notice in this small volume. Franklin is the *first* truly distinguished name on the roll of American writers. The best minds were stirred to fervent, patriotic action by the Revolution; and the battle of freedom was fought by the pen as well as by the sword.

## LESSON I.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. DIED 1790.

Chief works: (1) *Autobiography*.  
(2) *Essays*.  
(3) *Correspondence*.

1. What author holds a commanding position in the American literature of the eighteenth century?

Benjamin Franklin, who was equally illustrious as a man of letters, statesman, and philosopher.

2. Tell us something of his life.

Franklin was a native of Boston, and had to leave school at the age of ten. He learned the art of printing, went to Philadelphia, and soon became a leader of public opinion. He signed the *Declaration*

\* The oldest and best known of these are *Harvard* and *Yale*.  
† The English penal laws against Catholics were in force in all the colonies down to the Revolution. As I have already remarked in another work, "To the Catholic it mattered little whether he resided on the banks of the Connecticut, the Hudson, or the Savannah; he was still the same unhappy object of religious hatred and persecution." (See *The Popular History of the Catholic Church in the U. S.*)

of *Independence*, and was one of the great figures in the Revolution.

3. Which is his most exquisite literary production?

An *Autobiography*, which is one of the most charming and instructive works of the kind ever written.

4. What range of subjects do Franklin's *Essays* cover?

Morals, Commerce, Politics, and Political Economy.

5. How are his Letters regarded?

He was an admirable letter-writer, and it has been well said that in his correspondence a perfect picture of Franklin himself is presented.

6. Through what publication did Franklin first become well known?

By his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, an exceedingly popular publication.\*

7. Mention one of his most important discoveries in the field of natural science.

Franklin was the first to prove that lightning is electricity, and he invented the lightning-rod.

"This self-taught American is the most rational, perhaps, of all philosophers. He never loses sight of common-sense in any of his speculations; and when his philosophy does not consist entirely in its fair and vigorous application, it is always regulated and controlled by it in its application and results. No individual, perhaps, ever possessed a juster understanding, or was so seldom obstructed in its use by indolence, enthusiasm, or authority. The distinguishing feature of his understanding was great soundness and sa-

\* Some of the most popular of our proverbs first appeared in the *Almanac*, as—

Early to bed and early to rise, make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Diligence is the mother of good luck.

Never leave that till to-morrow which you can do to-day.

Want of care does us more damage than want of knowledge.

What maintains one vice would bring up two children.

It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright.

God gives all things to industry.

gacity, combined with extraordinary quickness of penetration. He possessed also a strong and lively imagination, which gave his speculations, as well as his conduct, a singularly original tone. The peculiar charm of his writings, and his great merit also in action, consisted in the clearness with which he saw an object, and the bold and steady pursuit of it by the surest and the shortest road."—Lord Jeffrey.

## LESSON II.

### OTHER NOTED WRITERS OF THE REVOLUTION.

8. Name a few of the other most noted writers of the Revolutionary Era.

*Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Freneau, Trumbull, and Patrick Henry.*

9. What are the chief productions that we possess from the pen of George Washington?

The famous *Farewell Address*,\* written in 1796, and a collection of interesting *Letters*. The great man who was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen" was master of a clear, manly, dignified style. He wrote as a man of large and luminous views.

10. What work created an imperishable renown for Thomas Jefferson as a writer and patriot?

*The Declaration of Independence*.\*

11. Who has been styled the ablest political writer of the Revolution?

*Alexander Hamilton.*

12. What great work do we owe to the joint authorship of Alexander Hamilton and James Madison?

*The Federalist.*

13. What is *The Federalist*?

It is a small volume containing eighty-five essays,† which were designed to explain the merits of the Con-

\* The reader should make himself familiar with this production.  
† Of the eighty-five essays, Hamilton wrote fifty-one, Madison twenty-nine, and John Jay five.

stitution to the American people. The essays appeared in the interval between the publication and the adoption of the Constitution.

14. Who were the two most noted poets of the Revolutionary Era?

*Philip Freneau* and *John Trumbull*. Trumbull's *McFingal*, a satirical poem in the style of Butler's *Hudibras*, is still published and read.

15. Who was the greatest orator of the Revolution?

*Patrick Henry*, whose fiery, trumpet-toned eloquence aroused the Colonies and infused the courage to battle for liberty into the hearts of his timid, hesitating countrymen.

#### SUMMARY OF CHAPTER I., BOOK IV.

1. Some strong external influence was required to consolidate the thirteen English Colonies, and such an event was *the French and Indian War*.

2. The next great event that drew them together in still closer union was the *American Revolution*, and from this glorious event we date the birth of a new nation.

3. Franklin is the *first* American writer of distinction.

4. *Bird's-eye view of the chief American writers and works of the eighteenth century:*

Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*.  
George Washington, *Farewell Address*.  
Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*.  
Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist* (in part).  
James Madison, *The Federalist* (in part).  
Philip Freneau, *Poems*.  
John Trumbull, *McFingal*.  
Patrick Henry, *Speeches*.\*

\* For a very full account of early American literature, see Tyler's *History of American Literature*.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

A.D. 1800 to 1900.

THE AGE OF IRVING, LONGFELLOW, AND BROWNSON.

#### HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

"The number of good writers truly American, by which we mean all those who are not imitators of foreign modes, might be counted on the fingers of the two hands. In the politer walks of literature we find much grace of style, but very little originality of thought—productions which might as readily be taken for the work of an Englishman as of an American."—*Francis Parkman*.

1. A GLIMPSE AT THE UNITED STATES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.—The history of this Republic during the Nineteenth Century was, on the whole, one of peace and marvellous progress. From 1801 to 1901 twenty-two Presidents ruled the nation. We have had four wars. The conflict known as the War of 1812 was caused by the insolent attitude of England and her outrageous claim to search American vessels on the high seas. The war with Mexico, which began in 1845, added a large strip of continent to our territory. The late civil war, however terrible in some aspects, happily settled two momentous questions that had long agitated the country.

(1) It abolished slavery.

(2) It solemnly decided that no State or number of

\* Most of the European monarchies have had from four to eight wars, or more, during the same period.