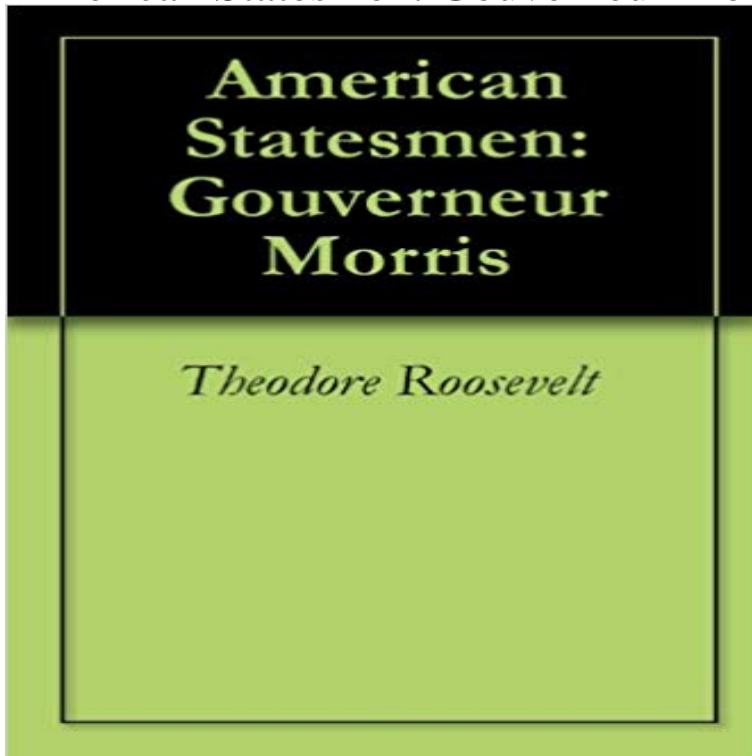


American Statesmen: Gouverneur Morris



CONTENTS Introduction. CH1. His Youth: Colonial New York. CH2. The Outbreak of the Revolution: Morris in the Provincial Congress. CH3. Independence: Forming the State Constitution. CH4. In the Continental Congress. CH5. Finances: The Treaty of Peace. CH6. The Formation of the National Constitution. CH7. First Stay in France. CH8. Life in Paris. CH9. Mission to England: Return to Paris. CH10. Minister to France. CH11. Stay in Europe. CH12. Service in the United States Senate. CH13. The Northern Disunion Movement among the Federalists. Two generations ago the average American biographer was certainly a marvel of turgid and aimless verbosity; and the reputations of our early statesmen have in no way proved their vitality more clearly than by surviving their entombment in the pages of the authors who immediately succeeded them. No one of the founders of the Constitution has suffered more in this respect than has he who was perhaps the most brilliant, although by no means the greatest, of the whole number,--Gouverneur Morris. Jared Sparks, hitherto Morris's sole biographer, wrote innumerable volumes on American history, many of which are still very valuable, and some of them almost indispensable, to the student. The value, however, comes wholly from the matter; Mr. Sparks is not only a very voluminous writer, but he is also a quite abnormally dull one. His Life of Gouverneur Morris is typical of most of his work. He collected with great industry facts about Mr. Morris, and edited a large number of his letters and state papers, with numerous selections, not always well chosen, from his Diary. Other merits the book has none, and it has one or two marked faults. He failed to understand that a biographer's duties are not necessarily identical with those of a professional eulogist; but for this he is hardly to blame, as all our writers then seemed to think it necessary to shower indiscriminate praise

on every dead American--whether author, soldier, politician, or what not--save only Benedict Arnold. He was funnily unconscious of his own prolix dullness; and actually makes profuse apologies for introducing extracts from Morriss bright, interesting writings into his own drearily platitudinous pages, hoping that candor and justice will make his readers pardon the negligence and defects of style, which the extracts contain. He could not resist the temptation now and then to improve Morriss English, and to soften down, or omit anything that he deemed either improper or beneath the stilted dignity of history. For example, Morris states that Marie Antoinette, when pursued by the Parisian fishwives, fled from her bed in her shift and petticoat, with her stockings in her hand; such particularity struck Mr. Sparks as shockingly coarse, and with much refinement he replaced the whole phrase by in her undress. An oath he would not permit to sully his pages on any terms; thus when Morris wrote that Pennsylvania would find Sir Henry Clinton a most damnable physician, Mr. Sparks simply left out the offending sentence altogether. This kind of thing he did again and again. Still he gives almost all of Morriss writings that are of political interest. It is, however, greatly to be desired that we should have a much more complete edition of his letters and Diary, on account of the extremely interesting descriptions they contain of the social life of the period, both in America and in Europe. As regards his public career, and his views and writings on public subjects, we already have ample material, much of which has appeared since Sparkss biography was written, and some of which is here presented for the first time. (continued)

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