

to seek for proofs of taste, mind, or information, worth possessing, in our early records; and some of our citizens, who have never examined these matters, have rested so quietly after these declarations, or so fondly denied them, that the bold asserters of these libels have gained confidence in tauntingly repeating them. The great epoch in our history—the revolution of 1775—seemed sufficient, alone, to many of the present generation, to give us, as a people, all the celebrity and rank, among the nations of the earth, we ought to aspire to, without taking the trouble to go back to the previous ages of heroick virtue and gigantick labours. Many of the present generation are willing to think that our ancestors were a pious and persevering race of men, who really did possess some strength of character, but, without further reflection, they are ready to allow that a few pages are ‘ample room and verge enough’ to trace their character and their history together: I have ventured to think differently”;—and the editors of the present work are at this point in accord with Knapp.

Knapp, however, illustrates a temptation which has beset investigators of American literature from his day to ours, namely, the temptation to relinquish the unremunerative project of adequate scholarly publication and to compensate oneself by producing a text-book adapted to the means and the minds of school-boys. “My plan,” he says, in a passage which throws an illuminating beam down the whole pathway of American literary scholarship—“My plan when I commenced my researches was an extensive one, and I gathered copious materials to carry it into effect. For several years past I have had access to libraries rich in American literature; but when I sat down to work up the mass I had collected, the thought suggested itself to my mind, that no adequate compensation could ever be reasonably expected for my pains. . . . Still I could not be persuaded to relinquish altogether my design, and I therefore set about abridging my outlines, dispensing with many of my remarks, and giving up many elaborate finishings I had promised myself to make in the course of my work. And another thought struck me most forcibly, that a heavy publication would not be readily within the reach of all classes of youth in our country, but that a single volume of common size, in a cheap edition, might find its way into some of