

**MODERN
AMERICAN
PROSE SELECTIONS**

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Modern American prose selections by Byron Johnson Rees

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BYRON JOHNSON REES

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EDITED BY

BYRON JOHNSON REES

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT WILLIAMS COLLEGE



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TO
E., C., AND H.
STUDENTS AND FRIENDS

PREFACE

As the reader, if he wishes, may discover without undue delay, the little volume of modern prose selections that he has before him is the result of no ambitious or pretentious design. It is not a collection of the best things that have lately been known and thought in the American world; it is not an anthology in which "all our best authors" are represented by striking or celebrated passages. The editor planned nothing either so precious or so eclectic. His purpose rather was to bring together some twenty examples of typical contemporary prose, in which writers who know whereof they write discuss certain present-day themes in readable fashion. In choosing material he has sought to include nothing merely because of the name of the author, and he has demanded of each selection that it should be of such a character, both in subject and style, as to impress normal and wholesome Americans as well worth reading.

The earlier selections — President Roosevelt's noble eulogy upon Lincoln, Secretary Lane's two addresses on American tradition and heritage, and Governor Coolidge's address at Holy Cross — remind the reader of the high significance of our national past and indicate the promise of a rightly apprehended future. There follow two articles — "Our Future Immigration Policy," by Commissioner Frederic C. Howe, and "A New Relationship between Capital and Labor," by Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. — on subjects that press for earnest consideration on the part of all who are intent upon the solution of our

problems. Mr. Alvin Johnson's playful yet serious essay on "the biggest, kindest, most honest and honorable tribal head that ever lived" completes the group of what may be termed "Americanization" Papers.

Perhaps the best of the many magazine articles that President Wilson has written is that which serves as a link — for those to whom links, even in a miscellany, are a satisfaction — between the earlier selections and those that follow. "When a Man Comes to Himself," expressing as it does in English of distinction the best thought of the best Americans concerning the individual's relation to society and to the state, will probably be widely read, with attention and gratitude, for many years to come. Associated with Mr. Wilson's article are three selections presenting various aspects of self-realization in education. One of them, "The Fallow," deals in signally happy manner with the insistent and vital question of the study of the Classics.

That scholarly and competent literary criticism need not be dull or deficient in charm is obvious from an examination of Mr. Bliss Perry's masterly study of James Russell Lowell and Mr. Carl Becker's subtle and discriminating analysis of *The Education of Henry Adams*. Both writers attack subjects of considerable complexity and difficulty, and both succeed in clarifying the thought of the discerning reader and inducing in him an exhilarating sense of mental and spiritual enlargement.

From the many notable autobiographies that have appeared during recent years the editor has chosen two from which to reprint brief passages. The first is Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*, the simple and straightforward personal narrative of one whom all must now concede to have been a very great man; the other is that human and poignant epic of the stranger from Denmark who became one of us and of whom we as

a people are tenderly proud. *The Making of an American* is in some ways a unique book; concrete, specific, self-revealing and yet dignified; a book that one could wish that every American might know.

Also concrete and specific are the chapters from Mr. Ralph D. Paine and Mr. Burton J. Hendrick. In "Bound Coastwise" Mr. Paine has treated, with knowledge, sympathy, and imagination, an important phase of our commercial life. As an example of narrative-exposition, matter-of-fact yet touched with the romance of those who "go down to the sea in ships," the excerpt is thoroughly admirable. Mr. Hendrick, in entertaining and profitable wise, tells the story of what he considers "probably America's greatest manufacturing exploit."

Dr. Finley "starts the imagination out upon the road" and "invites to the open spaces," especially to those undisturbed by "the flying automobile." "Walking," he says eagerly, "is not only a joy in itself, but it gives an intimacy with the sacred things and the primal things of earth that are not revealed to those who rush by on wheels."

In "Old Boats" Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton, in a manner of writing that has of late years won him a large place in the hearts of readers, thoughtfully contemplates the abandoned farmhouse, and lingers wistfully beside the beached and crumbling craft of the "unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea." Few can read, or, better, hear read, his closing paragraph without thrilling to that "other harmony of prose." That such a cadenced and haunting passage should have been published as recently as 1917 should assure the doubter that there is still amongst us a taste for the beautiful. "I live inland now, far from the smell of salt water and the sight of sails. Yet sometimes there comes over me a longing for the sea as irresistible as the lust for salt which stampedes the