

**AMERICAN AUTHORS;
WASHINGTON IRVING**

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American Authors; Washington Irving by David J. Hill

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BY

DAVID J. HILL,

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG; AUTHOR
OF "ELEMENTS OF RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION,"
AND "SCIENCE OF RHETORIC."

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PREFACE.

“**W**HAT is your first remark,” says Taine, “on turning over the great stiff leaves of a folio, the yellow sheets of a manuscript, — a poem, a code of laws, a confession of faith? This, you say, did not come into existence all alone. It is but a mould, like a fossil shell, an imprint, like one of those shapes embossed in stone by an animal which lived and perished. Under the shell there was an animal, and behind the document there was a **MAN**. Why do you study the shell, except to bring before you the animal? So you study the document only to know the man. The shell and the document are lifeless wrecks, valuable only as a clew to the entire and living existence. We must get hold of this existence, endeavor to recreate it. It is a mistake to study the document as if it were isolated. This were to treat things like a simple scholar, to fall into the error of the bibliomaniac.”¹

The brilliant French critic above quoted has stated an important truth, but has claimed for biography more than is due. Truth and beauty, the two chief powers

¹ English Literature, vol. i. pp. 1, 2.

of literature, are absolute, and independent of the man who discovers them, and embodies them in language. We do not "study the document *only* to know the man;" yet "it is a mistake to study the document as if it were isolated." The document and the man mutually interpret each other, and we know neither in its totality until we know both.

The series of biographies, of which this volume is the first, aims to furnish an introduction to our leading American authors. It, however, is a series of introductions merely. Its usefulness may well be questioned if it practically ends in satisfying the wants of the public. Should it excite an interest in the masterpieces of American letters, by developing an interest in our best writers, my purpose will be attained, but not otherwise. That the series will have the desired tendency, especially among the young, is confidently believed. It is not designed for the educated so much as for those who need information as well as criticism; yet it is hoped that the volumes may be found useful as compendiums for all classes of readers.

The chief source of information regarding the subject of this sketch is the "Life and Letters" by Pierre M. Irving. No biography of Irving could be written that would not be greatly indebted to this charming work. Its extent, however (it being in four octavo volumes), has rendered it less popular than it deserves to be. By the courtesy of the publishers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, I have made some extracts from Irving's correspondence, which greatly enrich the present sketch.

Excepting in the last chapter, which is a critique on the man and his writings, I have not ventured to express critical opinions, preferring to cite the best authorities.

The INDEX OF NAMES, and the CHRONOLOGY OF IRVING'S LIFE, are inserted for convenience.

DAVID J. HILL.

UNIVERSITY AT LEWISBURG,
November, 1878.