

to the production of a quite classed history of American literature.

Many of our historians who escaped from the colonial or provincial illusion succumbed, especially in the period before the Civil War, to the temptation of national pride. There was much provocation and incitement both at home and abroad. Transatlantic critics enquired tauntingly, "Who reads an American book?" and challenged the American authors to show reasons why sentence of death should not be pronounced against them. It no longer sufficed to say with the colonial divines of New England: We have created in the wilderness of the western world a commonwealth for Christ, a spiritual New Jerusalem. It no longer served to declare with the Revolutionary Fathers: We have established the political Promised Land, and have set up the lamp of Liberty for a beacon light to all nations. What was demanded early in the nineteenth century of the adolescent nation was an indigenous independent national literature. The wrong answer to this demand was given by the enthusiastic patriots who, after the Revolution, advocated the abrogation of English in "these States" and the invention and adoption of a new language; or compiled, to silence their skeptical English cousins, pretentious anthologies of all our village elegists; or offered Dwight's *Conquest of Canaan* as an equivalent to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Barlow's *Columbiad* as an imposing national epic, Lathrop's poem on the sachem of the Narragansett Indians, *The Speech of Caunonicus*, as heralding the dawn of a genuinely native school of poetry. Our pioneer historian Knapp discreetly hesitates to say "whether she of 'the banks of the Connecticut' [Mrs. Sigourney], whose strains of poetic thought are as pure and lovely as the adjacent wave touched by the sanctity of a Sabbath's morn, be equal to her tuneful sisters, Hemans and Landon, on the other side of the water." But Knapp, who is a forward-looking man, anticipates the spirit of most of our *ante-bellum* critics and historians by doing what in him lies to give to his fellow countrymen a profound bias in favor of the autochthonous. "What are the Tibers and Seamanders," he cries, "measured by the Missouri and the Amazon? Or what the loveliness of Illysus or Avon by the Connecticut or the Potomack?—Whenever a nation wills it,