THE
American Tradition
in Literature
REVISED

Edited by
Sculley Bradley
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND VICE-PROVOST
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Richard Croom Beatty
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

E. Hudson Long
PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN LITERATURE AND
CHAIRMAN OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

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Whitman to the Present

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Preface

In compiling this work we have intended to provide a freshly considered collection of great American writings representing the range and power of our literature as a whole. Our effort has been to represent major authors in the fullest of their stature and variety. Besides the titans, we have included writers of lesser stature whose works endure, but no author was introduced primarily for the purpose of illustrating literary or social history. In the same way, works of popular literature and humor have been admitted as literature, not as social or cultural documents.

While we have made literary merit our final criterion for selection, we have attempted in our critical apparatus to emphasize the relations between the literary work and the general movements in American civilization and intellectual history. In the textual annotations, as in the introductory essays and biographical skits, we have attempted to secure as much objectivity as possible, to suppress individualistic critical tendencies of our own in favor of the consensus of our professional peers, and to leave the reader free to pursue his own ideas and values without having to contend with ours. Yet we have annotated liberally, believing it our function as editors, while abstaining from the expression of personal prejudice or opinion, to elucidate any substantial obscurity that would handicap a reader lacking immediate access to the appropriate reference books.

During the present century the writings of Americans have become an important influence in the literature of the western world, and our second volume has considerably more than the usual representation of twentieth-century authors. But as early as the age of Jonathan Edwards and Franklin, and even more in that of Poe, Emerson, and Whitman, the voice of our young nation was heard far beyond the shores of our continent. In editing the present collection we have been fully aware of the increasing responsibilities involved in selecting from such a national inheritance the works that would best represent its nature and its values. In performing this task we have become indebted to the rapidly accumulating contributions

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