

**LITERATURE
PRIMERS. AMERICAN
LITERATURE**

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Literature Primers. American Literature by Mildred Cabell Watkins

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MILDRED CABELL WATKINS

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BY

MILDRED CABELL WATKINS



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PREFACE.

IN this volume the story of American literature is told to young Americans, briefly and understandably. It is written in a style which is both simple and familiar, avoiding on the one hand the verbiage of the larger manuals for schools, and on the other the prattle of the so-called first books for children. Brevity rather than condensation has been sought; care has been taken not to encumber the text with unnecessary or irrelevant details; dates have in most cases been relegated to the summaries at the close of the various chapters; criticisms are brief, often summed up in a single terse, easily remembered expression; illustrative extracts are confined to familiar quotations with which everybody ought to be acquainted. In the preparation of the book four objects have been constantly borne in mind: (1) to make the study interesting; (2) to give due prominence to the most essential facts; (3) to lead students to a first-hand acquaintance with the best and most famous works of American authors; and (4) to meet a very general demand among teachers for a simple, practical text book on the history of our literature adapted to the comprehension of pupils in the elementary schools.

A good deal of space has necessarily been given to minor authors and to living writers who will probably be forgotten before another century. But although

these play only an insignificant part in the real history of our literature, it is nevertheless important that readers should learn something about the writers whose books are affording so much present enjoyment to the world. On the other hand many names have been omitted—names known to the readers of news-stand literature, some of them very popular, but all of short-lived notoriety. This omission is defensible on the ground that some of the most widely read books of the day have no more place in literature than has the popular newspaper or last year's almanac.

In placing this little work before the public it is confidently hoped that it will encourage its readers—and especially its younger readers—to become more intimately acquainted with the works of the best American authors. It is also hoped that, by making the study of the subject both easy and attractive, the task of teachers and of others intrusted with the duty of forming and guiding the literary tastes of young people will be somewhat lightened.

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AMERICAN LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

What does "American Literature" Mean?

— If we should accept the definition sometimes given for literature, and say that it is "all that has been written," then "American literature" would, of course, include everything written by Americans, and the longest life would not be long enough to master its study. But the expression has generally a more restricted meaning, and includes, not all that has been written, but only what was worth writing and worth reading—worth reading not only when first printed, but for years afterwards. Sometimes, it is true, it includes books which nobody reads to-day, but which were written by men who influenced their own times, molding people's thoughts and actions, and thus shaping the literature of our own day, just as childhood shapes the after life of the man.

The study of American literature, then, is the study of the best books of America, and also of the lives of the men and women who wrote them. Volumes like the present try to answer the question: "What Americans have written books worth reading?" They try to tell, too, where and when such