

**HOME UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY OF MODERN
KNOWLEDGE. NO. 48.
GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649596713

Home University Library of Modern Knowledge. No. 48. Great American Writers by W. P. Trent & John Erskine

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

W. P. TRENT & JOHN ERSKINE

**HOME UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY OF MODERN
KNOWLEDGE. NO. 48.
GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS**

HOME UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

No. 48

Editors:

HERBERT FISHER, M.A., F.R.S.
PROF. GILBERT MURRAY, LL.D.,
F.R.S.
PROF. J. ARTHUR THOMSON, M.A.
PROF. WILLIAM T. BREWSTER, M.A.

THE HOME UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
OF MODERN KNOWLEDGE

16mo cloth, 50 cents *net*, by mail 56 cents

LITERATURE AND ART

Already Published

- SHAKESPEARE By JOHN MASFIELD
ENGLISH LITERATURE—
MODERN By G. H. MAIR
LANDMARKS IN FRENCH
LITERATURE By G. L. STRACHY
ARCHITECTURE By W. R. LETHBRIDGE
ENGLISH LITERATURE—
MEDIEVAL By W. P. KER
THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE By L. PRANSALL SMITH
GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS By W. P. TRENT and JOHN
ERSKINE

Future Issues

- THE WRITING OF ENGLISH By W. T. BARWATER
ITALIAN ART OF THE RENAISSANCE By ROGER E. FRY
GREAT WRITERS OF RUSSIA By C. T. HACKETT WRIGHT
ANCIENT ART AND RITUAL By MISS JANE HARRISON
THE RENAISSANCE By MRS. R. A. TAYLOR

GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS

BY

W. P. TRENT

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

AND

JOHN ERSKINE

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
LONDON
WILLIAMS AND NORGATE

COPYRIGHT, 1964,
BY
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS

CHAPTER I

FRANKLIN, BROCKDEN BROWN, AND IRVING

AMERICAN literature in the most liberal sense of the term is now a little more than three hundred years old. In the strictest sense comprising only the books that are still somewhat widely read, it is not half so old. Historians may discuss and students may read or skim a few poets and historians and theologians; Crèvecoeur's *Letters of an American Farmer* and John Woolman's *Journal* deservedly win an admirer here and there; a handful of people know that no American and few men anywhere ever possessed a more powerful mind than that of Jonathan Edwards; but practically only one book written by an American before the close of the eighteenth century has sufficient excellence and popularity to rank as a classic. Oddly enough, this book, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, was first read in an imperfect French version, won much of its fame in a somewhat emasculated English form, and

8 GREAT AMERICAN WRITERS

was not known in its native raciness until 1868. Its author, although his writings fill ten volumes, was far enough from being a professional writer; but his is the first name with which a popular account of the achievements of American men of letters need begin. In the one hundred and twenty-two years that have elapsed since his death the volume of American literature has increased in at least equal proportion with the growth of the country in population and wealth and power, yet among the thousands of authors whose works constitute this literature there is no more interesting and versatile and humane personality than his. The best element in their work, as in his, is a certain "citizen note," a certain adaptability to the intellectual, moral, and esthetic needs of a large democracy. When this is said, one perceives how it is that one may also say that America has no more produced an author of the range and quality of Dryden than she has produced one of the range and quality of Milton or Shakespeare.

Franklin's life is too well known, too intimately connected with the history of his country and his age, to require extended treatment here. We think of him primarily as a Philadelphian, but his birth at Boston on January 17, 1706, connects him with that New

FRANKLIN, BROWN, AND IRVING 9

England which, whether under the domination of the Congregational divines, such as the Mathers, or under the leadership of Emerson and his fellow Transcendentalists, was, until the present generation, the most productive and important literary section of the country. In his shrewdness and his practicality he was worthy of his Puritan birth; not so in his lack of spirituality and his thorough this-worldliness. Perhaps, however, a poetic imagination and a deep religious sense would have made a Franklin of whom the world would have stood in little need—a Franklin far from being the true child of his utilitarian century and the first exponent, on a broad scale, of the spirit of American nationality. He read both Bunyan and Defoe in his youth, but it was the author of the *Essay upon Projects* that chiefly impressed him. He read Addison also, and imitated him in early essays. With such masters and his own native genius, it is not surprising that, given the many occasions he had for putting his pen to use, he should have become the best of our early prose-men, a master, like Lincoln after him, of the homely vernacular.

He began his career as apprentice to his brother, who printed the *New England Courant*. He was already in touch with contemporary British literature, already a liberal in