

AMERICA IN LITERATURE

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America in literature by George Edward Woodberry

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GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

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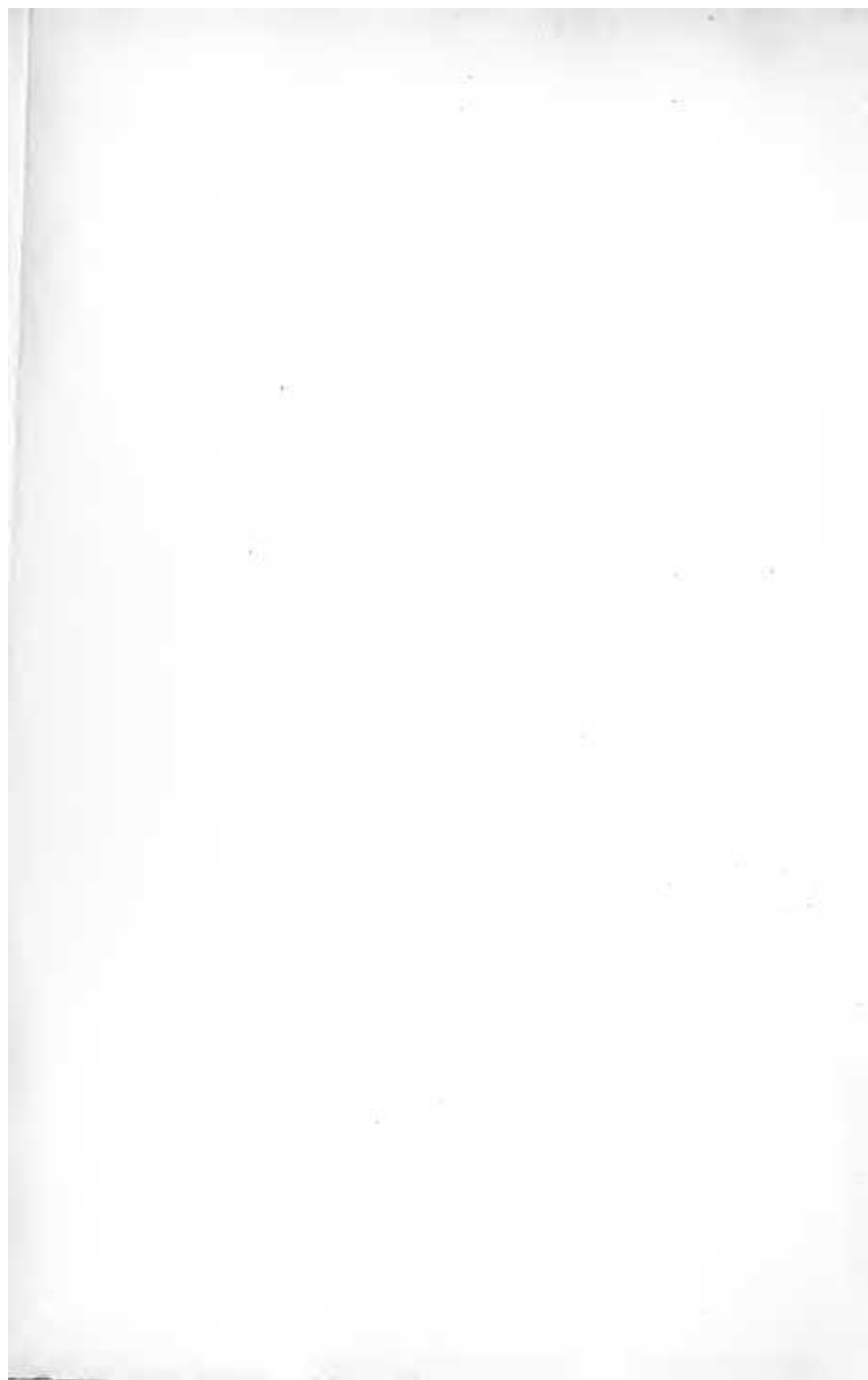
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THE BEGINNINGS

EVERYTHING begins in the middle—to adapt a wise saying—like an epic poem. That is the central truth of human perspective. Open history where you will, and there are always men streaming over the mountains or the sea from some horizon, bringing with them arms and cattle, battle-songs and prayers, and an imaginary world; their best treasure is ever the seed of some last year's harvest. Colonialism is a word too often used to disparage the thing; it is the natural condition of the outposts of man's spread over the earth;

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the wave, as it breaks on new shores, is salt with time. England was colonized, and Greece and India. So our ancestors, the first Americans, brought with them the past as well as the future to this land. It is not often that books make an important item in the cargo of an emigrant ship. The mother-tongue is brought, and in it is the great sap of thought, aspiration, and resolve that shall feed institutions of Church and State as they arise; but the book-language is, in the main, left at home; it is the mouth-language, where literature is in the making, that will be used on the new soil.

The pure literary influence in all our early colonies, the impact of the book-past of England, was slightest at the South and strengthened with the northing. In Virginia, generally, the first estates were naturally as innocent of