

poetry appeared. Even stern Puritanical notions had not been able to crush all sentiment from the New England breast. Men's minds were then filled with theological speculations and, as a natural result, the first poetry partook of a religious nature.

About the middle of the seventeenth century "the Bay Psalm Book" appeared. It was merely a metrical translation of a few of the Psalms from the Hebrew, by a number of ministers living in Massachusetts. Literary merits, it had none, and is now looked upon as a curiosity. Some interest is attached to it, however, on account of its being the first book printed within the bounds of the great American Republic. Such was the beginning of American poetry, which, as some one said, "was sure to rise because it could not sink lower." The next step was taken by Anne Bradstreet, who was considered a great versifier by her contemporaries. Though dignified with the title "Tenth Muse," she wrote nothing that could properly be called poetry. Mrs. Bradstreet's name is remembered chiefly because she was the first in the country to lay claim to poetic talent; and she was also the pioneer among American literary women. In those early times, a little Negro girl, Phillis Wheatley, whose years numbered not a score, joined the list of writers. She published a small book of "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral." The girl was an African slave, uneducated, and having but few friends. Her one small talent she carefully cultivated, and set an example to her race, which has never been followed to any extent.

The eighteenth century dawned on a new class of poets, represented by Timothy Dwight and John Trumbull. Their verses were heavy, unpleasing and laden with Calvinistic doctrines. A host of versifiers belong to this age, but they did not contribute anything of value except a few patriotic poems.

Different from the rest were Halleck and Drake, who wrote at the beginning of the present century. Intimate friends and lovers of poetry, their friendship was similar to that of Shelley and Keats. Halleck, like Shelley, was forced to yield to the cold clutch of death. His young associate Drake, fired with love for his growing country, wrote a lyrical poem, "The American Flag," which, if nothing more, inspired childish breasts with patriotic feelings. Halleck was not by any means a great poet, and yet he felt rather than saw the dawn that was to be.

Numerous were the poets of this time but it would be impossible to mention them all; they flashed like meteors through a darkened sky, then disappeared, leaving no trace of their brightness behind.

Passing on to those who really contributed to the growth of American poetry, we come to William Cullen Bryant, so truly called the poet of nature. With the publication of "Thanatopsis" a new era dawned in the poetry of this country. Bryant's mind was filled with the grandeur of the universe, and, wrapt in wonder at the harmony in nature, he wrote:

"Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works
Learn to conform the order of our lives."

His poetry breathes the life he loved, and but seldom does he wander from his "chosen woodland path." As a writer of blank verse Bryant has not been surpassed in his own country, and his translation of the Iliad and Odyssey have a stately grace that is not often reached.

From Bryant we pass to Longfellow, the loved poet of America. He did not follow in the beaten track of other writers but preferred to pave a way for himself. This is seen, especially in the metres he uses. He successfully employed unrhymed hexameter and unrhymed trochaic tetrameter, two measures seldom used in English. His long poems, "Hiawatha," "Evangeline" and "The Spanish Student" rank high in literature and form a golden setting for the rich jewels of his shorter pieces. Longfellow's style is pleasing, for his thoughts come from the fulness of a great heart. What he has done for his country's poetry is of priceless value.

Born about the same time but living scarcely more than half as many years as the poet just mentioned was Edgar Allan Poe. As a writer of poetry he differed from his contemporaries as well as from his predecessors. His thoughts delighted to ponder on the mysteries of the future world, and the possibility of friends being re-united there. His name seems to be more intimately associated with the stately stepping of the "Raven" than with any other piece he has written.

Of a very different type is the work of Emerson. His pre-eminence as a prose writer is acknowledged by critics; but as a poet he is not so popular. This may be due in part to a lack of flowing melody which one expects in poetry.