

<<美国文学教程>>

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内容概要

《美国文学教程》主要包括The Colonial Period and 17th Century Literature of Puritanism、 The Period of Enlightenment、 New England Transcendentalism and the Romantic Age等内容。

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CHAPTER I THE COLONIAL PERIOD AND 17TH CENTURY LITERATURE OF PURITANISM THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Modern archaeology and anthropology have confirmed that the first settlers in America were the Asians known as the ancestors of American Indians or Native Americans, who crossed the Bering Strait and immigrated into America between 25,000 and 40,000 years ago. The first immigrants infused new life to the uninhabited continent, but the later changes of the North American glaciers during the Ice Age destroyed the path by which the Asians came to America, and thereafter America became isolated from the other continents until Christopher Columbus arrived with his three ships in 1492. The discovery of America by Columbus led to the rush of European immigrants into this fascinating and strange continent and brought the rise of the New World. The English settlement in America began in 1607, when Captain Christopher Newport anchored his three storm-beaten ships near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay. The English settlers laid out Jamestown as their first permanent settlement in America, and then in rapid succession other English colonies emerged one after another, especially after the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620. The early settlers were so-called Separatists and Puritans, who managed to escape to the New World to avoid the religious persecution. The Puritans were members of the Church of England who at first wished to reform or "purify" its doctrines, however, their own firm belief and disconformity with the Church finally led to their withdrawal from it and a great Puritan exodus. Under the influence of John Calvin (1509-1564) and Martin Luther (1483-1546), the Puritans, no matter whether they were in England or America, kept in common with all advocates of strict Christian orthodoxy, insisting that the omnipotent and omniscient God had created Adam, the first man, in his own perfect image, and that Adam in his wilfulness had broken God's covenant. They subscribed to Calvin's belief in original sin as well as in original depravity, and to them the children of Adam were not mere automatons of evil impulse, as a limited freedom of the will, which they possessed as Adam had, would enable them to make the good or evil choice. However, the original sinfulness of a man's nature could not be mitigated by anything in his personal power, thus his redemption must be a free gift of God's grace. This doctrine led the Puritans to examine their souls to find whether they were of the elect and to search the Bible to determine God's will. Mindful of their outward behavior, they held the belief that good works were the natural evidences of the possession of faith and salvation, although they could not secure redemption. To be a Puritan, one had to give sufficient evidence of conversion and then continue to lead a good life.

Although Puritanism was originally a movement in England which rose in the sixteenth century within the Church of England, aiming at reforms in its doctrines and greater strictness in religious disciplines, and contending that religion should be a matter of personal faith rather than of ritual, with simpler forms of worship (no bishops, no robes, no set prayers, etc.) instead of those established by tradition and law within the Church of England, it was more than a religious creed to American Puritans, for their hard life and grim struggle for survival helped them comprehend that it should encompass and unify all aspects of man's life, spiritual and material, public and private. A perfect unity could not be achieved by a preoccupation with theology to the exclusion of other interests, but by a synthesis of all phases of human experience in relation to theology. In one word, American Puritans grew more practical as they had to be when living in the severity of the frontier conditions, in comparison with their counterparts in England. Lovers of a creative life as they were, American Puritans were blamed at times for their religious intolerance and austere way of life, but in their influence on American life, there should be much more to bless them for than to condemn.

From the very beginning, the movement of the European settlement in America followed in general east-to-west lines. From the Atlantic seaboard the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes water-way, which offered the readiest access to the interior land, ran roughly in an east-and-west direction. Wherever the European immigrants went, American Indians were too few and too backward to be a grave impediment to the advance and colonialization of newcomers. When the first Europeans arrived, the American Indians east of the Mississippi numbered not more than two hundred thousand; those of the whole continent north of Mexico did not exceed five hundred thousand. The Indians were in the tribal society. Armed only with such simple weapons as the bow and arrow, and ignorant of any military art, save the

ambush, they were ordinarily no match for the whites who were well-accounted and superior in number. It was impossible for them to stop the movement of the white settlement. Still, as the white immigrants advanced, seizing larger tracts of land, the Indians formed extensive tribal alliances for resistance. The stern and extensive struggles between the Indians and the settlers in the colonial period passed through several well-marked stages. The struggles caused the settlers severe losses in life and property, but often ended in the complete destruction of the Native Americans. As afterward the European settlers came into sharp conflict within themselves for their national interests in the New World, the Indians found European allies against their European enemy. Some of the Northern tribes got combined with the French in order to defeat the English-speaking settlers, and for the same aim some of the Southern tribes received arms and encouragement from the Spaniards. But none of these efforts could prevent the inevitable fall of the backward tribes.

The Puritan migration between 1620 and 1640 brought New England a population of twenty-five thousand, large enough to assure the colony a long-enduring economic and cultural leadership among all the European colonies. Although the settlements of Swedes along the Delaware, of Dutch in the Hudson River Valley, of Quakers in Pennsylvania, and of Catholics in Maryland added color and variety to the pattern of colonial culture, it was the Puritans who wrote most of the literature, and it was Puritanism that was most influential in the intellectual and economic life of the settlers. In the Massachusetts Bay colony, many of the Puritans had their own libraries that contained not only the theological volumes but also the classics and the works of leading contemporary English authors. Moreover, the geographical isolation of the American Puritans did not cut off their association with England; many books were imported, and at the same time, since the New England writers were widely read in their mother country, many of their manuscripts were sent to England to be printed. In addition, the first colleges in the colonies, such as Harvard University (1638), were established in the first half of the seventeenth century and gave evidence of a great stimulus that the Puritanism afforded to the intellectual life of the settlers.

However, the English immigration and settlement in America was not only the result of religious motives but also that of mercantile ones. Hence, when the Virginia Company promoted the Jamestown colony as the first permanent English settlement in 1607, they expected that its plantations would provide goods for the British trade and would attract Englishmen who needed homes and land. Driven by such ambition and hope, the settlers avariciously fenced and cultivated the hunting grounds of the American Indians who, though ignorant of the English concept of property, refused to be enslaved and retaliated with fire and blood to defend their own rights and interests. In order to solve the problem of labour, the settlers turned their attention to slaves. Slavery had existed in North America even before the Europeans arrived. Many Native-American tribes enslaved those captured in battle from other tribes. In the middle of the fifteenth century the slave trade began; thousands of Africans were shipped as slaves to America where they were sold into captivity. In 1619, the first African slaves were brought to Jamestown and sold to the plantation owners. By 1775, there were about half million slaves in the thirteen colonies in North America.

British mercantilism resulted in the eventual shift from an agricultural and tribal society to a slave-holding plantation economy in the South. Such a social transformation demanded a high price to pay for it. A number of laws, such as the Navigation Acts of the late seventeenth century, were intended to compel the settlers to sell to the mother country all their raw materials and agricultural exports, for which they were to receive in exchange British manufactured products. British shipping was given monopoly of the carriage, at rates fixed in England, thus the mother country was assured of a credit balance. As to the policy, there was no exception to the northern colonies. The natural conditions in the northern area favored commerce and manufactures, which thrived at an unexampled speed, but British exploitation ultimately became intolerable, and provided one of the deep-rooted reasons for the Revolution.

As the colonies in America grew and expanded, a developing Americanism began to play a role in the social life. Although the European immigrants were an amalgamation of different national stocks and cultures, the English language as a common language and English institutions were dominant everywhere, so that this gave the country a general unity. Different from the French and Spanish colonies which did not possess a representative self-government, the British colonies had opportunities to erect popular assemblies and to establish governments in which both electors and representatives had real political responsibility. This respect for essential civil rights began to take root during the colonial period, and brought about increasing

changes in the socialstructure,while breaking down many sorts of special privileges. ……

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