





THESIS

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 1803-1882

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English





EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

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*Approved*  
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THESIS





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## CHAPTER I.

### EMERSON'S LIFE, HIS PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE, AND HIS RELATION TO HIS TIMES.

Since Emerson's criticism of American literature is so closely interwoven with his philosophy of life, and since, in turn, his philosophy of life depends to a great extent on the times in which he lived and on the external events of his own life, any real understanding of this criticism demands a brief biographical, historical, philosophical introduction.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston in 1803. Although there had been several ministers among his forebears, the common idea (originated by Oliver Wendell Holmes) that the Emerson family had produced only ministers for seven generations is erroneous, as Holmes<sup>1</sup> himself admitted. However, even if Emerson's ancestors were not all Puritan ministers, at least they all were Americans - pioneers and patriots. Emerson's heritage by birth was almost purely American. His father was one of the new liberal ministers who helped to discard Calvinism by ignoring it. William Emerson edited The Monthly Anthology for over a year and through that magazine became associated with Buckminster, Kirkland, Channing, Andrews Norton, John Quincy Adams, and Richard H. Dana.<sup>2</sup> This same interest in new literature and in a more liberal theology was continued in his son. William Emerson died in 1811 and whatever influence he might have had if he had lived died with him.

At the time William Ellery Channing, the great Unitarian minister, became the "demiurge of Boston and the counsellor of the people," and

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1. F. I. Carpenter, Emerson, Introduction, p.xii.

2. George W. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p.14.

his influence lasted for three decades. <sup>3.</sup> There was a definite shift in religion at this time, and the America of the Mathers began to evolve into the America of Emerson. The old New England Calvinism was being replaced by a more optimistic and less harsh religion. Channing was arousing Boston from her long and unproductive sleep under the reign of Puritanism. By 1821 Channing was one of the foremost men in the country, and his influence on Emerson was tremendous. Without Channing, Unitarianism would never have swept over New England as it did. Also, Channing's Unitarianism spread beyond the narrow limits of religion to embrace politics, literature, education, ethics. As Blankenship says: "But Channing more than summarizes the Unitarian movement. In his insistence on the divine right of the individual to live his own life according to the dictates of his own conscience, the preacher was the forerunner of such later romantics as Emerson, Thoreau, Parker, Garrison, and Margaret Fuller. Without the emphasis on individualism and the doctrine of the possibility of human perfectibility, the romantic movement in New England would have been a thing of appearance and not of substance." <sup>4.</sup>

Channing not only created a more liberal, more optimistic atmosphere in Boston, but his belief in human Reason encouraged education. Channing influenced America (and Emerson) not only in his insistence on individualism, but in his continuous plea for an indigenous literature. This cry was taken up years later by Emerson in his Phi Beta Kappa address on "The American Scholar." Channing believed that America should proclaim her literary independence and free herself from the bonds of conformity

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3. Van Wyck Brooks, Life of Emerson, pp.34,36.

4. Russell Blankenship, American Literature, p. 284.



to English standards. He believed that America had greater intellectual freedom than any European country and therefore should be capable of producing a great and original literature. This new literature should be based on a new religious principle, because man's relation to God is the most important truth in the world and it is only fitting that this great truth should be the foundation of our national literature. <sup>5.</sup>

Although Emerson was still a boy when Channing began his emancipation of Boston, Channing's importance cannot be overestimated, because if he had not broken the ground and planted the seed, there would have been no audience for Emerson two decades later. While Channing was preaching individualism, Emerson was still attending school. He was a pupil at the Boston Latin School from 1813 to 1817 in spite of great poverty at home, for, as his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, said, "The Emersons are born to be educated." Pattee says that this poverty was an important influence in Emerson's life because it emphasized his New England frugality and made both his living and his philosophy a little too narrow. <sup>6.</sup>

This same aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson, was another important influence in Emerson's life. Her influence on Emerson, like that of Channing, began early and continued over a long period of years. Their correspondence is remarkable, particularly the exchange of their religious views. Her religion was intense, Calvinistic, almost too exalted. Although Emerson grew up into Unitarianism as opposed to his aunt's Calvinism, he did believe that what Unitarianism lacked was some great motivating force like that which lay behind Calvinism. From their earliest years the

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5. William Ellery Channing, Works, I, 244, 280.

6. Fred Lewis Pattee, First Century of American Literature, p.451.

Emerson boys received a great mental stimulus from this aunt. Waldo once said that her influence on his education was as great as that of Greece or Rome, and he described her as a great genius and a remarkable writer.<sup>7.</sup> She held up to the boys the ideals of honesty, courage, and self-reliance. This belief in self-reliance is one of the foundation stones of Emerson's whole philosophy, and Miss Emerson would be important for this if for no other reason. Emerson's belief and delight in solitude also seem to come from her teachings.

In spite of the fact that Miss Emerson regarded Harvard as a hot-bed of atheism, Emerson began his college career there at the age of fourteen and he graduated four years later, in 1821. Emerson's Journals begin in 1820 when he was still in college and are very important biographically because, although they do not reveal to any great extent what he did, they do show the beginning of the development of his thought and style. Emerson's actual college life was somewhat of a disappointment to him. His poverty kept him out of much of the social life of the college, and, for another thing, he was not at all well - he was a victim of consumption, the same disease that later caused the death of his two brothers. There is frequent criticism of American education, stated either implicitly or explicitly, in Emerson's Journals throughout his entire life. Emerson did, however, admire Professor Everett and, to a lesser extent, Professor Ticknor, but on the whole he did not have much respect for the Harvard faculty or the Harvard curriculum. Later on, Emerson became one of the first men to object to compulsory education

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7. Cooke, op. cit., p.17.



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in the dead languages. What he learned he learned from his own individual point of view - that is, he selected from the books he read only those thoughts which were of some value to him. And even that early in his life Emerson said that writing was his greatest pleasure; already he was trying his hand at poetry while his journals were giving him his start in prose writing. In many respects, these four years at Harvard were the most important, most formative years of Emerson's life even if the college itself did not have much influence on him. During his college career Emerson came in contact with many of the books, ideas, and influences on which the whole structure of his own philosophy rests.

One of the most important of these new influences in Emerson's America was the introduction and spread of German thought and philosophy. This movement began about 1819 with the return from Germany of Ticknor, Bancroft, and Everett, and it was of evolutionary, not revolutionary, growth. From this time on some direct knowledge of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Goethe, and Schiller began to seep slowly but directly into New England; this same influence came in even more rapidly through the indirect but increasing force of deStael, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and, later, Carlyle.<sup>9.</sup> The greatest importance of this dissemination of German thought lay in the fact that it led ultimately to the development of New England Transcendentalism. Emerson encountered the first germs of this thought at Harvard under Everett and Ticknor, both of whom he admired greatly. Most of these ideas Emerson discovered for himself, however, through his own reading. From his matriculation at Harvard in 1817 until the publication of Nature in 1836 we can trace Emerson's intellectual development almost step by step.

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8. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 258. All references are to the Centenary edition, unless otherwise stated.

9. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 332.

By 1836 Emerson's philosophy was mature, rounded, complete. The changes which occur in his philosophy after 1836 are changes in degree only, not changes in principles.

Emerson was well-read even before he entered college, however. He himself said: "The regular course of studies, the years of academical and professional education, have not yielded me better facts than some idle books under the bench of the Latin school. What we do not call education is more precious than that which we do call so."<sup>10.</sup> Three of Emerson's early favorites were Montaigne, Shakespeare, and, most important of all, Plato. At this time he was also reading histories, memoirs, English Reviews, Tillotson, Pascal, Augustine, and Jeremy Taylor.<sup>11.</sup> Thus far Emerson liked Byron and Moore, but he was doubtful of the experiments of Wordsworth and Coleridge.<sup>12.</sup> Not long after this he almost exactly reversed these opinions. Bliss Perry believes that Emerson first became acquainted with Iamblichus and Plotinus through his aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson. Perry also believes that it was Miss Emerson who first sent her nephew to De Gérando's Histoire Comparée des Systems de Philosophie, an outline of Oriental and Greek philosophy, and he says that Gerando's influence on Emerson's vocabulary and mode of thought can easily be seen.<sup>13.</sup> Emerson seems to have become interested in Plato through Cudworth's True Intellectual System of the Universe. However, Emerson acquired most of his Plato through the translations of Thomas Taylor, who gave a Neo-Platonic coloring even to Plato himself. Emerson first began to see, on

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10. Essays, First Series, Works, II, 133.

11. Cooke, op. cit., p.22.

12. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 58

13. Bliss Perry, Emerson Today, p.64.

reading Plato, glimpses of the contrasting forces of matter and spirit, each and all, change and absolute.

Although Shakespeare's poetry, Montaigne's wit, and Plato's philosophy were undoubtedly the most important influences at this time on Emerson's thought and style, the list of the rest of Emerson's reading is not inconsequential and reveals how his mind worked and in what direction his interests lay. These other books included Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Jonson, Milton, Massinger, Dryden, Cowper, Corneille, Racine, Scott, Byron, Campbell, Bryant, Hobbs, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Burke, Sismondi, Montesquieu,<sup>14.</sup> Chateaubriand, Swift, Sterne, Addison, and many others.

Although Emerson's reading and thought continued to develop in much the same way as before, his life did change externally after his graduation in 1821. At this point Emerson entered the most discouraging period of his life. In order to earn a living, he was forced to teach in his brother William's school for girls in Boston; he thoroughly hated this teaching position and the remembrance of it was repugnant to him for many years afterwards. At this time he was also attending lectures at the Divinity School at Harvard, but his eyes gave out and his lungs were worse, so his uncle sent him South (to Florida) for the winter of 1826 - 1827. He considered this trip as a waste of time for the most part, but at least his health improved and he was soon able to go on with his theological studies. On his return home he established himself at Divinity Hall and began his preaching, substituting for a while at the First Church in Boston, and later in the Northampton and New Bedford churches. However, his health was so bad that

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14. Journals, I, 84 - 91.

he even thought of going back to school teaching because it would be less of a strain on his lungs.

At this point Emerson received another terrible blow; his brother Edward, who had been suffering from consumption for a long time, went mad. Although he recovered sufficiently to go to the West Indies and get a position there, it was the beginning of the end, as Emerson well knew.

Emerson was called to the Second Church of Boston and was ordained there in March, 1829. Six months later he married Ellen Tucker, of New Concord, New Hampshire. But Emerson himself felt that things were too good to last. In 1831, only a year and a half after their marriage, his wife died; and in 1832, just three years after his ordination, Emerson broke with the Unitarian Church, supposedly because he could not consider the Lord's Supper as a sacrament. Since the church refused to drop the sacrament, he decided to resign rather than participate in something in which he did not believe. If Emerson had not broken with the church on this point, he probably would have found some other reason for leaving the ministry. He had never been enthusiastic about the ministry - although he did not believe in his aunt's feverish Calvinism, neither did he believe that Unitarianism could continue without having some spirituality injected into it. So in 1832, at the age of 29, Emerson seemed to have made little progress in his life. His profession was gone, his wife was gone, his two brothers were dying of consumption, and his future lay ahead of him, blank and plahless.

At this critical moment in his life, Emerson sailed for Europe, where he spent the next year. The trip to Europe was a turning point for him in many ways. His meetings with Landor, Wordsworth, Coleridge,

and Carlyle were important because they showed Emerson that while he could accept some things from all these men, yet in the last analysis he could depend only on himself and on what he himself believed.

Another vital point about this trip is the fact that on the way home Emerson wrote "I like my book about Nature,"<sup>15</sup> and this remark shows that Emerson had his book already well in mind, that his philosophy was now almost settled. It was with renewed energy, with new ambition, with new ideas that Emerson returned to America. His health was also very much improved.

Emerson soon decided to live in Concord because he felt that Concord was the only place where he could live and think, where he could be a writer and a poet. Concord had always been an important influence in Emerson's life; all of his early summers and many of his later vacations had been spent in Concord at the old manse of Dr. Ripley. It was here that he began to feel himself a part of the force of Nature. In thus identifying himself as part of Nature Emerson had planted early the seed for his doctrine of the Over-Soul, and it was this doctrine which later flowered into one of the main tenets of his philosophy. For these reasons it is no wonder that Emerson desired to live in Concord. In 1835 he married Miss Lidian Jackson, and the same year they moved into their new home in Concord. The following year Emerson published Nature, his first book. In many ways the publication of this little volume was the most important event in his entire life. Nature is an almost pure expression of Emerson's philosophy; the material in this first book is the foundation for all that Emerson wrote and said and did from this time forth. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance to

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15. Journals, III, 196.

trace the development of this philosophy from 1821, when he graduated from Harvard, until 1836, when his fully developed philosophy emerges. The external events of his life during this period - the death of his first wife, and his brothers, his renunciation of his pulpit, his own ill health, his trip to Europe, his return to Concord - are important, but they cannot explain entirely how and why Emerson developed the philosophy he did. Parrington gives a good brief summary of what this Emersonian philosophy really is. He says: "Stripped of its idealistic phraseology, of its beauty and fervor, the master idea of the Emersonian philosophy is the divine sufficiency of the individual. In accepting himself, he accepts his fellows, and he accepted God. The Universe he conceived of as a divine whole, whereof each man is his own center from whom flows the life that has flowed in upon him, perennially fresh, perennially a new creation. The law for things is not the law for mind; man is unkinged in acknowledging any lesser sovereignty than the sovereignty of self. Statutes, constitutions, governments, schools, churches, banks, trade - the coercing sum of institutions and customs - these things do not signify; they are only idols with clay feet that blind men worship. The true divinity dwells elsewhere, in the souls of man, and that divinity must rule the world and not be ruled by it."<sup>16.</sup> This is the definite philosophy of Emerson in 1836 and it is a far cry from the desultory, tentative thinking of Emerson in 1821. In 1821 he had begun to feel himself as part of nature and he had begun to read Plato, but he had not progressed much farther.

During these years there was developing in America a strong current of which Emerson was at once both a generating force and a product. This great current was New England Transcendentalism. The movement toward

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16. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 390.





Transcendentalism had begun in Emerson's youth through two factors.

The first of these was the introduction of German thought and literature in 1819 through Everett, Ticknor, and Bancroft; the second factor was the decline of Unitarianism. According to Gray, New England Transcendentalism was the result of superimposing some imperfectly understood elements of German idealistic philosophy on American Unitarianism.<sup>17</sup>

Unitarianism gave encouragement to Transcendentalism, and in many individuals the two movements are closely interwoven. Although it is really impossible to define Transcendentalism (even the leading Transcendentalists could not express their own beliefs clearly and logically on paper), some idea of what it meant can be obtained from the following definition. "Transcendentalism was a distinct philosophical system. Practically, it was an assertion of the inalienable worth of man; theoretically, it was an assertion of the immanence of divinity in instinct, the transference of supernatural attributes to the natural constitution of mankind ....

It would present in turn all the phases of idealism but running through all was the belief in the living God in the Soul, faith in immediate inspiration, in boundless possibility, in unimaginable good."<sup>18</sup>

Whatever transcends the experience of the senses is transcendental. Gray says that the period of New England Transcendentalism does not begin until the publication of Emerson's Nature in 1836, but he admits that the "stir" was felt much earlier and that these forces were all at work before 1836. These same forces which were developing into Transcendentalism were the very forces which were producing Emerson's philosophy. The difference lies in the fact that Emerson,

17. Henry David Gray, Emerson, p. 14.

18. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, pp. 136, 137.

although he was a Transcendentalist, was more than just a Transcendentalist. Emerson's superiority lies in the fact that he had his head in the clouds of the spirit, but he also kept his feet firmly planted on the Yankee ground of common sense. Both Transcendentalism and Emersonianism really rest on the same foundations, however, so that in tracing the development of Emerson's philosophy we are also tracing the development of Transcendentalism, and vice versa.

After Emerson's graduation from Harvard and his experiment at teaching, he entered the Harvard Divinity School and here his ideas began to undergo a change. He began to resent the quibbling pettiness of technical theology; he began to put the concept of God a little farther off. "His mind was rounding in to one centre, to the immediacy of religion, to the individual man and the present moment, to intuitional life." <sup>19.</sup> Emerson's philosophy remained religious always, but not theological. All his thinking since his college years had borne him irresistibly in one direction - away from every kind of traditional creed and belief. He borrowed only those ideas which coincided with his own; he borrowed mainly to prove his own beliefs. As Perry says, "If he had never been educated beyond the primary school, had never read Plato and Plotinus, St. Augustine and George Fox and Coleridge, he would still have been a mystic by nature, like countless illiterate men and women in all ages and of every race .... The fact that Emerson happened to be well-educated, and that all influences surrounding his early life and his professional studies tended to

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19. George E. Woodberry, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p.31.

emphasize the significance of philosophy and religion, are secondary influences confirming, but not originating, the natural bent of his mind."<sup>20.</sup>

However that may be, in Emerson and the Transcendentalists there are many different influences at work. Among the forces producing this philosophy are Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Boehme, Schelling, Goethe, Coleridge, Channing, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Swedenborg. Although Emerson ranged widely in place and time for his materials, his thinking was connected mainly with the idealistic school.

Plato was one of the influences which began during Emerson's college days. Emerson, like Plato, believed that the material world is only a crude reflection of the spiritual, ideal world. Both men have a moral interpretation of the universe; both are optimistic about evil, also.<sup>21.</sup> Emerson took over many of Plato's ideas and in

Representative Men we see that to Emerson Plato is philosophy.

Much of Plato, however, comes to Emerson through Plotinus and his school of Neo-Platonists. Whereas Plato made the Good the highest idea, Plotinus elevated the Good or the One above the world of ideas. This idea appears later in Schelling, in Swedenborg, and, last but not least, in Emerson. Through Plotinus comes Emerson's theory of the identity of mind and matter, and the theory of intuition.<sup>22.</sup> Since Emerson came in contact with Plato and Plotinus so early in his life, he was almost from the beginning an idealist, and his idealism was tinged with mysticism. Perry says that "on the more purely mystical side of his nature, he owed more to

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20. Perry, op. cit., pp. 59.- 60.

21. Cooke, op. cit., p.273 .

22. Ibid., pp. 273 - 274.

Plotinus than to Plato. " <sup>23.</sup> It was through Plotinus, also, that Emerson first came in contact with Orientalism. <sup>24.</sup> However, this Oriental philosophy did not affect Emerson until much later in his life, and it never became a strong influence. Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists would be of the utmost importance if they had given Emerson nothing but the idea of the Over-Soul, but he did gain more from them than that.

The German philosophers were the next to influence Emerson and the Transcendentalists, although much of the German thought in turn was based on the Platonists and Neo-Platonists. Emerson agrees with the general but not the specific beliefs of Jacob Boehme and Eckhart, The doctrine of emanation was exchanged for that of immanence, and all these previous philosophies were summed up in Schelling. Even if Schelling did not influence Emerson directly, much of what Emerson believed is found <sup>25.</sup> almost exactly in Schelling. Schelling teaches that nature and mind, subject and object, are one and the same in the Absolute, and that this identity is perceived by intuition. In many other respects, also, Emerson is very like Schelling. Perhaps Gray best expresses this relation when he says, "But while Emerson was no doubt stimulated either directly by Schelling or indirectly through Coleridge, there can be no doubt that he was an original thinker, and arrived at his conclusions by very much the same methods as all other philosophers have done, however much he may have attributed a religious <sup>26.</sup> connotation to any new truth which he felt he has acquired."

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23. Parry, op.cit., p.66.

24. Frederic Ives Carpenter, Emerson and Asia, p.43.

25. Cooke, op.cit., p.278.

26. Gray, op.cit., p.31

Emerson was not a great student of Kant, but living in the period he did, he could not help showing Kant's influence. It was to a great extent the Kantian philosophy which was superimposed on New England Unitarianism to produce the Transcendentalism of this country. <sup>27.</sup>

Like Kant, Emerson does not distinguish between morality and religion but makes them one and the same. Kant is of the utmost importance not only for his direct influence, but also for his influence as it came through Coleridge, Carlyle, and others. The very word "transcendental" really goes back to Kant and his Critique of Pure Reason, although in New England even Kant's ideas underwent somewhat of a change. Kant believed that the transcendental was what was beyond experience, and he made a distinction between Reason and Understanding. Reason perceives absolute truth; it is really intuition. Understanding is what we use to perceive ordinary every-day life and experience. This distinction is of the greatest importance in Emerson's philosophy, even in his theory of literature and criticism. Emerson may have borrowed this distinction from Coleridge or Carlyle instead of directly from Kant, but nevertheless it did come from Kant originally.

Important as this German thought was to Emerson and the Transcendentalists, most of its influence came through the intermediary sources of the English Romanticists - Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, Landor. Coleridge is of the utmost importance and it is through him that New England Transcendentalism is akin to Schelling in so many respects. <sup>28.</sup>

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27. Gray, op.cit., p. 13.

28. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 332.

In Coleridge we have the distinction between Reason and Understanding, and a universal participation of all in this Reason. In Coleridge, we again see the germ of Emerson's Over-Soul, for Emerson's Over-Soul is almost a counterpart of Coleridge's Universal Reason. Already in 1829 Emerson was writing the following passage to his aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson: "I am reading Coleridge's 'Friend' with great interest .... He has a tone a little lower than greatness, but what a living soul, what a universal knowledge .... I love him that he is no utilitarian, nor necessarian, not scoffer, nor hoc genus omne, tucked away in the corner of a sentence of Plato."<sup>29</sup> Coleridge was one of the men whom Emerson was most desirous of seeing when he made his trip to Europe in 1832.

Emerson's increasing interest in Wordsworth is also significant. Emerson started to read Wordsworth much earlier than he started to like and appreciate him. Since Emerson liked, for the most part, only those books which confirmed his own beliefs, his own attitude toward Nature had to ripen a little more before he could be in sympathy with Wordsworth. Emerson's first reference to Wordsworth is in 1828 when he says, "A fault of Mr. Wordsworth is the direct pragmatical analysis of objects, in their nature poetic, but which all other poets touch incidentally .... Mr. Wordsworth is trying to distil the essence of poetry from poetic things, instead of being satisfied to adorn common scenes with such lights from these sources of poetry as nature will always furnish to her true lovers."<sup>30</sup>

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29. Journals, II, 277, 279.

30. Journals, II, 232, 233.





Yet only three years later Emerson's attitude has so greatly changed that he is writing, "Wordsworth has writ lines that are like outward nature, so fresh, so simple, so durable."<sup>31.</sup> And again, "His noble distinction is that he seeks the truth and shuns with brave self-denial every image and word that is from the purpose, means to stick close to his own thought and give it in naked simplicity and so make it God's affair, not his<sup>32.</sup> own whether it shall succeed." From the comparison of these passages of Emerson about Wordsworth, we can see in Emerson from 1828 to 1831 a growing admiration and appreciation of plain language. He is beginning to renounce the rhetoric of Everett, he is beginning to give up the oratory which appealed to him in his youth. If it is true that Emerson was a pantheist, as Gray asserts,<sup>33.</sup> it follows almost of necessity that Emerson was influenced by Wordsworth in this pantheism. From Wordsworth, or rather, like Wordsworth, Emerson conceived of nature as alive with the Universal Spirit, as being the Universal Reason embodied in law and order.

The influence of Channing again becomes significant here. Channing is responsible to a great extent for the spread of the ideas of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Channing liked and appreciated both Wordsworth and Coleridge, and by trying to get America to like and appreciate them he introduced English Romanticism into America. The seeds of Transcendentalism came in along with this Romanticism. In the following passage Channing shows himself related to Coleridge on one hand and to Emerson on the other:

31. Journals, II, 402.

32. Journals, II, 430.

33. Gray, op.cit., p.67

"No man can be just to himself till he has risen to communion with the Supreme Mind; till he regards himself as the recipient and minister of the Infinite Spirit."<sup>34</sup>

Frederick Henry Hedge, like Channing, helped to popularize the English Romanticists and the German philosophers.

According to Gray, Hedge's reviews of Coleridge "brought the contribution of Coleridge to a focus."<sup>35</sup>

The introduction of the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge into America is important, also, because they broke the ground and prepared an audience for Emerson.

Landor is another European writer who affected Emerson, though to a much lesser extent. Emerson read Landor's Imaginary Conversations before he went to Europe, and Landor was another of the men he desired to see over there. Landor, like Emerson, had some perception of the moral power of character. Landor also seems to have influenced Emerson's style in some respects. Conway says: "From the time Emerson met with the writings of Walter Savage Landor his tone became less fervid and prophetic, and more secular. Whatever eccentricity threatened him was dismissed in the presence of the clear and classic style of Landor."<sup>36</sup>

Last, and in many respects the most important, of all the English writers who influenced Emerson is Thomas Carlyle. Emerson became acquainted with Carlyle's writings in 1832, and he wrote in his Journal: "I am cheered and instructed by this paper on Corn Law Rhymes in the Edinburgh by my Germanick new-light writer, whoever he may be. He gives us confidence in our principles. He assures the truth-lover everywhere of sympathy."<sup>37</sup> Emerson liked Carlyle because Carlyle, too, subscribed

34. William Ellery Channing, Works, I, 274.

35. Gray, op.cit., p.23.

36. M. D. Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p.112.

37. Journals, II, 515.

to a Transcendental philosophy. Although Emerson was not an imitator of Carlyle by any means, Gay points out that the section on Language in Emerson's Nature is much like Carlyle's Sartor Resartus in spirit, because both develop the idea of nature as the symbol of the divine.<sup>38.</sup> Although Emerson was very anxious to meet Carlyle, their meeting was somewhat of a disappointment to Emerson and only served as the final affirmation of his own theory of self-reliance. Nevertheless, in spite of the great difference in their thought and style, Carlyle and Emerson were good friends and carried on a very interesting correspondence from 1834 to 1872. Their points of divergence are brought out very clearly in these letters. Both men believed in sincerity, independence, and a transcending spiritual truth, but their approach was very different. Carlyle not only thought but told Emerson that he was too abstract.<sup>39.</sup> What Carlyle failed to realize was that abstractions were realities to Emerson. Carlyle also objected to Emerson's optimism.<sup>40.</sup> Carlyle saw much evil, while Emerson, if he saw it at all, ignored it. Emerson, on the other hand, could not understand Carlyle's wild strength, both in subject matter and style. Emerson believed that Carlyle should be "more simple less Gothically efflorescent."<sup>41.</sup> In spite of these differences, however, Emerson does owe a debt to Carlyle, not only for the affirmation of his own transcendentalism and his own self reliance, but also for the Germanic thought which came through Carlyle. Carlyle is especially important for introducing Emerson to the works of Goethe.

38. Robert M. Gay, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p.123.

39. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 216.

40. Ibid., II, 324 - 325.

41. Ibid., I, 131.

Emerson's Journals show that he had begun to read Goethe by 1830 or possibly earlier, but he could not appreciate him until Carlyle helped to show him the way. In 1834 Emerson was writing in his Journals that Goethe seemed to him "to be only another poor monad, after the fashion of his little race bestirring himself immensely to hide his nothingness, spinning his surface directly before the eye to conceal the universe of his ignorance."<sup>42.</sup> Later the same year he wrote to Carlyle about Goethe, saying, "With him I am becoming better acquainted, but mine must be a qualified admiration .... I cannot but regard it as his misfortune, with conspicuous bad influence on his genius, - that velvet life he led. What incongruity for genius to repose fifty years on chairs of state .... Then the Puritan in me accepts no apology for bad morals in such as he."<sup>43.</sup> Emerson's longest adverse criticism of Goethe appears in a paper, "Thoughts on Modern Literature," which he wrote for the Dial. In this we see distinctly the gulf between Emerson and Goethe. Emerson criticizes Goethe for being the poet of the Actual, of limitation, instead of the poet of the Ideal, of possibility. Then too, Goethe was weak in moral perception and in some respects he let his genius slip into mere talent.<sup>44.</sup> But at the same time Emerson says:<sup>45.</sup> "His love of Nature has seemed to give a new meaning to that word." Cooke believed that Goethe taught Emerson the love of Nature more than

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<sup>42.</sup> Journals, IV, 309.

<sup>43.</sup> The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 29 - 30.

<sup>44.</sup> Natural History of Intellect, Works, XII, 329 - 332.

<sup>45.</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

Wordsworth did.<sup>46.</sup> Also, in spite of Goethe's lack of "moral perception" Emerson was much more in sympathy with Goethe's optimism than he was with Carlyle's bitter despair. That Emerson later came to value Goethe highly is shown by the fact that he chose Goethe as "The Writer" in his Representative Men and wrote a very high opinion of him. Emerson realized and admitted Goethe's great influence, not only on himself, but on the whole generation. Emerson himself says, "It is very plain to me that no recent genius can work with equal effect upon mankind as Goethe, for no intelligent young man can read him without finding that his own compositions are immediately modified by his new knowledge."<sup>47.</sup> And again he says, "He [Goethe] teaches us to treat all subjects with greater freedom, and to skip over all obstruction, time, place, name, usage, and come full and strong on the emphasis of the fact."<sup>48.</sup> Emerson sums this up twelve years later when he writes, "Goethe is the pivotal man of the old and new times with us. He shuts up the old, he opens the new. No matter that you were born since Goethe died, - if you have not read Goethe, or the Goetheans, you are an old foggy and belong with the antediluvians."<sup>49</sup> Goethe is an important influence, therefore, on nineteenth century America as well as on Emerson. Emerson is indebted to Goethe for the development of his love of nature, his love of culture, and, most important of all, his love of beauty. He needed Goethe's influence to release his aesthetic sense from its hitherto Puritanical background. Goethe's influence started during

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46. George W. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p.53.

47. Journals, IV, 218.

48. Journals, V, 222.

49. Journals, VIII, 249.

this critical period in Emerson's life, but it lasted throughout his lifetime.

Two other men whose thought affected Emerson during this stage of his life were Emanuel Swedenborg and George Fox. Emerson was always in sympathy with the Quakers, because like them, he believed in intuition,<sup>50.</sup> in the "inner light." The Quakers in some respects are like the Swedenborgians, as Emerson himself admitted.<sup>51.</sup> The Swedenborgians, too, believed in the inner light, at least to a certain extent. The Swedenborgian influence and Emerson's interest in Swedenborg really came through an intermediary, however, This intermediary was the American Sampson Reed, who published his Observations on the Growth of the Mind in 1826. Hotson believes not only that Emerson's interest in Swedenborg came from reading this book but also that it was Sampson Reed who<sup>52.</sup> gave the first definite impulse leading to Emerson's literary career. Reed had influence in forming Emerson's modes of expression and his ideas of style. To Emerson, Reed represented Swedenborg and all that Swedenborgianism stood for.<sup>53.</sup> Emerson did get his Swedenborgianism from Reed, but he interpreted it in his own way. Emerson believed Swedenborg wrote in parables; Reed believed he wrote matter-of-factly. Swedenborg affected Emerson mainly because he, like Emerson, saw nature as symbol and revelation of spiritual realities. Also, Emerson's self-reliance is like the still, small voice or "proprium" of Swedenborg.<sup>54.</sup> Nature shows Reed's influence

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50. Journals, II, 521.

51. Journals, II, 318.

52. Clarence Paul Hotson, "Sampson Reed, a Teacher of Emerson," New England Quarterly, April 1929, p.249.

53. Ibid., p. 277.

54. Cooke, op. cit., 331 - 332.



especially in the doctrine of correspondence, the idea that nature symbolizes the soul. Reed in his paper "On Animals" and Emerson in his Nature both use facts as symbols.<sup>55.</sup> Although Emerson received his Swedenborgianism through Reed, and although he often read into both of these authors more than they had written, nevertheless Swedenborg and Reed did influence Emerson considerably and over a long period of years (forty five to be exact). Emerson makes Swedenborg "The Mystic" in his Representative Men, and in that essay he intimates the influence on himself of Swedenborg's idea "that the physical world was purely symbolical of the spiritual world."<sup>56.</sup>

All of these forces and influences had been at work on Emerson in the years between his graduation from college in 1821 and his trip to Europe at the end of 1832. However, Emerson's European trip was of the utmost importance in many respects. These ideas that he had been absorbing over this period of years now began to crystallize in his mind, and during his travels Emerson was evidently already writing, at least mentally, his little book Nature. Of course, some of the most important events of his trip to Europe were his long-anticipated meetings with Landor, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle. These meetings were a disappointment to him in many ways and yet in the final analysis it was all for the best because it meant the final affirmation of Emerson's independence and self-reliance. After meeting these men he could return to America with a certain belief in his own powers. Emerson admitted this in his Journals when he wrote, "I thank the Great God who had led me through this European scene, this last schoolroom in which he has pleased to instruct me .... He has shown me the men I wished

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55. Clarence Paul Hotson, "Sampson Reed, a Teacher of Emerson," New England Quarterly, April, 1929, p.249.

56. Works, IV, 116.

to see, - Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth; he has thereby comforted and confirmed me in my convictions. Many things I owe to the sight of these men. I shall judge more justly, less timidly, of wise men forevermore. To be sure not one of these is a mind of the very first class .... Especially are they all deficient, all these four, - in different degrees, but all deficient, - in insight into religious truth. They have no idea of that species of moral truth which I call the first philosophy. " 57. Emerson's European trip also made him realize that he could see life just as well in Concord as he could in travelling. As he says himself, "And what if it is Naples, it is only the same world of cakes and ale, of men and truth and folly." 58.

Another important landmark during Emerson's trip abroad was his visit to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris. Science was a rapidly growing force in the nineteenth century throughout the entire world. It is no wonder, then, that Emerson came under the influence of science in general, but it is of the utmost importance that he came under the influence of evolution. Evolution became a very important tenet of Emersonian philosophy. At the time of his visit to the Jardin des Plantes in 1833 Emerson wrote the following passage in his Journals: "Here we are impressed with the inexhaustible riches of nature. The universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever, as you glance along this bewildering series of animated forms, - the hazy butterflies, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes, and the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient, in the very rock aping organized

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57. Journals, III, 185 - 186.

58. Journals, III, 62.

organized forms. Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer, - an accult relation between the very scorpions and man. I feel the centipede in me, - cayman, carp, eagle, and fox. I am moved by strange sympathies; I say continually, 'I will be a naturalist.'"<sup>59</sup>

Emerson's attitude toward science is rather unique. He did not really like investigation and analysis, yet he read a great many books on science, gave several lectures on science and natural history, and shows throughout his Journals that he was interested in it. Science was an important force in Emerson's day because it helped to break down the old New England Puritanism, and in this way it prepared for Emerson an audience which he would not have had otherwise. Emerson himself says, "But I think the paramount source of the religious revolution was Modern Science .... astronomy taught us our insignificance in Nature; showed that our sacred as our profane history had been written in gross ignorance of the laws, which were far grander than we knew; and compelled a certain extension and uplifting of our views of the Deity and his Providence."<sup>60</sup> The nineteenth century conceptions of man and his destiny were greatly enlarged when they became connected with a universal scheme of being.

It is remarkable that Emerson accepted the theory of evolution so early, long before the publication of Darwin's Origin of the Species in 1859. Emerson's views do not seem advanced now, but it is interesting to see how he arrived at these conclusions so long ago. Edward Waldo Emerson attributes these beliefs to his open mind, his liking for

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59. Journals, III, 163.

60. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 335 - 336.

astronomy, his reading of Heracleitus and Xenophanes, his knowledge of Leibnitz's scale of being, his acquaintance with the speculations of Oken and Schelling through Coleridge, his visit to the Jardin des Plantes, and his contact with Lamarck's theory through Lyell's book on Geology.<sup>61.</sup>

That Emerson's ideas were definitely prophetic of Darwin is clearly shown in the following passage from an unpublished lecture "On the Relation of Man to the Globe," delivered in 1833. Emerson said, "Man's limbs are only a more exquisite organization - say rather the finish of the rudimental forms that have been already sweeping the sea and creeping on the mind; the brother of his hand is even now clearing the Arctic Sea in the fin of the whale...."<sup>62/</sup>

Emerson's interpretation of the theory of evolution went beyond science, however, into the spiritual world. Evolution was important in Emerson's philosophy because he believed that the difference between mind and matter was a difference of degree only. Since this is so, Nature is continually growing, proceeding, evolving toward spirit. Emerson expresses this himself when he says, "How far off yet is the trilobite ! how far the quadruped ! how inconceivably remote is man ! All duly arrive, and then race after race of men. It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato and the preaching of the immortality of the soul. Yet all must come, as surely as the first atom has two sides."<sup>63.</sup> Emerson's theory of the evolutionary ascent from matter to mind is the basis of his idealism,<sup>64.</sup> and on this theory, according to Conway, he rests his idea of "Poetry."

61. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 335 - 336.

62. Cabot, op. cit., I, 224.

63. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 180.

64. Conway, op. cit., p. 159.



Gray believes that Emerson's belief in evolution influenced his philosophy in two ways. He believes that the evolutionary point of view turned Emerson "from a purely idealistic interpretation of the world as illusion to an attempt to account for the presence of the individual by an evolution where the metamorphosis is entire." 65. Gray also believes that evolution is the ethical basis for his optimism. 66.

These, then, were the forces and influences which produced Emerson's philosophy, especially as it was embodied in his little book Nature, which came out in 1836, although it had been in his mind for at least four years previous to that. The Emerson of 1836 had almost reached his full stature; in fact, in some respects Emerson reached heights in Nature which he never again attained. The external events of Emerson's life are important - the death of his father, which brought poverty to the family, his years at Harvard, his training in the Harvard Divinity School, his marriage and the death of his wife, the deaths of his brothers, his renunciation of his pulpit, his trip to Europe, his return to America, and more particularly his establishment at Concord - but more important than these events are the subtler influences which were at work within his mind during all these years. Emerson's philosophy could not have been the same if he had not come into contact with Plato and Plotinus, who helped him lay the foundation of his philosophy. Nor would he have been the same if Boehme, Schelling, Coleridge, Carlyle, the German and the English idealists, had not helped him to erect a substantial edifice on this foundation laid by Plato and Plotinus. A few necessary touches were added by his aunt, Miss Mary

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65. Gray, op.cit., p.45.

66. Ibid., p.78

Moody Emerson, by Channing, Hedge, Lander, and Wordsworth. And last but not least the structure was completed through the powerful forces of Transcendentalism, Science, and Evolution. All of these forces and influences were at work on Emerson over a long period of years, some from his earliest youth on, and most of these forces continued to operate on Emerson after 1836 although the main part of their work was done.

Emerson's philosophy was very nearly completed by 1836; his main tenets, such as his theory of the Over-Soul and his belief in Self-Reliance, were so firmly imbedded that they could not be changed. Emerson's life, his philosophy, and the times in which he lived unite logically to form a perfect circle. If Emerson had lived anywhere else or at any other time, he would not have been the Emerson we know. And yet Emerson was not the product solely of nineteenth century America; he was also the product of every country and every era since history began.

After Emerson settled in Concord and published Nature, his life did not change much. In these years at Concord he set the pattern of his life, and he never departed from it until his death in 1882. His routine was broken somewhat by his lecture tours, by his travels and his friends, but even these did not disturb his life to any great extent. His first book, Nature, contains the quintessence of Emersonianism, and everything he wrote after that is really only an addition to, a modification or re-statement of what he said or intimated in that. Emerson first became a figure of national importance with his Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard in 1837. After this "American Scholar" address, Emerson became the American prophet - and this position was even more strongly fortified after the famous "Divinity School Address" of 1838. From then on there is little of importance in Emerson's external life; he edited the Dial



from 1842 to 1844, and he made two more visits to Europe, one in 1847 and one in 1872. Between 1844 and 1870 he had been publishing his volumes of essays and poems and had been educating all America from his lecture platform.<sup>67.</sup> After 1872 Emerson's powers failed visibly, and he accomplished very little of importance between 1872 and his death at Concord in 1882.

In the last forty-five years of Emerson's life, in the period between the publication of Nature in 1836 and his death in 1882, there were, however, three forces which had a growing influence on him. The first of these forces was the group of friends and writers who surrounded him at Concord. The European forerunners of Transcendentalism were important, but almost equally important were the actual exponents of Transcendentalism in New England. Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Orestes Brownson, Bronson, Alcott, even Thoreau, were not only voices in America at this time, but they were personal friends of Emerson and were therefore bound to have some influence on him, inasmuch as they were influencing all the rest of America. Emerson was associated with these men and women, he liked and admired them - but he also criticized them. This small group probably helped to keep Emerson's thought on the path it had already started to take, but he came in contact with their minds after his own thought was already formed and set.

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67. Emerson was very fortunate in living in the period of the American lyceum. Since Emerson was really a lay preacher, and since the lyceum lecture platform was really a lay pulpit, it was the perfect medium of expression for his type of thought.

Another influence which affected Emerson in his later life was that of oriental literature, including the Neo-Platonists, the Hindus, the Persians, and the Chinese. Emerson's reading became more abstract with the years; the Chinese classics, the Vishnu Sarna, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Calvin, Spinoza, and Berkeley all began to get more attention while the references to poetry became less frequent.<sup>68.</sup> Oriental literature was known to Emerson only indirectly until 1841, so that his philosophy was entirely formed before he really became interested in it.<sup>69.</sup> From 1837 on Emerson began to read more Oriental books, and in 1841 he first made the acquaintance of the Persian poets. Emerson's other reading had prepared his mind for this Oriental literature which began to have a noticeable effect on him from 1845 on. Emerson had begun reading the Neoplatonists very early in his life, but his earlier Neoplatonism was free from Orientalism. However, he found in the Hindu writings, as he had already discovered in Neoplatonism, a strong support for the mystical tendencies he already possessed.<sup>70.</sup> Carpenter says that Emerson liked this Oriental literature for its scholarly and cultural values, for its ideas which served to affirm his own, and for its poetic stimulation.<sup>71.</sup> The influence of this Oriental thought can be clearly seen in the essay on Plato in Representative Men, in the essays, "Fate" and "Illusions" in The Conduct of Life, and in his famous poems "Brahma" and "Hamatreys."<sup>72.</sup>

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68. Gay, op.cit., p. 192.

69. Carpenter, op. cit., pp.2, 12.

70. Perry, op. cit., p.77

71. Carpenter, op. cit., pp.17 - 21.

72. Ibid., pp. 19, 23.

Emerson's theory of poetry and literature he also owes in part to the Oriental side of the Neoplatonists,<sup>73.</sup> and his theory of poetry is necessarily very important in his criticisms of literature. This Oriental Neoplatonism, to quote Carpenter again, "furnished a background of vague transcendental thought, which, superadded to the poetic thought of Coleridge and Wordsworth and Goethe, formed the most distinctive element of Transcendentalism."<sup>74.</sup> Emerson's theory of the Over-Soul was probably strengthened to an extent by the Oriental doctrine of spiritual emanation from an Absolute source to individuals.

Goethe led Emerson to read the Persian poets, and Emerson became very fond of them in his later years. He particularly liked Hafiz and Saadi, and their influence on him is shown by the fact he wrote two essays and two poems dealing with Persian poetry - the essay "Persian Poetry" in Letters and Social Aims, the poem "Saadi," the preface to the American edition of Saadi's "Gulistan," and "Fragments on the Poet and the Poetic Gift."

Emerson's poems "Bacchus" and "Days" also owe much to the Persians.

Emerson liked the Persian poets not only for their great joy in life but because in them he found re-expressed his own love of nature, and his own beliefs in self-reliance and compensation.<sup>75.</sup> Emerson did get a great

deal from Oriental literature, but through it all he remains an Occidental. Carpenter believes that Emerson's native New England Yankee shrewdness kept him from accepting too completely the mysticism of the Hindus and the other Orientals.<sup>76.</sup> Perry suggests also that Emerson's Oriental readings and

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73. Ibid., p. 86.

74. Ibid., p. 99.

75. Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 162 - 181.

76. Ibid., p. 155.

quotations may be " in part, at least, the old Lyceum device of ranging far for fresh illustrations, of making large vague references to what is distant and unknown, the charm of names and places that we cannot quite identify." 77.

Emerson was not only influenced by this Oriental literature and thought himself, but he has been a tremendous force in spreading it throughout America. Carpenter thinks of Emerson as the founder of comparative Religion and Comparative Literature in America, and he believes it was the stimulus to Orientalism in America which Emerson gave that is responsible, in part at least, for the work of Whitman , Amy Lowell, Wheelock, and Eugene O'Neill. 78.

Carpenter says that Emerson's Yankee shrewdness saved him from the extremes of Orientalism. This Yankee shrewdness is the last of the three influences which affected Emerson's later life. Emerson was born with this innate Yankee shrewdness, but it did not have much chance to operate on him until he had established himself permanently at Concord. It was only when he had finally settled down that Emerson had the time and the perspective to become an alert observer and critic of the more practical aspects of the country. He saw the opening of the West; he even had first-hand observation of it during his lecture tours in that part of the country. He saw the coming of the railroads, of the telegraph, and of the transatlantic cable, and he saw the cultural possibilities of all these for America.

With his romanticism, he was naturally an advocate of democracy, but he deplored the grossness of the Jacksonian democrats as well as the

77. Perry, op. cit., p.81.

78. Carpenter, op. cit., pp. 247 - 255.

materialism of the Whigs. <sup>79.</sup> During Emerson's life-time we have the growing antagonism of North and South, culminating in the Civil War. The Abolition movement was the only event which actually drew Emerson into active participation in public affairs. He opposed Slavery on moral and religious grounds, but he did not believe that all men were born equal. <sup>80.</sup> His radical idealism was tempered by his common sense. For the most part Emerson was an acute observer only, but he did enter into the Abolition crusade to the extent of making speeches and even writing a letter to the President. The influence of this movement is seen in his later essays, addresses, and Journals, and it appears more than once in his criticisms of America and American literature.

Although Emerson remained to a great extent on the side-line of American Life, nevertheless, he did observe carefully and accurately all these things that were going on around him, and what he saw he could not help criticizing, Parrington calls Emerson "the most searching critic of contemporary America." <sup>81.</sup> It is in these criticisms of the America of his day that we find Emerson's criticism of American literature, of American literary and historical personages.

Besides the abolition movement there was one other current of American life which influenced Emerson very strongly - this was the opening and rapid development of the West. The influence of the West on Emerson has been noted by many of his biographers. Cabot believed that Emerson's essays were less absolute in their idealism because they

79. Raymer McQuiston, "Relation of Ralph Waldo Emerson to Public Affairs,"

University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, III, April, 1923, p. 21.

80. Ibid., pp. 37, 58.

81. Parrington, op. cit., II, 386.

had to be adapted to his western audiences. <sup>82.</sup> Woodberry said that no other writer of Emerson's day had such an appreciation of the West, and that this gave a more American strain to his writings. <sup>83.</sup> Crothers thinks that Emerson redeemed the New England men of letters from provincialism by his attack on English things and by the injection into his contemporaries of a great admiration for the America that was growing up in the West. <sup>84.</sup> Emerson was conscious of the social and economic changes that were going on around him during the middle of the nineteenth century, and he saw the great possibilities of the West. One of his most pungent comments on the West appeared in his lecture "The Young American," given in 1844. Emerson said, "Luckily for us, now that steam has narrowed the Atlantic to a strait, the nervous, rocky West is intruding a new and continental element into the national mind, and we shall yet have an American genius." <sup>85.</sup> Emerson believed that, since the East was so much in subjection to European culture, the West would be responsible for producing an indigenous American culture. He believed that the vastness of America, especially the vastness of the new West, would make Europe dwindle into a less significant place in the American eye. <sup>86.</sup> Marchand believes that the frontier produces democracy, individualism, and optimism, and that all these can be seen in Emerson. If Emerson did not derive his optimism from the frontier, at least the frontier confirmed it. <sup>87.</sup> Also, Emerson's doctrine of self - reliance is a natural

82. Cabot, op. cit., II, 386.

83. Woodberry, op. cit., p. 79.

84. Crothers, op. cit., pp. 123 - 124.

85. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 369,-370.

86. Ernest Marchand, "Emerson and the Frontier," American Literature, III, 1931,-1932, p. 156.

87. Ibid., pp. 160 - 161.

corollary of frontier individualism, though in Emerson it has been re-  
 fined, rationalized, spiritualized.<sup>88.</sup>

This is true of Emerson's entire attitude toward the West. His appreciation of the West was symbolic and spiritual; he thoroughly detested the actual crudities and excesses of the West, but he looked beyond these to its future possibilities. He disliked the materialism of the Whigs in the East as much as he disliked the extreme democracy and Jacksonian rabble of the West. Emerson was far ahead of his time in many respects; he attributed the same significance to the land that Turner did eighty -  
 89.  
 five years later. Already in his lecture "The Young American"

Emerson was saying, "I think we must regard the land as a commanding and increasing power on the citizen, the sanative and Americanizing influence, which promises to disclose new virtues for ages to come."<sup>90.</sup>

The best summary of the influence of the West on Emerson also appears in Marchand's article, where he says: "Of the two factors entering into his (Emerson's) thought, foreign philosophy and native culture, the former seems, by comparison, accidental. Emerson was in revolt against the harsh theology of Puritanism. Yet, he was unable to abandon a teleological view of the world. He found the Platonic - Hegelian - Coleridgean transcendental scheme most ready to hand and most congenial to his temperament .... The cardinal points of his teaching - optimism, democracy, individualism, self-reliance -- derive their chief sanction and meaning from the psychology bred by the frontier."<sup>91.</sup> Lucy Lockwood

88. Ibid., pp. 160 - 161.

89. Ibid., p. 158.

90. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 370.

91. Ernest Marchand, "Emerson and the Frontier," American Literature, III  
 1931, 1932, p. 174.





Hazard even goes one step farther; she sees Transcendentalism as a product of German idealism plus the frontier environment. The optimism and individualism of the frontier she sees again in transcendentalism, and in Emerson she sees the fusion of both transcendental and pioneer ideals.<sup>92.</sup> However, it is impossible to read Emerson and not see the effect of the West in his whole attitude toward America and toward American literature.

All of these forces were at work on Emerson throughout his lifetime, and all of them were operative for varying lengths of time and with varying intensity. Each of these numerous forces and influences is absolutely essential to the molding of Emerson's thought. However, it is the interaction of all these currents of thought which really produced Emerson, not only Emerson the writer and philosopher but also Emerson the critic.

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92. Lucy Lockwood Hazard, The Frontier in American Literature, pp. 148 - 153, 158.

## CHAPTER II

## EMERSON'S THEORY OF LITERATURE AND CRITICISM.

Although Emerson's theory of literature and criticism is not as clear or as concentrated as is Poe's, and although his literary criticism is scattered rather indiscriminately throughout every volume of his essays and his journals, nevertheless, as a critic of American letters, Emerson is an outstanding figure. The whole field of American criticism, especially early American criticism, has been unduly neglected, and Emerson's place in its development has never been established. Much of Emerson's literary criticism grew out of his observations of American as a whole, with its newness, its cultural dependence, its lack of spirituality, its materialism. It is not for nothing that Parrington calls him "the most searching critic of contemporary America."

Emerson's works contain a great deal of criticism of individual authors, but before one can understand his criticism of individuals, one must be familiar with his theory of literature, although some of it is too abstract to be applicable. Emerson's theory of literature and criticism is so inextricably interwoven with his philosophy of life that it is almost impossible to separate the two.

Emerson's theories of literary expression and criticism cannot be divorced from the transcendentalism which was the pivotal point of his entire philosophy. Just as Emerson received much of his transcendentalism from Coleridge so he also learned the art of literary criticism from Coleridge.<sup>1</sup> In criticism as in philosophy, the distinction between

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1. Frank Thompson, "Emerson's Theory and Practice of Poetry," P.M.L.A.

Reason and Understanding is of great importance to both Emerson and Coleridge. Thompson believed that Emerson was still a classicist in his attitude toward poetry in 1826, but that by 1839 his continued reading<sup>2.</sup> of Coleridge led him to romantic criticism.

Emerson believed that Reason ~~perceived~~ the Ideal, Understanding the Actual. Also, since the material is necessary to express the ideal,<sup>3.</sup> the symbol becomes of the utmost importance in Emerson's literary theory. Emerson himself says that words are signs of natural facts.<sup>4.</sup> Sutcliffe goes even farther in saying that, to Emerson, literature is completely dependent on the symbol. Emerson himself says that "Words are signs of natural facts."<sup>5</sup> He believes that language is a symbol for spiritual truths and that Nature is the intermediary for uniting the actual (language) to the ideal (spirit). Like Coleridge, Emerson believes that words should have an external sense for the materialists and yet convey spiritual truth to those who look beyond.<sup>6.</sup> In his essay, "The Poet" Emerson himself speaks of the double meaning of every sensuous fact.<sup>7.</sup> The truer expression is the symbolic, however. Emerson also believes in the identity of words and object, in the unity of thought and language. He himself says, "No man can write well who thinks there is any choice

2. Ibid., p. 1172.

3. Emerson Grant Sutcliffe, "Emerson's Theories of Literary Expression,"

University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, VIII, no. 1, p. 14.

4. Ibid., p. 25.

5. Nature, Works, I, 25.

6. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 28

7. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 4.

of words for him .... In writing there is always a right word, and every other than that is wrong .... In good writing, words become one with things."<sup>8.</sup>

But to Emerson absolute identity of word and object was only possible in moments of communion with the Over-Soul. This tenet is the foundation for a great many of Emerson's literary theories, and it is evident not only in his criticism of others but also in his own literary practices. To Emerson this communion with the Over-Soul, this inner flash of light, is the really important thing in literature. It is through these flashes of inspiration<sup>9.</sup>

that the ideal becomes real to the poet. Emerson says more than once that "there is nothing of value in literature except the transcendental."<sup>10.</sup>

Poetry is the only truth and it is a truth perceived, not externally, but with the inward eye.

This trust in the "inner light" is responsible for some of Emerson's other conclusions in regard to literary theory. It is this which leads Emerson to carry his belief in self-reliance from his general philosophy into the field of writing as well.<sup>11.</sup> It is this which also leads to Emerson's distinction between mere talent and genius. There can be good writing with mere talent, but there can be no great writing without genius, without this communion with the Over-Soul. Only everlasting works have caught the universal thought which descends from above not to but through the man of genius.

Emerson also believed that in art, as in life, the moral is inseparable from the beautiful. Goethe has not true genius because

8. Journals, II, 401.

9. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 42.

10. Journals, V, 496; Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 32.

11. Journals, III, 550.

he lacks the moral sentiment.<sup>12.</sup> Emerson's ideal man is a "Poet - priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle, with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act, with equal inspiration."<sup>13.</sup> Emerson's standard for criticism was thus an ideal; hence it is no wonder that sometimes his criticism seems a little harsh. Emerson believed in books and education, but to him these were secondary things. The spiritual flashes were the most important thing, for, as he said,<sup>14.</sup> "Books are for the scholar's idle times," and "what is any book next to undiscoverable all?"<sup>15.</sup> Thus we see that Emerson's theory of literature is based on his doctrines of self-reliance and the Over-Soul. The ideal literary man should be a post-priest, a "Man Thinking," a man educated first by Nature, then by books, then by action.

Emerson's ideas of Nature also enter into his literary theory. Nature is the source from which the writer derives ability to express himself figuratively, and figurative language is nearest to the divine language.<sup>16.</sup> Nature is the language of the spirit, and for this reason all other language has limitations, since it falls far short of Nature in representing the spirit.<sup>17.</sup> However, like Wordsworth,<sup>18.</sup> Emerson believed in Nature as a great teacher. Emerson also seems

12. Representative Men, Works, IV, 281.

13. Representative Men, Works, IV, 219.

14. "The American Scholar," Works, I, 91.

15. Journals, IV, 66.

16. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 23.

17. Ibid., p. 45.

18. Norman Foerster, American Criticism, p. 107, note.

to show that he has been influenced by Wordsworth's idea of describing familiar things in familiar words, for he says, "I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low .... What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan ...." <sup>19.</sup>

Thompson believes that Wordsworth is responsible <sup>20.</sup> for furnishing Emerson with a theory of poetry. At least Wordsworth changed and modified the theory that Emerson would otherwise have had. Although Emerson believed that language (such as Whitman used, for example) could be too low, he did believe in the use of idiomatic language because of its strength, vitality, and symbolic intensity. Emerson says, "Ought not the scholar to convey his meaning in terms as short and strong as the smith or drover use to convey theirs? ...." <sup>21.</sup> Speak with the vulgar, think with the wise."

Emerson is also a firm believer in the virtue of compression, to which his own works bear witness. The superfluous should be omitted because the whole truth resides in any part of the truth, in literature, as in Nature. <sup>22.</sup>

Emerson defines literature as the "conversing of action into thought, for the delight of the Intellect. It is the turning into thoughts of what was done without thought. It aims at the ideal truth." <sup>23.</sup> He also believes that "all literature is yet to be written, that the Infinite Truth has not been and cannot be exhausted." <sup>24.</sup>

19. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 111.

20. Frank L. Thompson, "Emerson's Theory and Practice of Poetry," P.M.L.A. XLIII (1928) 1185.

21. Natural History of Intellect, Works, XII, 285 - 286.

22. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 17.

23. Journals, III, 280.

24. Journals, IV, 475.



Emerson not only had an ideal for his standard, but most of his reading was among the great authors such as Homer, Plato, Milton, and Shakespeare, and this makes him doubly critical.

In Emerson's theory of art, eloquence is an important part of poetry and therefore orators are poets.<sup>25.</sup> Judging by Emerson's standards, his criticism of American literature would naturally include the American orators such as Webster and Everett. With reference to his own career, it is interesting to note that Emerson regarded the lyceum lecture as a new type of literature.<sup>26.</sup>

Emerson believed that poetry was the highest and greatest form of literature, and he also believed that poetry preceded prose.<sup>27.</sup> He regarded drama as the most attractive art and one which had great possibilities, although it had been misused and degraded.<sup>28.</sup> One queer quirk in Emerson's theory of literature was his own personal aversion to novels (except Sir Walter Scott's novels, particularly The Bride of Lammermoor.) Since he never read novels himself, his attitude toward novelists and novel writing is a little severe. He thinks that on the whole novels and romances are "intended for coxcombs and deficient persons,"<sup>29.</sup> and "The love of novels is the preference of sentiment to the senses."<sup>30.</sup> Although Emerson admits that a novel may teach the value of action, he says, "How far off from life and manners and motives the novel still is."<sup>31.</sup>

Of style Emerson says: "A man's style is his intellectual voice. He can mimic the voices of others, he can modulate it with occasion and the

25. Letters and Social Aims, Works, VIII, 25, 26.

26. Journals, V, 233, 281, 298. 373.

27. Journals, III, 492.

28. Journals, I, 127, 148, 170, 289

29. Journals, II, 13

30. Journals, II, 372.

31. Society and Solitude, Works, VII, 214.





the passion, but it has its own individual nature. " <sup>32.</sup>

This, then, is Emerson's theory of literature - a belief in self-reliance, in inspiration, in the moral sentiment, in the unity of word and thought, in Nature both as a teacher and as agent of spirit, and in the use of familiar idiomatic language to describe common every-day things. There is one flaw in this theory of literature, however; Emerson's belief in the unity of thought and word is inconsistent with his acceptance of translations.

Emerson's theory of criticism is dependent on his theory of literature in every particular, just as his literary theory is in turn dependent on his own philosophy of life. Before examining any opinions of Emerson as a critic, it seems advisable to look first at Emerson's own ideas of criticism and at his own picture of himself as a critic.

Since the standard by which Emerson judged literature was the standard of an ideal, an ideal of which even Shakespeare fell far short, it is no wonder that he himself said, "I criticize with hardness." <sup>33.</sup> Emerson's <sup>was</sup> search for books which contained a moral element and which were written through inspiration. He believed self-reliance was just as necessary in judging a book as in writing it; his rule was "to confide in your own impressions of a book." <sup>34.</sup> Emerson also believed that "criticism must be transcendental," <sup>35.</sup> and here again we find his theory of criticism paralleling his ideas of literature and life.

32. Journals, II, 96.

33. Journals, I, 362.

34. Journals, IV, 326.

35. Journals, V, 283, 398.

Emerson's criticism is consistent with his optimism also.

Criticism is of a lower order than poetry because "the critic destroys, the poet says nothing but what helps somebody."<sup>36.</sup> Although Emerson's criticisms are far from being always favorable, nevertheless it would appear that he preferred constructive to destructive criticism. Emerson himself says, "Criticism should not be querulous and wasting, all knife and root-puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind."<sup>37.</sup> Again he says, "Every scripture is to be interpreted by the same spirit which gave it forth - this is the fundamental law of criticism."<sup>38.</sup> What Emerson himself tried to do in criticism is best expressed in the following passage. "Criticism is an art when it does not stop at the words of the poet, but looks ahead at the order of his thoughts and the essential quality of mind. Then the critic is poet. 'Tis a question not of talents but of tone; and not particular merits, but the mood of mind into which one and another can bring us."<sup>39.</sup> In criticism as in other writing the idea was more important to Emerson than the manner in which it was expressed; the moral is again inseparable from the beautiful."<sup>40.</sup>

Foerster believes that Emerson is important as a critic because he really does have a coherent theory of criticism, and because that theory is backed up by a unified vision of nature and man which gives him rare insight."<sup>41.</sup> It is interesting to note that, in most respects, Emerson's theory of criticism is the exact antithesis of that of his

36. Letters and Social Aims, Works, VIII, 37.

37. Journals, VII, 291.

38. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 35.

39. Natural History of Intellect, Works, XII, 305.

40. Henry David Gray, Emerson, p. 101.

41. Norman Foerster, American Criticism, p. 59.

contemporary, Edgar Allen Poe, Poe believed in art for art's sake, not in art for morality's sake. Nor did Poe believe in individualism in criticism, in trusting to his own impressions of a book, as Emerson did. Nevertheless, although Emerson and Poe had fundamentally different concepts of the function of literature, there is a certain similarity, superficial though it may be, between them. As Foerster says, both Poe and Emerson believe that "Poet and critic are of the same genius: 'The poet is the lover loving; the critic is the lover advised'; consequently, the specific difference between them lies in the poet's spontaneity and the critic's consciousness - the one loving, the other advised. Unlike Poe, Emerson sets the two sharply apart. The poets cannot be served by the critics, assuredly not if their criticism is querulous and destructive. For the poets do as they can, and cannot do otherwise --- This fatalistic conception of artistic creation is in striking contrast with Poe's belief in the conscious adaptation of means to ends. Emerson is unlike Poe, again, when he asserts that criticism is an art when it goes beyond the poet's words, his vehicle, to his thought, the thing conveyed. But the two are once more in agreement in calling for an absolute criticism, a comparison, of the particular work of art, not with inferior art, not even with superior art, but with supreme art - art that excels the best that has ever been produced. Using a term that Poe abhorred, Emerson demands a 'transcendental' criticism."

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Emerson was, on the whole, a good critic, and he was consistent in the application of his own theory. However, this theory of criticism led Emerson into certain faults which appear when it is applied to actual literary works.



One of the deficiencies of Emerson as a critic is that he is too remote from the actions and passions of mankind. He deals too much with the spirit and not enough with the emotions. This is what Walt Whitman meant in his criticism of Emerson. Whitman says, "Emerson, in my opinion, is not eminent as poet or artist or teacher, though valuable in all those. He is best as critic or diagnoser .... cold and bloodless intellectuality dominates him .... At times it has been doubtful to me if Emerson really knows or feels what Poetry is at its highest, as in the Bible, for instance, or Homer or Shakespeare ...."<sup>43.</sup>

Although many of Emerson's criticisms are very keen and are still valid today, his disbelief in Poe's theory of "art for art's sake" occasionally led him to make some rather shallow criticisms. Perhaps one of his greatest errors was his estimation, or rather underestimation, of Shelley. His criticisms were always honest and sincere, but his perpetual search for thought and ideas in literature did lead him astray in a few instances at least. Also, Emerson is inclined to overpraise a little those books which embody or substantiate his own ideas. One last objection to Emerson as a critic is that, since he was not primarily a critic, his criticisms are often too short and disconnected. This is only natural because he was primarily a philosopher, not a critic.

The defects of Emerson's theory of criticism are very evident in his own writings, both prose and poetry. There is a definite relationship between Emerson's own theory and practice of poetry. As Gay says,

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43. Walt Whitman, Complete Prose Works, II, 267, 269.

"His theory of poetry tended to encourage and condone his technical faults .... With his insistence upon the intellectual content of poetry, it is small wonder if his own verse lacks both passion and music."<sup>44</sup>

Gray, also, recognizes the limitations imposed on Emerson by his own aesthetic theory. "When there was a conflict between art and thought, Emerson never hesitated to put down the thing as he meant it and let the meter limp along as best it could. For the idea was the inspiration, was it not? And the meter and rhyme were no more than the Understanding's method of decking out what the Reason had perceived in one of its great silences. They should not be abandoned, as Whitman abandoned them, because they were the conventional graces which established a community of feeling between the poet and the reader; but the moment that they asserted any claim of their own they became an offense and a hindrance."<sup>45</sup>

Thus we see that Emerson's philosophy of life produced a theory of literature and criticism which kept him from becoming a really great critic, just as it prevented him from being a truly great poet. If Emerson had not been an idealist, if he had not believed in intuition and self-reliance, he would have been a better poet and a better critic, at least from a technical standpoint. However, even if Emerson is not a great

critic, he is a good critic. His judgments on American literature are remarkably keen, and it is interesting to note how many of his opinions still hold good today. DeMille believes that Emerson did have many of the

<sup>44</sup>. Robert M. Gray, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 194.

<sup>45</sup>. Gray, op. cit., pp. 103 - 104.

qualities of a great critic - "enthusiasm for literature, wide-reading, catholicity of taste, a high standard and a sharp discrimination, independence."<sup>46.</sup>

Another thing that kept Emerson from being a really great critic was his high opinion of "Man Thinking" and of man as poet. Emerson did not believe in giving criticism a high place among the arts. He himself wanted to be a philosopher and a poet, not a critic, for, as he says, "Life is too short to waste  
47.  
In critic peep or cynic bark."

Even though Emerson is not primarily a critic, even though his criticism is scattered and incidental, nevertheless he is a real critic and an important one. De Mille recognizes this importance in the following estimate of him: "However, if we cannot call Emerson a great critic, we must at least recognize him as a great critical force. Lowell and the North American school constitute the critical orthodoxy of the Nineteenth Century in America. Poe leads one wing of the opposition, what we might call the artistic wing. Emerson is the leader of a second group of heretics, who agree not so much in specific doctrines as in general attitudes, in fundamental philosophy. In his desire to be independent of traditional judgment, in his occasional moods of almost arrogant disregard for the past, in his call for a literature smacking of the soil, in his dislike of the merely pretty, in his impatience with American literature, Emerson is the teacher of Whitman, of Burroughs, and in part, I think, of the realistic novelists and critics of the eighteen - nineties. And as I read the works

46. George E. De Mille, Literary Criticism in America, p. 127.

47. Poems, Works, IX. 30.



of John Macy, Carl Van Doren, VanWyck Brooks, all of the men of the modern iconoclastic school of critics, or even such far removed persons as V. F. Calverton, I see everywhere traces of the germinating spirit of Emerson. " <sup>48.</sup>

Emerson is also a good critic because his criticism of American letters does not confine itself solely to literature, but it relates this literature to the times, to science, history, politics, economics, culture. His criticism is based on transcendentalism, on intuition, on idealism, on individualism and self-reliance, and on morality, and these fundamental critical principles are, in every respect, a direct outgrowth of his philosophy of life. The results obtained by applying this theory of criticism to the entire field of American letters are very interesting, both in themselves and for the light they shed on Emerson.

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48. De Mille, op. cit., pp. 127 - 128.

## CHAPTER III.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

## I.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF AMERICAN LITERATURE AS A WHOLE.

Emerson's criticism of American literature is of two kinds: criticism of American literature as a body, and criticism of individual men of letters. It is difficult to collect Emerson's criticisms of American literature into a body for two reasons. In the first place, his criticism is scattered throughout and buried deeply in all of his writings - in his journals, his essays, and his letters. Secondly, most of the contemporary authors of his time were friends of his, and this makes it difficult to sort out what is really literary criticism from what is merely a commentary on personalities.

Emerson criticizes American literature on three main points: its dependence on Europe, its materialism, and its failure to use American materials.<sup>1</sup> Long before his "American Scholar" address of 1837 Emerson was suggesting that America cease her servile imitation of Europe. This is one of Emerson's strongest teachings, and it is really just a corollary of his belief in self-reliance. Channing had begun preaching this doctrine of literary independence long before, but Emerson was the one who really sounded the clarion call to the youth of America. Emerson's attacks against America's cultural dependence on Europe continued

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1. Journals, IV, 89 - 90; 108,-110.

throughout his entire life. His earliest remark on this subject was written at the age of nineteen when he said, "Let the Young American withdraw his eyes from all but his own country."<sup>2.</sup>

Years later he says, "Imitation may be pretty, amusing, popular, but it never can be great."<sup>3.</sup> While he is in England, in 1833, he speaks disparagingly of the influence of the English press on America: "I have heard the proverb that no evil but can speak .... Consider that every week Europe sends this voice of all its opinions and interests by its periodical press or occasional works into America."<sup>4.</sup>

One of Emerson's most severe criticisms during this early period of his life was written in 1834, after his return to America. He says, "Webster's speeches seem to be the utmost that the unpoetic West has accomplished or can. We all lean on England; scarce a verse, a page, a newspaper, but is writ in imitation of English forms; our very manners and conversation are traditional, and sometimes the life seems dying out of all literature, and this enormous paper currency of Words is accepted instead. I suppose the evil may be cured by this rank rabble party, the Jacksonianism of the country, heedless of English, and of all literature, - they may root out the hollow dilettantism of our cultivation in the coarsest way, and the newborn may begin again to frame their own world with greater advantage. Meantime Webster is no imitator ...."<sup>5.</sup>

Emerson's most important indictment of American literature as a whole occurs, of course, in his Phi Beta Kappa oration of 1837, "The

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2. Journals, I, 246.

3. Journals, II, 522.

4. Journals, III, 202.

5. Journals, III, 308.

American Scholar." The philosophy behind the oration has already been - discussed under Emerson's theory of literature, and criticism, but some of his more specific remarks on American literature are applicable here. His strongest criticism arises from the idea that our age is too retrospective, that we look backward to genius, instead of realizing that every age must produce its own literature and its own geniuses. This can be done only through self-reliance, by relying on that spark of the divine which is in us all. America, in particular, has always looked toward Europe instead of relying on herself. I think Oliver Wendell Holmes is justified in calling this "the American declaration of literary independence"; because this was no doubt very influential in arousing young American authors, like Thoreau, to create and originate literature. Emerson was not alone in his demand for an indigenous literature, but his cry was probably the strongest and most insistent. Channing had begun this demand in his paper "On National Literature" in which he said: "A people into whose minds the thoughts of foreigners are poured perpetually, needs an energy within itself to resist, to modify this mighty influence .... It were better to have no literature, than form ourselves unresistingly on a foreign one." <sup>6.</sup> The periodicals, too, were calling for an American literature, although they continued to borrow much of their material from England. <sup>7.</sup> This cry was taken up by some of Emerson's younger contemporaries also. Lowell's magazine The Pioneer was founded as a protest against American's dependence on England, in the

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6. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 110.

7. Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741 - 1850, pp. 183 - 186, 210, 390 - 391.

hope of encouraging a native literature. DeMille says that "Lowell called for a literature to reflect 'not only the mountain and the rock, but also the steam-boat and the railcar, the cornfield and the factory.'" <sup>8.</sup>

Longfellow was another of these writers who made a plea for national character in the work of American writers. He says: "In order to effect this, they have only to write more naturally, to write from their own feelings and impressions, from the influence of what they see around them." <sup>9.</sup>

However, Emerson was a pioneer in this field, and his demands for a national literature seem to have gained a wider audience and had a deeper and more lasting influence than the demands of his contemporaries. Emerson was optimistic about America ending her cultural dependence on Europe, for, even in "The American Scholar" address, he says: "Perhaps the time is already come when it, [our literature], ought to be, and will be, something else; when the sluggish intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close." <sup>10.</sup>

This optimistic prophecy of 1837 was not fulfilled as soon as Emerson had expected, however, and in 1956 in his English Traits he was forced to admit that America was still not entirely independent. He writes: "The American is only the continuation of the English genius into new conditions, more or less propitious. See

8. George E. De Mille, Literary Criticism in America, p. 50.

9. Mott, op. cit., p. 390.

10. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 82.

what books fill our libraries. Every book we read, every biography, play, romance, in whatever form, is still English history and manners, so that a sensible Englishman once said to me, 'As long as you do not grant us copyright, we shall have the teaching of you.'<sup>11.</sup> Emerson was shrewd enough to recognize that lack of copyright of English books was a definite barrier to American literature; American publishers would not risk publishing the works of an unknown American when they could reprint Dickens and Scott even more cheaply. However, this is Emerson's only comment on the subject. Emerson continues his attack on America's literary dependence in his later Journals also. He says, "Can we never extract this maggot of Europe from the brains of our countrymen?"<sup>12.</sup> And "Our American letters are, I confess, in the optative mood."<sup>13.</sup> We have seen that, through the influence of Wordsworth, Emerson had come to place great value on simple, idiomatic language, and this leads him to make another criticism. He says, "Our conventional style of writing is now so trite and poor, so little idiomatic, that we have several foreigners who write in our journals in a style not to be distinguished from their native colleagues."<sup>14.</sup> Emerson believed in a great future for American literature, but he knew that it was still far inferior to the contemporary English literature of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, etc.<sup>15.</sup> This, then, is Emerson's first plea - that America cast off its European shackles.

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11. English Traits, Works, V, 36.

12. Journals, V, 393.

13. Journals, V, 409.

14. Journals, V, 215.

15. Journals, VIII, 354.

Emerson's second criticism of American literature is an objection to its materialism. He criticizes America for making literature and art secondary in importance to trade and the material things of life. <sup>16.</sup>

It is this devotion to property added to America's dependence on Europe which has resulted in such intellectual barrenness in this country. Emerson's longest and fullest discussion of this problem appeared in his lecture on "Poetry and Imagination" when he said, "The question is often asked, Why no poet appears in America? Other nations in their early expanding periods, in their war for existence, have shot forth the flowers of verse, and created a mythology which continued to charm the imagination of after-men. But we have all manner of ability, except this: we are brave, victorious, we legislate, trade, plant, build, sail, and combine as well as many others, but we have no imagination, no constructive mind, no affirmative books; we have plenty of criticism, elegant history; all the forms of respectable imitation; but no poet, no affirmer, no grand guiding mind .... The answer is, for the time, to be found in the preoccupation of all men. The work of half the world to be done; and it is the hard condition of Nature, that, where one faculty is excessive, it lames all the rest. We are the men of practice, the men of our hand, and, for the time, our brain loses in range what it gains in skill." <sup>17.</sup>

Emerson refers more than once to this lack of any genius in a country which has so much of everything else. In his essay, "Nominalist and Realist" he says: "It is worse in America, where, from the intellectual quickness of the race, the genius of the

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16. Journals, I, 262.

17. Letters and Social Aims, Works, XII, 203 - 204.

country is more splendid in its promise and more slight in its performance. Webster cannot do the work of Webster."<sup>18.</sup> Emerson comments on this again in his essay on "Boston": "I confess I do not find in our people, with all their education, a fair share of originality of thought; - not any remarkable book of wisdom; - not any broad generalization, any equal power of imagination. No *Paradise Lost*, no *Hamlet*, no *Wealth of Nations*, no *National Anthem* have we yet contributed."<sup>19.</sup>

Emerson bases his third point of attack on the failure of American literature to use American materials. He was one of the first men to admit that America did have incomparable materials for literature. It was only natural that Emerson, with his own great love to nature, should put his hopes in the great beauty of Nature in America, particularly the vast new Nature of the West. He says, "It is a pity that in this Titanic continent, where nature is so grand, that genius should be so tame. Not one unchallengeable reputation. Bryant .... Greenough .... Channing .... They<sup>20.</sup> are all feminine or receptive, and not masculine or creative." Again we read: "We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the time, another carnival of the same gods whose picture<sup>21.</sup> he admires so much in Homer ...." Emerson objected to America's borrowing of inferior materials when there were much greater things to be written

18. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 230.

19. Natural History of Intellect, Works, XII, 203 - 204.

20. Journals, IV, 87.

21. Essays, Second Series, Works, III, 37.





about at home. Emerson has some constructive ideas on this subject, too; he points out that as yet no one has written about "the noonday darkness of the American forest, the deep, echoing, aboriginal woods, where the living columns of the oak and fir tower up from the ruins of the trees of the last millennium; where, from year to year, the eagle and crow see no intruder; the pines, bearded with savage moss, yet touched with grace by the violets at their feet .... This beauty, - haggard and desert beauty, which the sun and the moon, the snow and the rain, repaint and vary, has never been recorded by art ...."<sup>22.</sup>

We have already seen that the West had great influence on Emerson, and to him it had boundless possibilities in literature as in everything else. In "The Young American" he says, "The nervous rocky West is intruding a new and continued element into the national mind, and we shall yet have an American genius."<sup>23.</sup> Emerson believed that this new element injected into American literature by the West would more than counteract the influence of Europe. In a paper written for the Dial in 1843 Emerson is speaking of European literary dominance when he says: "This powerful star, it is thought, will soon culminate and descend, and the impending reduction of the Transatlantic excess of influence .... is already a matter of easy and frequent computation. Our eyes will be turned westward and a new and stronger tone of literature will result. The Kentucky stump oratory, the exploits of Boone and Crockett, the journals of western pioneers, agriculturists, and socialists, and the letters of Jack Downing, are

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22. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 169.

23. Works, I, 370.

genuine growths which are sought with avidity on Europe, where our European - like books are of no value." <sup>24.</sup> This passage is of the utmost importance for two reasons. First of all, it illustrates again the importance of the West to Emerson and shows how he always looked to the American frontier for an indigenous American literature. Secondly, this passage shows that Emerson was well-qualified to criticize American literature because he was keenly aware of what was going on around him. It shows that he must have been acquainted with this new "Yankee" literature, even though he does not refer to it at any other time, and his acute critical ability is revealed by his early recognition of its importance. Emerson was correct in believing that this new American humor was going to inject a new and indigenous element into American literature. This Yankee humor began to emerge during the Jackson era, at the time of the Westward movement of the frontier and the rise of the newspapers. <sup>25.</sup> Seba Smith's "Jack Downing" books and David Crockett's Autobiography prepared the way for Lowell's Biglow Papers and for Mark Twain and Bret Harte. Emerson proves himself to be a shrewd critic and observer by forecasting the future importance of this new native frontier element in the development of a real American literature.

Although Emerson realized more clearly than anyone else in his time the great scarcity of American literature, and the great defects in what American literature there was, nevertheless he was almost always very optimistic about the future of American literature. In spite of its de-

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24. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 416.

25. Cambridge History of American Literature, II, 150.

pendence on Europe, its materialism, and its failure to use American materialisms, the field of American literature had great possibilities in Emerson's mind. As early as 1822 he said, "I dedicate my books to the spirit of America .... With a spark of prophetic devotion, I hasten to hail the Genius, who yet counts the tardy years of his childhood, but who is increasing unawares in the twilight, and swelling into strength ...." 26

McQuiston says that Emerson kept this same youthful hope in America throughout his entire life; this patriotic faith appears not only in this Journal extract of 1822 but in his "Young American" address of 1844 and in "The Fortunes of the Republic" as late as 1878. 27. Emerson admitted that

America had no literature as yet, but he added, "What we have is better. We have a government and a national spirit that is better than poems or histories...." 28. However, Emerson did not really believe that America

was sufficiently great without any literature, for shortly after this he says, "It is only fit that something besides newspapers should be put into the hands of the people." 29. And Emerson is indicting all America

when he says: "We are a puny and fickle folk .... Our books are tents, not pyramids." 30.

He is indicting early New England literature, particularly early Massachusetts literature, in the following paragraph:

"To write a history of Massachusetts is not, I confess, inviting to an expansive thinker, since, from 1790 to 1820, there was not a book, a

26. Journals, I, 160.

27. Raymer McQuiston, "Relation of Ralph Waldo Emerson to Public Affairs," University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, III, no. 1, (April, 1923), p. 59.

28. Journals, I, 398.

29. Journals, II, 15.

30. Journals, V, 529.

speech, a conversation, or a thought, in the State. About 1820, the Channing, Webster, and Everett era began, and we have been bookish and poetical and cogitative since." <sup>31.</sup> Emerson does not think American literature

entirely barren, however, for in nominating the faculty for his ideal college he says, "My college should have Allston, Greenough, Bryant, Irving, Webster, Alcott, summoned for its domestic professors." <sup>32.</sup> Another favor-

able comment appears a few years later when he writes: "The English are stupid because they reserve their strength. The Lowells ripen slowly.

Hurrying America makes out of little varieties its great men, as now, the three leading men in America are of a small sort, who never saw a grander arch than their own eyebrow .... Yet Washington, Adams, Quincy, Franklin, I would willingly adorn my hall with, and I will have daguerres of Alcott, Channing, Thoreau," <sup>33.</sup>

In another instance he says, "Look at literary New England, one would think it was a national fast." <sup>34.</sup> But he modifies this statement a few

months later by adding, "We have not had since ten years a pamphlet which I saved to bind, and here at last is Bushnell's," <sup>35.</sup> and now Henry Thoreau's

'Ascent of Katahdin.' " <sup>36.</sup> Emerson is also predicting a brighter future for

American literature when he says, "Let us be very mum at present about American literature. One of these ages, we, too, will set our feet on Andes'

31. Journals, VIII, 339.

32. Journals, V, 203.

33. Journals, VIII, 551.

34. Journals, VI, 268.

35. Horace Bushnell was an important American theologian of the nineteenth century. He wrote theological works, but he also contributed to several of the periodicals of his day. His writings were original and vigorous and always aroused much discussion and interest among scholars and thinkers.

36. Journals, VII, 526.

tops. " <sup>37.</sup> In his last volume of Journals, late in the year 1869, Emerson gives a good summary of much of the important American literature of that time. He writes, "What a harness of buckram wealth and city life put on our poets and literary men, even when men of great parts. Alcott complained to me of want of sympathy in Lowell, Holmes, and Longfellow; and Alcott is the right touchstone to test them; true litmus to detect the acid .... Henry James is not spoiled; Bryant is perfect; New York has not hurt him. I should be glad if James Lowell were as simply noble as his cousin Frank Lowell .... Charles Newcomb and Channing (Ellery) are saved by genius. Thoreau was with difficulty sweet .... But in all the living circle of American wits and scholars is no enthusiasm. Alcott alone has it." <sup>38.</sup>

At another time he condemns Irving, Bryant, Everett, Channing, and Webster because they "all lack nerve and dagger." <sup>39.</sup> In his essay on "Literary Ethios" in 1838 he says, "This country has not fulfilled what seemed the reasonable expectation of mankind .... The mark of American merit in painting, in sculpture, in poetry, in fiction, and in eloquence, seems to be a certain grace without grandeur, and itself not new but derivative, a vase of fair outline but empty ...." <sup>40.</sup> Emerson's prophecies are again more optimistic in his lectures on "The Young American" in 1844. He says, "America is beginning to assert herself to the senses and to the imagination of her children, and Europe is receding in the same degree." <sup>41.</sup>

This, then, concludes Emerson's criticism of American literature as a whole. Although he was not satisfied with American literature,

37. Journals, X, 51.

38. Journals, X, 65.

39. Journals, V, 205.

40. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 156 - 157.

41. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 363.

although he believed it should have produced something greater than it has as yet produced, nevertheless he was, on the whole, optimistic about the future of American literature. It is Emerson's transcendentalism which makes him so impatient with the materialism of American letters; it is his belief in self - reliance and individualism which makes him so impatient with America's cultural dependence on Europe. And, with his own underlying optimism and his love of Nature, it is to the West that Emerson turns to see America's rising star.





## II.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF AMERICAN PERIODICAL LITERATURE.

The character of the periodical in America at this time justifies Emerson's criticism of American literature as a whole. These periodicals clamored for an indigenous literature and yet they continued to borrow almost all of their material from English and other sources.<sup>1.</sup> However, beginning in 1825, American periodical literature entered a new era, which has been called the "Golden Age of Periodicals."<sup>2.</sup> The new German thought, English Romanticism, and the growth of the West were affecting this field as well as every other aspect of American life. One of the most noticeable results of all these forces was the tremendous increase in the number of periodicals produced in America; from less than a hundred in 1825 the number of these publications had jumped to about six hundred by 1850.<sup>3.</sup> Of course, many of these periodicals were very ephemeral, and their average life was not over two years. The field was becoming more remunerative, however, and the famous Graham's Magazine and the equally famous Knickerbäcker were beginning to publish articles by America's leading authors, such as Poe, Bryant, Cooper, Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes. But there were still many inferior publications, particularly in the field of the literary weekly, and the competition from the Womens' Magazines such as Godey's Lady's Book also tended to lower the standard of other periodicals.<sup>4.</sup>

1. Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741 - 1850, p. 211

2. Ibid., p. 337.

3. Ibid., pp. 341 - 342.

4. Ibid., pp. 348 - 366.

The Quarterly reviews were increasing in number but they never became very popular because as a rule they appealed only to that class which was especially interested in reviews and other literary topics.<sup>5.</sup> Some of the most famous among these Quarterly reviews are the North American of Bancroft, the Boston Quarterly of Brownson, the Dial of the Transcendentalists, and the Massachusetts Quarterly of Parker. Emerson was of course most interested in this phase of American periodical literature, and his criticism is limited entirely to these Quarterly reviews with the exception of his comments on the newspapers. America was also producing numerous religious periodicals, to which such men as Clarke and Hedge were frequent contributors. Even after 1825, however, America had not really entered a "golden age" of periodicals. There were too many of them, especially too many of the weaker ones. Almost all of them were still demanding a national literature, while at the same time they were still slavishly imitating the English magazines in both form and content. The American eclectics were still borrowing the best of English periodical literature.<sup>6.</sup> It is no wonder that Emerson found much to criticize in American periodical literature at this time - it was not only too dependent on England, but, for the most part, its indigenous material was inferior and weak. Emerson also believed that this rapidly increasing periodical literature was retarding the growth of American literature as a whole. He says, "Our era of exploits and civilization is ripe enow, and if it had not been dissipated by the unfortunate rage for periodical productions, our literature should have grown ere now to a Greek or Raman stature."<sup>7.</sup>

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5. Ibid., pp. 366 - 367.

6. Ibid., pp. 393 - 397.

7. Journals, I, 306.

If Emerson was critical of American periodical literature, it is interesting to note that the periodicals were equally critical of him. Until 1844 both the religious and secular journals were strongly opposed to Emerson, partly because of his transcendentalism but mainly in protest against his famous "Divinity School Address" of 1838.<sup>8</sup> However, after the publication of his second volume of essays in 1844, Emerson began to receive more favorable treatment from the periodicals of his day.

Emerson's criticism of this American periodical literature is of particular interest because of his own intimate connection with at least one of these periodicals, the Dial. The Dial grew out of a desire for expression on the part of the members of Transcendental Club, and the establishment of a journal was first discussed in 1839 at a club meeting. Emerson, Parker, Fuller, Ripley, Alcott, Hedge were really the founders of this new journal, and the first issue came out in July, 1840, with Margaret Fuller as editor. Emerson himself became editor in 1842, and he held this position until the journal became defunct in April, 1844. Emerson not only edited the Dial for two years, but during the four years of its existence he contributed some sixty or seventy articles, ranging from essays and poems to editorials and book reviews. His interest in this periodical is further shown by the many comments in his Journals and letters.

At the time the Dial was being organized, Emerson writes, "If there be need of a new Journal, that need is its introduction; it wants no preface .... It will ignore all the old, long constituted public or publics to which newspapers and magazines address. It ignores all

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8. Mott, op. cit., p. 410.

newspapers and magazines .... If the projected Journal be what we anticipate, - and if not, we should not care for it, - it does not now know itself in the way of accustomed criticism; it cannot foretell in orderly proportions what it shall do; its criticism is to be poetic, not the peeping but the broad glance of the American man on the books and things of the hour. Its brow is not wrinkled with circumspection,

but it serene, cheerful, adoring." <sup>9.</sup> Emerson also wrote about the founding of the Dial to his friend Carlyle. In a letter dated March, 1840, he says, "Did I tell you that we hope shortly to send you some American verse and prose of good content? My vivacious friend, Margaret Fuller is to edit a journal whose first number she promises for the 1st of July next, which I think will be written with a good will if written at all. I saw some poetical fragments which charmed me, - if only the writer consents to give them to the public." <sup>10.</sup>

And the following month he writes the following to Carlyle: "I have very good hope that my friend Margaret Fuller's Journal - after many false baptisms now saying it will be called the Dial, and which is to appear in July - will give you a better knowledge of our young people than any you have had." <sup>11.</sup>

In June he wrote again to Carlyle, saying, "With this, or present~~ly~~ after it, I shall send a copy of the Dial. It is not yet much; indeed, though no copy has come to me, I know it is far short of what it should be, for they have suffered puffs and dulness to creep in for the sake of the complement of the pages; but it is better than

9. Journals, V, 386 - 387.

10. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 270.

11. Ibid., I, 285.

anything we had; and I have some poetry communicated to me for the  
 next number which I wish Sterling to see." <sup>12.</sup> The first issue of

the Dial was not very well received, and Emerson himself had many doubts about it. He wrote to Carlyle again immediately after the publication of the first issue, saying, "Our community begin to stand in some terror of Transcendentalism, and the Dial, poor little thing, whose first number contains scarce anything considerable or even visible, is just now honored by attacks from almost every newspaper and magazine." <sup>13.</sup>

Since Emerson believed that poetry was the highest form of literature, he criticized the first number, in a letter to Margaret Fuller, because he believed that the verse should occupy a more conspicuous place in the journal. <sup>14.</sup> However, he must have come to

the conclusion that the public did not agree with him in this respect, for in another letter to Miss Fuller in July, 1840, he writes: "Nowhere do I find readers of the Dial poetry, which is my one thing needful in the enterprise .... I think Alcott's paper of great importance to the journal, inasmuch as otherwise, as far as I have read, there is little that might not appear on any other journal." <sup>15.</sup>

That Emerson was not quite satisfied with the Dial after its first issue becomes more apparent in a comment written in his Journal on July 31. At that time he says: "And now I think our Dial ought to be a mere literary journal, but that the times demand of us all a more earnest aim. It ought to contain the best

12. Ibid., I, 289 - 290.

13. Ibid., I, 298.

14. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, II, 404.

15. Ibid., II, 405.

advice on the topics of Government, Temperance, Abolition, Trade, and Domestic Life. It might well add to such compositions such poetry and sentiment as now constitute its best merit, Yet it ought to go straight into life with the devoted wisdom of the best men and women in the land. It should - should it not? - be a degree nearer to the hodiurnal facts than my writings are." <sup>16.</sup> Just five days later he writes a letter to Miss Fuller which contains the same idea as the above passage from his journal. He writes: "I begin to wish to see a different Dial from that which I first imagined. I would not have it too literary. I wish we might make a journal so broad and great in the survey that it should lead the opinion of this generation on every great interest, and read the law on property, government, education, as well as on art, letters, and religion. It does not seem worth our while to work with any other than sovereign aims .... I am just now turning my pen to scribble and copy on the subject of Labor, Farm, Reform, Domestic Life, etc., and I asked myself, why should not the Dial present this homely and grave subject to the men and women of the land? .... I know the dangers of such latitude of plan in any but the best conducted journal. It becomes friendly to special modes of reform; partisan, bigoted, perhaps whimsical; ~~not~~ universal and poetic. But our round-table is not, I fancy, in imminent peril of party, and bigotry, and we shall not bruise each the other's whims by the collision." <sup>17..</sup> Emerson's standard for periodical literature was evidently just as high as his standard for any other type of literature. He criticizes the Dial again a little later in his Journals, saying, "A newspaper in a grave and candid tone censures the Dial as having disappointed the good expectation of our lovers of literature .... The Dial is poor and low and all unequal to its promise: but that is not for

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16. Journals, V, 448.

17. Cabot, op. cit., II, 405 - 406.



you to say, O Daily Advertiser, but for me. It is now better after your manner than anything else you have; and you do not yet see that it is, and will soon see and extol it. I see with regret that it is still after your manner, and not after mine, and that it is something which you can  
18. praise." A few days later he adds, "I see in a moment, on looking

into our new Dial, which is the wild poetry and which the tame, and see  
19. that one wild line out of a private heart saves the whole book."

When Emerson took over the editorship of the journal he wrote the following passage in a letter to Carlyle: "I submitted to what seemed a necessity of petty literary patriotism, - I know not what else to call it, - and took charge of our thankless little Dial, here, without subscribers enough to pay even a publisher, much less any laborer .... but it serves as a sort of portfolio, to carry about a few poems or sentences which would otherwise be transcribed and circulated; and always we are waiting  
20. when somebody should come and make it good."

This is almost exactly what Emerson wrote to Dr. Hedge, also. He says in this letter, "Poor Dial - it has not pleased any mortal. No man cried, God save it. And yet, though it contains a deal of matter I could gladly spare, I yet value it as a portfolio which preserves and conveys to distant persons precisely what I should send them if I could. It wants mainly and and only some devotion on the part of its conductor to it, that it may not be the herbarium that is of dried flowers, but the vehicle of some living and advancing mind. But nobody has yet conceived himself born for this end  
21. only."

18. Journals, V, 471 - 472.

19. Journals, V, 476.

20. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 2.

21. Cabot, op. cit., 407 - 408.





When the Dial finally died out Emerson wrote the following passage to his friend W. H. Furness: "I have just done with the Dial. Its last number is printed; and having lived four years, which is a Presidential term in America, it may respectably end. I have continued it for some time against my own judgment to please other people, and though it has now some standing and increasing favour in England, it makes a very slow gain at home, and it is for home that it is designed. It is time that each of the principal contributors to it should write in their own names, and go to their proper readers. In New England its whole quadrennium will be a pretty historiette in literary annals."<sup>22.</sup>

The Dial seems to have had a better reputation in England than in its country, for in 1847 Emerson wrote to Thoreau from England, saying, "The Dial is absurdly well-known here. We at home, I think, are always a little ashamed of it, - I am, - and yet here it is spoken of with the utmost gravity and I do not laugh."<sup>23.</sup>

Emerson seems to have felt more kindly toward the Dial as he grew older, and his last two comments on it show that it had become a mellow memory to him. Emerson speaks of the Dial in the chapter he wrote for "The Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli." In that book he says of the Dial: "The workmen of sufficient culture for a poetical and philosophical magazine were too few, and, as the pages were filled by unpaid contributors, each of whom had some paying employment, the journal did not get his best but his second-best. Its scattered writers had not digested their theories into a

22. Clarence Gohdes, The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism, p. 153.

23. Charles Sanborn, "The Emerson - Thoreau Correspondence," Atlantic Monthly, LXIX, (May, 1892) p. 742.

distinct dogma, still less into a practical measure which the public could grasp; and the magazine was so eclectic and miscellaneous, that each of its readers and writers valued only a small portion of it ....

But the Dial betrayed, through all its juvenility, timidity, and conventional rubbish, some sparks of the true love and hope, and of the piety to spiritual law .... " <sup>24.</sup>

Emerson's last reference to the Dial appears in his essay on "Life and Letters in New England." Speaking of the meetings of the Transcendental Club, he says; "Nothing more serious came of it than the modest quarterly journal called the Dial, which under the editorship of Margaret Fuller, and later of some other, enjoyed its obscurity for four years. All its papers were unpaid contributions, and it was rather a work of friendship among the narrow circle of students than the organ of any party. Perhaps its writers were its chief readers; yet it contained some noble papers by Margaret Fuller, and some numbers had an exhausting sale, because of papers by Theodore Parker." <sup>25.</sup>

Thus we see that Emerson, in spite of his intimate connection with the journal, was able to see its defects very clearly, and that he was able to look beyond these defects and recognize that it did have some value. To Emerson the main value of the Dial was not so much in its good individual pieces as in its superior aim. Here again we see Emerson as a "transcendental critic."

Emerson saw American periodical literature as a whole as "a diffused and weakened Athens," <sup>26.</sup> and he also said that it was a vice of journals <sup>27.</sup> that they contained only the second best. The Dial was probably originated partly as an attempt to remedy these defects, and, if it failed, it was not for want of trying. If it fell short of the mark, at least the aim was high and it was by no means an ignominious failure.

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24. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 323.

25. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 343 - 344.

26. Journals. V. 449.

27. Journals. VI. 203.

Emerson~~was~~ associated with another periodical after the Dial disappeared, but he was never very intimately connected with it. This second periodical was Theodore Parker's "Massachusetts Quarterly," which came into existence in 1847, three years after the Dial ended. Emerson, Parker, Alcott, Thoreau, Elliot Cabot, Clarke and others first started discussing the project of this new journal in May of 1847.<sup>28.</sup> Emerson was asked to edit this new periodical but he refused, and finally Parker was forced to undertake the task. Cabot says that Emerson did not like it when his name appeared<sup>29.</sup> as one of the editors. but Gohdes says that Emerson must have known about it and allowed his name to appear among the editors, since the preliminary announcement came out before Emerson left for Europe.<sup>30.</sup>

Emerson wrote the "Editors' Address" for the first issue of the Massachusetts Quarterly, and it is written in a very optimistic vein. Emerson seems to have had the same high hopes for the Massachusetts Quarterly Review that he had seven years earlier for the Dial. He says, "A journal that would meet the real wants of this time must have a courage and a power sufficient to solve the problems which the great groping society around us, stupid with perplexity, is dumbly exploring .... We rely on the magnetism of truth."<sup>31.</sup>

However, this periodical, too, fell short of Emersons' expectations, and, after the first issue, he had his name withdrawn from the list of editors. Emerson did not lose all his interest in the journal, as he later contributed two reviews (one on Coleridge, the other on Sterling) which he would not have done if the periodical itself had been distasteful to him. In a letter to

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28. Journals, VII, 268 - 269.

29. Cabot, op. cit., 497 - 498.

30. Gohdes, op. cit., 160.

31. Miscellaneous, Works, XI, 390, 393.

his wife in January, 1848, shortly after the first issue of the Massachusetts Quarterly Review had appeared, Emerson writes, "The journal is of a good spirit, and has much good of Agassiz, but no intellectual tone such as is imperatively wanted; no literary skill, even, and, without a loftier note than any in this number, it will sink into a North American at once."<sup>32.</sup> A few months later, in another letter to his wife, written this time from England, he says, "I find Chapman very anxious to establish a journal common to Old and New England, as was long ago proposed. Let the Massachusetts Quarterly give place to this, and we should have two legs and bestride the sea. But what do I, or what does any friend of mine in America, care for a journal? Not enough, I fear, to secure any energetic work on that side .... 'Tis certain the Mass. Q.R. will fail unless Henry Thoreau and Alcott and Channing and Charles Newcomb-the fourfold visaged four - fly to the rescue."<sup>33.</sup>

Although Emerson had a rather high opinion of the North American Review in his youth, he began to think that the Massachusetts Quarterly Review may have been started partly as a protest against the conservation of the North American Review.<sup>34.</sup> In 1822, at the age of nineteen, Emerson wrote the following passage in a letter to his classmate J. B. Hill: "The North American Review grows better and travels farther, and though we are inundated with silly poetry, we improve."<sup>35.</sup> In another letter to Hill written almost a year later we read, "The last N.A. Review is full of wit and literature ...."<sup>36.</sup> Emerson does not refer to this periodical again

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32. Cabot, op. cit., p. 515.

33. Ibid., p. 537.

34. Gohdes, op.cit., p. 161.

35. Cabot, op. cit., p. 90.

36. Ibid., p. 96.

until 1838, fifteen years later, when he writes in his Journal, "When I read the North American Review or the London Quarterly, I seem to hear the snore of the muses, not their waking voice." <sup>37.</sup> Later he adds,

"And I confess to some pleasure from the stinging rhetoric of a rattling oath in the mouth of truckmen and teamsters. How laconic and brisk it is by the side of a page of the North American Review." <sup>38.</sup> He also says, "A journalist in London or New York acquires a facility and élan which throws the slow elaborators for the Edinburgh and the North American into the shade. Thus this lively article 'Schopenhauer' in the New York Commercial Advertiser eclipses Hedge's learned paper in the Examiner." <sup>39.</sup>

The Atlantic Monthly was founded in 1857 in an attempt to do what almost all the other American periodicals to date had tried to do, but where the others had failed this new periodical came very close to succeeding. Pattee says that even when it was founded it was "an adequate magazine, one that at the same time could be as profound as Emerson and yet as sparkling as Holmes." <sup>40.</sup> However, Emerson himself did not seem to have a very high opinion of it, for, in 1857, he writes thus: "The Atlantic Monthly. A Journal is an assuming to guide the age - very proper and necessary to be done and good news that it shall be so - But this journal, is this it? Has Apollo spoken? In this, the sentiment of freedom is the sting which all feel in common; a Northern sentiment, the only tie; and the manifest convenience of having a good vent for such wares as scholars have. There is a discrepancy in the nature of the thing; each of the contributors is content

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37. Journals, IV, 476.

38. Journals, V, 419.

39. Journals, X, 33.

40. Fred Lewis Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, p. 579.

that the thing be to the largest aims; but when he is asked for his contributions, he considers where his strength lies; he has certain experiences which have impressed him lately, and which he can combine, but no choice or a very narrow choice among such, and the best the Editor can do is, to see that nothing goes into the book but important pieces; every chapter must recall real experiences. It suffices that it be weighty. It matters not whether 'tis upon Religion, or Balloons, or Kneebuckles, so only that there is nothing fantastic or fictitious in the subject and writing. Great scope and illumination ought to be in the Editor, to draw from the best in the land, and to defy the public, if he is only sure himself that the piece has worth, and is right...."<sup>41.</sup>

However, if Emerson did not have a very high opinion of American periodicals, his opinion of our newspapers was even lower, for the most part. In 1838 Emerson writes, "Bancroft talked of the foolish Globe newspaper. It has a circulation of 30,000 and as he said, each copy is read by ten persons, so that an editorial article is read by three hundred thousand persons .... I only told him then I wished they would write better if they wrote for so many. I ought to have said what utter nonsense to name in my ear this number as if that were anything. Three million such people as can read the Globe with interest are as yet in too crude a state of nonage to deserve any regard. I ought to have expressed a sincere contempt for the Scramble newspaper."<sup>42.</sup>

In the essays there are many more comments on newspapers in general, although there are few more specific references to any one newspaper. In his essay on Goethe, Emerson is criticizing both kinds of periodical

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41. Journals, IX, 117 - 118.

42. Journals, IV, 410.

literature when he says, "In the learned journal, in the influential newspaper, I discern no form; only some irresponsible shadow; oftener some moneyed corporation, or some dangler who hopes, in the mask and robes of his paragraph, to pass for somebody."<sup>43.</sup> He is even more bitter in his essay "Weeks and Days" when he says, "What sickening details in the daily journals. I believe they have ceased to publish the Newgate Calendar and the Pirates' Own Book since the family newspapers, namely the New York Tribune and the London Times, have quite superseded them in the freshness as well as the horrors of their records of crime."<sup>44.</sup> Later he says, "Shun the spawn of the press on the gossip of the hour."<sup>45.</sup> Emerson did realize, however, that there was also much good in the newspapers, for he speaks of the "cheap press bringing the university to every poor man's door in the newsboys basket."<sup>46.</sup> And in his lecture on "The Fugitive Slave Law" he says: "With the business men enters the newsboy, that humble priest of politics, finance, philosophy, and religion. He unfolds his magical sheets, - twopence a head his bread of knowledge costs - and instantly the entire assembly, fresh from their breakfast, are bending as one man to their second breakfast. There is, no doubt, chaff enough in what he brings; but there is fact, thought, and wisdom, in the crude mass, from all regions of the world."<sup>47.</sup>

Thus we see that Emerson was as just and keen a critic of American periodical literature as he was of any other phase of American letters.

43. Representative Men, Works, 282.

44. Society and Solitude, Works, VII, 165.

45. Works, VII, 196.

46. Works, VII, 24.

47. Miscellaneous, Works, XI, 218.





He saw the defects and weakneses of the periodicals and newspapers of the day, but he also saw their good points, especially in their great possibilities for future good.

## III.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING.

William Ellery Channing is an important figure in American letters because he was the greatest of the Unitarians, especially from a literary point of view, and because he did so much to liberate Boston from Calvinism. His influence on Emerson has already been noted in respect to the philosophy of the Over-Soul and the demand for an indigenous literature. However, the scope of Channing's influence was much broader than that; his importance to all New England cannot be overestimated. Van Wyck Brooks says that Channing was "the great awakener" and "father of half the reforms that characterized the Boston of his age."<sup>1</sup> Channing helped to rid Boston of its outworn Calvinism by putting man and the present life in the foreground, by putting God and immortality a little farther away. Channing tried to elevate the lower classes, he tried to promote a national literature, and, most important of all, he tried to arouse the people of Boston to think for themselves. As Brooks says, "He harrowed the ground for literature, first by his harrowing of the ground for life, and also by his intuitive understanding of the function of art and letters. He knew his country and he knew the poets, and he knew what his country and the poets needed. Independence, he was well aware, - the basis of all enduring greatness, - was something that had to be earned,<sup>2</sup> and that could be earned." Without Channing's influence, Emerson might not have become such an ardent advocate of the over-soul and of a national

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1. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, pp. 109, 110.

2. Ibid., p. 110.

literature. What is more certain, however, is that, without Channing, there would have been no audience for Emerson to proclaim these views to. Channing is also important as a forerunner of Transcendentalism; Frothingham says he was a Transcendentalist in feeling, even though he was not a Transcendentalist in philosophy.<sup>3.</sup> I think Emerson realized the debt he owed to Channing, but I do not think he realized the extent of this debt. From Emerson's first journals we see that Channing was one of his early idols, and after Channing's death Emerson again holds a very high opinion of him. There is also much adverse criticism of Channing, however. Emerson's criticisms may not be unjust, but occasionally he does seem to forget his own debt to Channing and the handicaps of illness and an unsympathetic Boston, which Channing had to fight against. In the field of American letters Channing's sermons are his most important works because they influenced all New England, but his secular essays, on Milton, Fénelon, and Napoleon, made him well-known throughout the world.<sup>4.</sup>

Emerson's early comments on Channing are all favorable. In 1823 he writes in his journal, "I heard Dr. Channing deliver a discourse upon Revelation as standing in comparison with Nature. I have heard no sermon approaching in excellence to this, since the Dudleian Lecture. The language was a transparent medium, conveying with the utmost distinctness the pictures in his mind to the mind of his hearers."<sup>5.</sup> The same year in a letter to Miss Mary Moody Emerson he says, "Dr. Channing is preaching sublime sermons every Sunday morning in Federal Street, one of which I

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3. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, pp. 111 - 113.

4. Brooks, op. cit., p. 107.

5. Journals, I, 290.

heard last Sunday, and which surpassed Everett's eloquence." <sup>6.</sup> A year later we read, "No change of manners leaves Heaven without a witness, and Luitprand and St. Gregory and St., etc. are represented today by Dr. Channing, Dr. Chalmers, etc." <sup>7.</sup> Ten years later Emerson is still commenting favorably on Channing, for he says: "When I remember that the very greatness of Homer, Shakespeare, of Webster, and Channing, is the truth with which they reflect the mind of all mankind, then I feel the riches of my inheritance in being set down in this world, gifted with organs of communication with this gifted company." <sup>8.</sup> Shortly afterwards he adds, "Coleridge, Wordsworth, Schelling are conclusive when Channing or Carlyle or Everett quotes them, but if you take up their own books, then instantly they become not lawgivers, but modest, peccable candidates for your approbation." <sup>9.</sup> At least we see here that Emerson was cognizant of Channing's importance in the spread of German thought and English Romanticism in America.

Channing seemed to find favor with Emerson because he, too, observed the criterion of the necessity of the moral. Emerson writes, "If Daniel Webster's or Dr. Channing's opinion is not frankly told, it is so much deduction from the moral value of that opinion, and I should say, moreover, that their opinion is known by the very concealment." <sup>10.</sup> Later he says, "I think Dr. Channing was intellectual by dint of his fine moral sentiment, and not primarily." <sup>11.</sup>

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6. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 105.

7. Journals, I, 375.

8. Journals, III, 383 - 384.

9. Journals, III, 466.

10. Journals, III, 546 - 547.

11. Journals, VI, 271.

Emerson's adverse criticisms of Channing start about 1835. Emerson was beginning to realize that Channing was getting on in years, that his powers were weakening a little. In a letter to Carlyle in March, 1835, Emerson writes the following passage about Channing: "I know his genius does not and cannot engage your attention much. He possesses the mysterious endowment of natural eloquence, whose effect, however, intense, is limited of course, to personal communication. I can see myself that his writings, without his voice, may be meagre and feeble. But please love his catholicism, that at his age can relish the Sarter Resartus, born and inveterated as he is in old books. Moreover, he lay awake all night, he told my friend last week, because he had learned in the evening that some young men proposed to issue a journal, to be called The Transcendentalist, as the organ of a spiritual philosophy." <sup>12.</sup> At another time he says of Channing, "He can never be reported, for his eye and his voice cannot be printed, and his discourses lose what was best in wanting them." <sup>13.</sup> Emerson's criticisms of the Unitarian minister become more severe, and in 1836 he speaks of the "Tameless of genius in America. Not one unchallengeable reputation .... everything is uncharacterized, uncreative .... So of Dr. Channing's preaching. They are all feminine or receptive, and not masculine or creative." <sup>14.</sup> The following year, 1837, Emerson tells us very distinctly how he feels about Channing, for he says, "Men are continually **separating**, not nearing by acquaintance. Once Dr. Channing filled our sky. Now we become so conscious of his limits and of the difficulty attending any effort to show him our point of view that we doubt if it be worthwhile. Best Amputate." <sup>15.</sup>

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12. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 48.

13. Cabot, op. cit., p. 103.

14. Journals, IV, 87.

15. Journals, IV, 239.

Emerson at this time seemed to see Channing as a representative of the old school, while he himself was becoming a leader of the younger generation, and he occasionally forgets that it was Channing who helped produce this new generation. However, even during this period of adverse criticism, Emerson was still on very friendly terms with Channing, and received at least two visits from him in 1837. Of the first visit Emerson says, "But Sages of the crowd are like kings, so environed with deference and ceremony that a call like this gives no true word for the mind and heart."<sup>16.</sup>

The second visit was evidently more successful, for Emerson refers to Channing as "the bearer of the right Promethean fire."<sup>17.</sup> That Emerson did still regard Channing as an important literary figure is revealed by the group of men with whom he places Channing. He says, "It would give me new scope to write on topics proper to this age and read discourses on Goethe, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Canova, Thorwaldsen, Tennyson, O'Connell, Baring, Channing, and Webster. To these I must write up."<sup>18.</sup> In 1841

Emerson comments much less favorably, however. He says, "I cannot help seeing that Dr. Channing would have been a much greater writer had he found a strict tribunal of writers, a graduated intellectual empire established in the land, and knew that bad logic would not pass, and that the most severe exaction was to be made on all who enter these lists .... It is very easy to reach the degree of culture that prevails around us; very hard to pass it, and Doctor Channing, had he found Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and Lamb around him, would as easily have been severe with himself and risen a degree higher as he has stood where he is."<sup>19.</sup>

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16. Journals, IV, 236.

17. Journals, IV, 356.

18. Journals, V, 17.

19. Journals, V, 105 - 106.

When Channing died, in 1842, Emerson seems to have forgiven him for the weaknesses he had been criticizing for the last few years, and he pays him a fine tribute in his journal. He says, "A most respectable life; and deserves the more praise that there is so much merely external, and a sort of creature of society in it; - that sort of merit of which praise is the legitimate fee. He seems sometimes as the sublime of calculation, as the nearest that mechanism could get to the flowing of genius. His later years - perhaps his earlier - have been adorned by a series of sacrifices .... He has been, whilst he lived, the Star of the American Church, and has left no successor in the pulpit .... The sternest Judges of the Dead, who shall consider our wants and his austere self - application to them, and his fidelity to his lights, will absolve this Soul as it passes, and say, This man has done well. Perhaps I think much better things of him too. His 'Milton' and 'Napoleon' were excellent for the time (the want of drill and thorough breeding as a writer from which he suffered being considered), and will be great ornaments of his biography." <sup>20.</sup> Almost ten years later, in 1851,

Emerson speaks of Tennyson's In Memoriam and says, "The book has the advantage that was Dr. Channing's fortune, that all the merit was appreciable." <sup>21.</sup>

Emerson believed that, as a minister, Channing had no equal in his time, <sup>22.</sup> and he admits Channing's great influence when he says, "Doctor Channing's piety and wisdom had such weight that, in Boston, the popular idea of religion was whatever this eminent divine held." <sup>23.</sup>

Emerson's last reference to Channing is in his essay "Life and Letters in New England,"

20. Journals, VII, 285.

21. Journals, VIII, 163.

22. Journals, X, 371.

23. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, X, 166 - 167.





when he says, " I attribute much importance to two papers of Dr. Channing, one on Milton and one on Napoleon, which were the first specimens in this country of that large criticism which in England had given power and fame to the Edinburgh Review. They were widely read, and of course, immediately fruitful in provoking emulation which lifted the style of Journalism .... He could never be reported, for his eye and voice could not be printed, and his discourses lose their best in losing them. He was made for the public, his cold temperament made him the most unprofitable private companion; but all America would have been impoverished in wanting him .... A poor little invalid all his life, he is yet one of those men who vindicate the power of the American race to produce greatness."<sup>24.</sup>

Thus we see that Emerson's criticism of William Ellery Channing divides itself into three periods. The first period, from 1822 until 1835, was a stage of youthful, almost unreserved, praise on the part of Emerson. From 1835 until Channing's death in 1842 Emerson's criticism becomes much more severe. He realized that Channing lost much when his works were put into writing. He also failed to see why Channing, although he had done much to liberate Boston and advance culture there, could not have accomplished even more than he did. After Channing's death, Emerson's criticism becomes less harsh and he looks back on his early idol with respect and appreciation.

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24. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 339 - 340.



## IV.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF THE HISTORIANS AND SCHOLARS.

In his criticism of historians and scholars, Emerson comments on four of America's most outstanding men - Edward Everett, George Bancroft, George Ticknor, and Andrews Norton. It is interesting to note that, except for one incidental remark, there is no mention of W. H. Prescott, author of Ferdinand and Isabella, who was the only other American historian of importance at this time. Everett, Bancroft, and Ticknor, were all very different, and they all occupy much the same position in the history of American letters. These three young men were the first Americans to study in Germany; on their return from Göttingen they all accepted professorships at Harvard, and with their return ( in 1819 ) began the dissemination of German thought. The knowledge of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Goethe, and Schiller came into America through these three men.<sup>1.</sup>

Everett, Bancroft, and Ticknor, had a tremendous influence on the whole field of American letters and American thought; we have already seen that without this new German thought there would have been no Transcendental movement in New England. Also, without these men and the ideas they brought back with them, it is doubtful if Emerson would have been the Emerson we know now. Emerson himself, although he does not exempt them from criticism, recognized their importance in the service of American letters.

Edward Everett is really much more important as a vital literary influence in New England than as a man of letters himself. Everett assumed the chair of Greek literature at Harvard in 1819, and it was through this

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1. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 332.

position that he gained much of his great influence. Van Wyck Brooks says that Everett stirred the imagination of the students and held them spellbound, while his fame drew students from all over the country.<sup>2.</sup> Everett was really a thorough Greek scholar, and it was too bad that he gave up his scholarship to become a "lesser Webster," as he has often been called. Although there is little valuable critical comment in Emerson's Harvard Journals, nevertheless, it is not hard to gather that Everett was one of Emerson's early idols. His position in Emerson's estimation was lowered somewhat when he turned to oratory and politics, particularly when he, like Webster, came out in support of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Bill.

Although Emerson does not comment specifically on Everett in his college journals, he realized that Everett (and Ticknor) were the most valuable, to him the only valuable, men at Harvard. One of his earliest comments appears in 1825 after Everett's Plymouth Oration: "I have been reading Everett's rich strains at Plymouth - gazing at the Sun till my eyes are blurred."<sup>3.</sup> A year later he says, "I have not forgiven Everett one speculative doctrine of the Phi Beta Kappa oration, the more disagreeable that I have found some reason to think it true, - to wit, that geniuses are the organs, mouthpieces of their age ...."<sup>4.</sup> Shortly afterwards he adds, "For diligence, rectitude, fancy and sense we reckon Edward Everett chief among ten thousand."<sup>5.</sup> As in his criticism of Channing, Emerson's early and extravagant admiration for Everett turns into a more adverse criticism as the years pass. In 1835, almost ten years after the

2. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, pp. 101 - 103.

3. Journals, II, 45.

4. Journals, II, 100 - 101.

5. Journals, II, 123.

above comment, he writes, "Brougham, Everett, Canning, convert their genius into a shop, and turn every faculty upside down that they may see well."<sup>6.</sup> Since Edward Everett was at one time editor of the North American Review, it is interesting to note that Emerson's criticism of the periodical parallels his criticism of Everett himself. When Emerson was young he admired both the man and the journal tremendously, but his admiration for both declined with the years. By 1835 Emerson is not only criticizing the North American rather severely, but he is saying of Everett, "He is not content to be Everett, but would be Daniel Webster. This is his mortal distemper. Why should such a genius waste itself? Have we any to spare?.... Daniel Webster, Nature's own child, sat there all day and drew all eyes. Poor Everett - for this was it you left your own work, your exceeding great and peculiar vocation, the desire of all eyes, the gratitude of all ingenuous scholars - to stray away hither and mimic this Man, that .... you might still be mere secondary and satellite to him, and for him hold a candle?"<sup>7.</sup> And a few years later he says, "How can a great genius endure to make paste jewels? It must always have the effect, compared with the great originals .... of Everett's Burdens of the Nations compared with the comforting or alarming words of David and Isaiah."<sup>8.</sup> The same year, however, Emerson admits that "Everett has put more stories, sentences, verses, names in amber for me than any other person."<sup>9.</sup>

Emerson's longest entry on Everett in his Journals appears in

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6. Journals, III, 456 - 457.

7. Journals, III, 471.

8. Journals, IV, 34 - 35.

9. Journals, IV, 471.



1842 but much of this is reproduced word for word in his essay "Life and Letters in New England." In the Journals we read, "There was an influence on the young people from Everett's genius which was almost comparable to that of Pericles in Athens. That man had an inspiration which did not go beyond his head, but which made him the genius of elegance .... The word that he spoke, in the manner which he spoke it, became current and classical in New England .... He thus raised the standard of taste in writing and speaking in New England. Meantime all this was a pure triumph of Rhetoric. This man had neither intellectual nor moral principles to teach. He had no thoughts. It was early asked, when Massachusetts was full of his fame, what truths he had thrown into circulation, and how he had enriched the general mind, and agreed that only in graces of manner, only in a new perception of Grecian beauty, had he opened our eyes .... Everett's fame had the effect of giving a new lustre to the University - which is greatly needed. Students flocked thither ...." <sup>10.</sup> And a little later he says, "Edward Everett did long ago for Boston what Carlyle is doing for England <sup>11.</sup> and Europe, in rhetoricizing the conspicuous objects."

In a conversation with Charles Woodbury he said somewhat the same thing: "Edward Everett and George Ticknor were men especially excellent in the modern languages. The golden time of Everett's life was when he was Professor of Greek at Cambridge. He did more real good there than as senator or governor. He had a fine conception of Greece, and a genius for the Greek language. He returned from Europe, and was professor to the class above me when I was a student. As a college president he was not successful. He

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10. Journals, VI, 255 - 257.

11. Journals, VI, 403.





He noticed little things too much, as whether an undergraduate touched his hat to him or not, and the students hated him. Therefore he resigned." 12.

In 1851, when the Slavery question was increasing in importance, Emerson writes, "The fame of Everett is dear to me and to all his scholars. And I have watched with alarm his derelictions. Whenever his genius shone, it of course was in the instinct of freedom, but one of his scholars cannot but ask him whether there was no sincerity in all those apostrophes to freedom and adjurations of the dying Demosthenes; was it all claptrap?" 13.

However, in the same year he says, "Edward Everett had in my youth an immense advantage in being the first American scholar who sat in the German universities and brought us home in his head their whole cultural method and results, - to us who did not so much as know the names of Heyne, Wolf, Hug, and Ruhnken. He dealt out his treasures too, with such admirable prudence, so temperate and abstemious that our wonder and delight were still new ...." 14. The year after Emerson's graduation from Harvard he wrote a letter to John B. Hill, a classmate, in which he says, "I have been attending Professor Everett's lectures, which he has begun to deliver in this city, upon Antiquities. I am as much enamoured as ever with the incomparable manner of my old idol, though much of his matter is easily acquired from common books. We think strong sense to be his distinguishing feature; he never commits himself, never makes a mistake." 15.

In Emerson's lecture on "Life and Letters in New England" he expands the remarks in the Journals with the following passages: "Germany had

12. Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 65.

13. Journals, VIII, 182.

14. Journals, VIII, 225, 226.

15. Works, X, notes, p. 574.

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created criticism in vain for us until 1820, when Edward Everett returned from his five years in Europe, and brought to Cambridge his rich results, which no one was so fitted by natural grace and the splendor of his rhetoric to introduce and recommend. He made us for the first time acquainted with Wolf's theory of the Homeric writings, with the criticism of Heyne. The novelty of the learning lost nothing in the skill and genius of his relation, and the rudest undergraduate found a new morning opened to him in the lecture room of Harvard Hall .... He had a good deal of special learning, and all his learning was available for purposes of the hour. It was all new learning, that wonderfully took and stimulated the young men .... this learning instantly took the highest place to our imagination in our unoccupied American Parnassus .... By a series of lectures largely and fashionably attended for two winters in Boston, he made a beginning of popular literary and miscellaneous lecturing, which in that region at least had important results. It is acquiring greater importance every day, and becoming a national institution. I am quite certain that this purely literary influence was of the first importance to the American mind." <sup>16.</sup>

Emerson's criticism of Edward Everett went through almost exactly the same stages as that of Dr. Channing. His early enthusiasm turned to criticism and disappointment, but at the end of his life, looking back retrospectively, he recognized and acknowledged Everett's importance, especially his importance in introducing German thought into America. Emerson realized Everett's greatest weakness, however, - Everett was a "Pure triumph of Rhetoric," but he could not fulfill Emerson's demands for intuition, truth, and spirituality in writing.

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16. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 330, 335.



George Bancroft, like Everett, is mainly important for the impetus he helped to give to German thought in America, but he is of greater importance as a man of letters than is Everett. Bancroft taught at Harvard for a while (as tutor in Greek), and it was there that Emerson first came in contact with him. Although he wrote a volume of verses, published in 1823, and articles for the North American Review, his outstanding achievement was, of course, his History of the United States, which he wrote over a period of sixty years. This great history is written from a distinctly American point of view, from an almost radically Democratic point of view, for Bancroft was a staunch Democrat throughout his life. In spite of the fact that the History of the United States is a little out of date now, it still is a very valuable contribution to American letters, particularly for its point of view.<sup>17.</sup> Emerson must have known Bancroft rather well, for in later years they were both members of the Transcendental Club.

Emerson's first comment on Bancroft was written at Harvard and he says, "Bacon .... had more of the philosopher than the poet which is the reverse of Everett, Buchminster, Bancroft - and is superior to them."<sup>18.</sup> His next comment appears in 1822 in a letter to Miss Mary Moody Emerson. He writes, "There are two rising stars in our horizon which we hope shall shed a benign influence from the sources of religion and genius. I mean Upham and Bancroft .... The second is an indefatigable scholar and an accomplished orator."<sup>19.</sup> A few months later, in a letter to his classmate John E. Hill, he says, "I am happy to contradict the rumors about Bancroft.

17. Brooks, op. cit., pp. 132 - 134.

18. Journals, I, 324.

19. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 83

I heard him preach at New South a few Sabbaths since, and was much delighted with his eloquence. So were we all. He needs a great deal of cutting and pruning, but we think him an infant hercules. All who know him agree in this, that he has improved his time thoroughly in Göttingen. He has become a perfect Greek scholar, and knows well all that he pretends to know...." 20

Fifteen years later, in 1837, he says; "I have read the second volume of Bancroft's History of the United States. It is very pleasing. He does not, I think, ever originate his views, but he does impart very good views into his book, and parades his facts by the brave light of his principles. A very pleasant book for here, lo, the huge world has at last come round to Roger Williams, George Fox, and William Penn, and time-honored John Locke received kicks. An objection to the book is the insertion of a boyish hurrah, every now and then, for each State in turn ...." <sup>21.</sup> The same year, however, Emerson adds, "I believe the man and the writer should be one, and not <sup>22.</sup> diverse, as they say Bancroft, as we know Bulwer, is." These two comments almost sum up Emerson's criticism of Bancroft; like Everett, Bancroft tried to substitute rhetoric for the "inner light" which Emerson demanded

In a conversation with Charles Woodbury, Emerson makes a pungent criticism not only of Bancroft but of the whole body of American historians. To Woodbury he said, "But now you shall not read these books - Prescott or Bancroft or Motley. Prescott is a thorough man. Bancroft reads enormously, always understands his subject. Motley is painstaking, but too

20. Ibid., pp. 93 - 94.

21. Journals, IV, 304.

22. Journals, IV, 356.

mechanical. So are they all. Their style slays. Neither of them lifts himself off his feet. They have no lilt in them. You noticed the marble we have just seen? You remember, that marble is nothing but crystallized limestone? Well, some writers never get out of the limestone condition .... Be airy .... It is a fine power this. Some men have it, prominently the French .... Thoreau had it." <sup>23.</sup>

Emerson's last comment on Bancroft appears in 1842, when he writes, "Bancroft and Bryant are historical democrats who are interested in dead or organized, but not in organizing, liberty. Bancroft would not know George Fox, whom he has so well eulogized, if he should meet him in the street." <sup>24.</sup> Bancroft did not look forward to the promise of the future as Emerson did; to Emerson Bancroft was an example of what he meant in his "American Scholar" address when he said "Our age is too retrospective."

George Ticknor, like his contemporaries Everett and Bancroft, studied in Europe, and, like them, on his return to America he accepted a professorship (in French and Spanish) at Harvard. Ticknor was an educator and tried to introduce some of his modern ideas of education at Harvard, but with no success (except in his own department). Even if his educational reforms failed, Ticknor was nevertheless an important influence at Harvard. As Van Wyck Brooks says, "In days to come, the young men at Harvard were to reap the fruits of Ticknor's 'wanderjahre'. Here and there as they followed his lectures, they were to catch a phrase or an allusion that opens up the picture. What patterns of the literary life the great professor, cold as he was, cold and distant, was able to place before them .... Never before, in

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23. Woodbury, op. cit., pp. 24 - 25.

24. Journals, VI, 315.



America, had anyone invested with such glamour the life of the poet and the man of letters; and ~~Harvard~~<sup>25.</sup> was ready for the new evangel."

Ticknor, with his German scholarship and training, did some really memorable work in his books on Spanish history and Spanish letters. Although Emerson must have known Ticknor from his lectures and his books, there are only two brief references to Ticknor in the Journals. When Emerson was at Harvard in 1820 he writes, "I have listened this evening to an eloquent lecture of the elegant Professor of French and Spanish Literature on the subject of the extent of the language, a subject which bears on the face of it dulness and dread .... every soul present warmly acknowledged the force of delineation."<sup>26.</sup> Fifty years later we read, "Chivalry, I fancied, this afternoon, would serve as a good title for many topics, and some good readings which I might offer to the Fraternity course of Lectures on December 6. George Ticknor, Hallam, and Renan have each given me good texts."<sup>27.</sup>

Andrews Norton, who was for a time librarian and Professor of Sacred Literature, was one of the outstanding scholars in America. He was a great Biblical scholar and wrote, besides poetry and hymns, two very scholarly books on the genuineness of the Gospels. It is unfortunate that Norton and Emerson were so different that they were always on opposing sides in any question. Where Emerson was a Transcendentalist, Andrews Norton was a hard-headed rationalist, and thus they came to verbal blows over Emerson's "Divinity School Address" of 1838. Norton accused Emerson of atheism and heresy and his arguments were so logical that he really vanquished Emerson's

25. Brooks, op. cit., p. 88.

26. Journals, I, 65.

27. Journals, X, 329.

defenders, even though one of them was Theodore Parker. Also, Norton was a reactionary and did not approve of the new German scholarship that was entering Harvard; and on this point, too, he was at cross-points with Emerson.

Emerson's first comment on Norton appears in 1822, when he writes, "Of Professor N., Shakespears wrote long ago the good and bad characters: 'Oh, it is excellent to have a giant's strength but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.'" <sup>28.</sup> In 1838, after Norton's criticism of his "Divinity School Address," Emerson says, "How rare is the skill of writing? I detected a certain unusual unity of purpose on the paragraph levelled at me in the Daily Advertiser, and I now learn it is the old tyrant of the Cambridge Parnassus himself, Mr. Norton, who wrote it. One cannot compliment the power and culture of his community so much as to think it holds a hundred writers; but no, if there is information and tenacity of purpose, what Bacon calls longanimity, it must be instantly traced home to some known hand." <sup>29.</sup> And on the same subject he adds a few days later, "The feminine vehemence with which the A.N. of the Daily Advertiser beseeches the dear people to whip that naughty heretic is the <sup>30.</sup> natural feeling in the mind whose religion is external."

In his essay on "Courage" in Society and Solitude Emerson goes back again to the influence of Norton at Harvard. "But I remember the old professor whose searching mind engraved every word he spoke on the memory of the class, when we asked if he had read this or that shining novelty,

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28. Journals, I, 195.

29. Journals, V, 92.

30. Journals, V, 92.

'No, I have never read that book;' instantly the book lost credit, and was not to be heard of again."<sup>31.</sup> Emerson's last comment on Norton is in "Life and Letters in New England," where he says, "And Professor Norton a little later gave form and method to the like [theological] studies in the then infant Divinity School."<sup>32.</sup>

Emerson did not criticize Norton because the latter held different opinions from his own; he believed a man should form his own opinions. However, Emerson did criticize Norton for his conservative and his reactionary tendencies, which were a barrier to American progress, especially in the field of American letters. The controversial nature of the relationship between Emerson and Norton is well shown in a letter from Emerson to Carlyle. He writes, "I make no doubt you shall be sure of some opposition. Andrews Norton, one of our best heads, once a theological professor, and a destroying critic, lives upon a rich estate at Cambridge, and frigidly excludes the Diderot paper from a Select Journal edited him him, with the remark, 'Another paper of the Teufelsdröckh school.'<sup>33.</sup> Emerson was broad-minded enough, however, to recognize and admit that Norton was one of America's finest scholars.

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31. Works, VII, 269 - 270.

32. Works, X, 335.

33. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 61.

## V

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF DANIEL WEBSTER.

Although Webster's name has become dimmed in the last century, in Emerson's day he was one of the most important figures in the country. No doubt a great deal of his fame was due to his overpowering personality; for this reason it is hard for us today to get an accurate estimate of Webster. Webster was a political scholar in his early life -- in his later life he was not much more than a politician. Webster's main literary contributions are in the field of political science; in some ways it is hard to judge him, as a writer, because it was Webster the orator who had such a tremendous following a century ago. However, after 1851, Webster's popularity as an orator, as statesman, as defender of the constitution declined -- all because he declared himself in favor of the Fugitive Slave Bill which was anathema to the New England Transcendentalism. Webster represented the new industrialism which was in opposition to the romanticism and transcendentalism in much of the rest of New England. Parrington gives a good estimate of Webster in the following paragraph: "No man more richly endowed in mind and person has played a part on the stage of our public life, and in spite of gross shortcomings in character and the betrayal of his own promise, Webster retains an aura of the heroic about him. He was a great man, built on a great pattern, who never quite achieved a great life. In Emerson and Webster were completely embodied the diverse New England tendencies that derived from the Puritan and the Yankee; the idealistic and the practical; the ethical and the nationalistic; the intellectual revolutionary, ready to turn the world upside down in theory, planting at the base of the established order the dynamite of ideas, and the soberly conservative,

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understanding the economic springs of political action, inclined to pessimism, neither wishing for Utopian change nor expecting it." <sup>1.</sup>

Nevertheless, although Webster and Emerson are the antithesis of each other, and although Emerson was very bitter toward Webster after Webster's support of the Fugitive Slave Bill, on the whole Emerson seems to have great admiration for Webster, and Webster's name appears almost more frequently than anyone else's in Emerson's Journals and Essays. Emerson's first reference to Webster occurs in 1822 when Webster has been elected to Congress. He says, "A victory is achieved today for one [Webster] whose name perchance is written highest in the volume of futurity." <sup>2.</sup> His next comment on Webster does not appear for eight years: "Read with admiration and delight Mr. Webster's noble speech in answer to Hayne. What consciousness of political rectitude, and what confidence in his intellectual treasures must he have to enable him to take this master's tone - The beauty and dignity of the spectacle he exhibits should teach men the beauty and dignity of principle. This is one that is not blown about by every wind of opinion, but has mind great enough to see the majesty of moral nature and to apply himself in all his length and breadth to it and magnanimously trust thereto." <sup>3.</sup> In 1834 Emerson says, "Webster's speeches seem to be the utmost that the unpoetic West has accomplished or can .... Meantime Webster is no imitator, but a true genius for his work, if that is not the highest. But every true man stands on the top of the world." <sup>4.</sup> Another time Emerson refers to Webster as "Nature's own child," <sup>5</sup> and on still another

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1. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents of American Thought, II, 304.

2. Journals, I, 175.

3. Journals, II, 295 - 296.

4. Journals, III, 308.

5. Journals, III, 471.

occasion he says, "Webster is in a galvanized state when he makes the Hayne Speech, and 'tis as easy to say gigantic things, to introduce from God on the world truths which arise but never set, as at another hour to talk nonsense. He is caught up in the spirit and made to utter things not his own." <sup>6.</sup> In this respect Webster seems to fulfill Emerson's idea of what genius should be. Emerson also appreciated Webster's imagery because it was first hand from observation of nature, not second hand from books as Burke's was. <sup>7.</sup>

Again, he says of Webster, "The newspapers say they might as well publish a thunderstorm as a report of Webster's speech in answer to Wright. His tones were like those of a commander in battle. Times of eloquence are times of terror." <sup>8.</sup> Later he says, "Can Webster in the American Senate, for any conceivable public outrage, scream with real passion? Nobody believes it was anything else than a fine, wise, oratorical scream." <sup>9.</sup> A more favorable comment is that "Mr. Webster never loses sight of his relation to nature. The Day is always part of him." <sup>10.</sup> Emerson also included Webster on the faculty of his ideal college. <sup>11.</sup> However, his opinion of Webster seems to decline shortly after this. In 1839 he says, "Adams, Clay and Webster electioneer. And Nature does not forgive them, for thus they compromise their proper majesty, and are farther than ever from obtaining the adventitious." <sup>12.</sup> And a year later

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6. Journals, III, 565 - 566.

7. Journals, VI, 507.

8. Journals, III, 255 - 256.

9. Journals, III, 455.

10. Journals, IV, 172.

11. Journals, V, 203.

12. Journals, V, 420.

13. he says that he can no longer read Webster's speeches. "It is a bad fact that our editors fancy they have a right to call on Daniel Webster to resign his office, or much more, resign his opinion and accept theirs. That is the madness of party." 14. And in 1841, Emerson says, "I saw Webster on the street - but he was changed since I saw him last - black as a thundercloud, and careworn, the anxiety that withers this generation among the young and thinking class had crept up also into the great lawyer's chair, and too plainly, too plainly, he was one of us. I did not wonder that he depressed his eyes when he saw me, and would not meet my face. The cankerworms have crawled to the topmost bough of the wild elm and swing down from that. No wonder the elm is a little uneasy." 15.

Again, speaking of Carlyle, Emerson says, "Yet I always feel his limitation, and praise him as one who plays his part well and according to his light, as I praise the Clays and Websters." 16. Emerson's longest and most complete estimate of Webster was written in 1843 while Webster was still Secretary of State. Emerson says, "Webster is very deaf to the Yankees because he is a person of very commanding understanding with every talent for its adequate expression. The American, foreigners say, always reasons, and he is the most American of the Americans.... His external advantages are very rare and admirable; his noble and majestic frame, his breadth and projection of brows, his coal-black hair, his great cinderous eyes, his perfect self possession; and the rich and well modulated thunder of his voice (to which I used to listen, sometimes, abstracting myself from the sense merely for the luxury of such noble

13. Journals, V, 420.

13. Journals, VI, 79.

15. Journals, VI, 91 - 92.

16. Journals, VI, 292.

expressions of sound) distinguish him above all other men. In a million you would single him out. In England, he made the same impression by his personal advantages as at home, and was called the Great Western. In speech he has a great good sense - is always pertinent to time and place, and has an eye to the simple facts of nature - to the place where he is, to the hour of the day, to the sun in heaven, to his neighborhood, to the sea, or to the mountains; - but very sparingly notices these things, and clings closely to the business part of his speech with great gravity and faithfulness .... He trusts to his simple strength of statement - in which he excels all men - for the attention of the assembly. His statement is lucid throughout, and of equal strength. He has great fairness and deserves all his success in debate, for he always carries a point from his adversary by really taking superior ground, as in the Hayne debate. There are no puerilities, no tricks, no academical play in any of his speeches, - they are all majestic men of business. Every one is first-rate Yankee .... The faults that shade his character are not such as to hurt his popularity .... All is forgiven to a man of such surpassing intellect, and such prodigious powers of business which have so long been exerted. There is no malice in the man, but broad good humor and much enjoyment of the hour, so that Stetson said of him, 'It is true that he sometimes commits crimes, but without any guilt,' .... He has misused the opportunity of making himself the darling of the American world in all coming time by abstaining from putting himself at the head of the Anti-Slavery interest, by standing for New England and for man against the bullying and barbarism of the South. I should say of him that he was not at all majestic, but the purest intellect that was ever applied to business. He is Intellect applied to affairs. He is the greatest of lawyers; but a very in-

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different statesman for carrying his points. He carries points with the bench, but not with the caucus. No following has he, no troop of friends, but those whose intellect he fires. No sweaty mob will carry him on their shoulders. And yet all New England to the remotest farmhouse, or lumberers' camp in the woods of Maine, delights to tell and hear of anecdotes of his forensic eloquence."<sup>17.</sup>

Later in the same year, Emerson adds: "Daniel Webster is a great man with a small ambition. Nature has built him and holds him forth as a sample of the heroic mould to this puny generation. He was virtual President of the United States, but this did not suffice; he wished to be an officer, also; wished to add a title to his name, and be a President."<sup>18.</sup>

That ruined him." And again, "Webster gave us his plain statement like good bread, yet the oration was feeble compared with his other efforts ...."<sup>19.</sup>

Webster is very good America himself." At this time, August, 1843, Webster came to Concord and this caused Emerson to make several more comments on him. "Mr. Webster loses nothing by comparison with brilliant men in the legal profession; he is as much before them as before the ordinary lawyer .... His wonderful organization, the perfection of his elocution, and all that thereto belongs, - voice, accent, intonation, attitude, manner, - are such as one cannot hope to see again in a century; then he is so thoroughly simple and wise in his rhetoric. Understanding language and the use of the positive degree, all his words tell, and his rhetoric is perfect, so homely, so fit, so strong. Then he manages his matter so well, he hugs his fact so close, and will not let it go, and never indulges in a weak flourish ....

17. Journals, VI, 341 - 345.

18. Journals, VI, 381.

19. Journals, VI, 415.



and one feels that every moment he goes for the actual world, and never one moment for the ideal. He is the triumph of the Understanding, and is undermined and supplanted by the Reason for which yet he is so good a witness, being all the time fed therefrom, and his whole nature and faculty presupposing that, that I feel as if the children of Reason might gladly see his success as a homage to their law, and regard him as a poor, rude soldier lived for sixpence a day to fight their battles...." <sup>20.</sup>

In comparing Webster to Choate, Emerson speaks of Webster as "the man of men" and says that he dwarfed Choate and all the rest, <sup>21.</sup> and later he he refers to him as the "Emperor of men," <sup>22.</sup> At the same time Emerson says, "It seems to me the Quixotism of Criticism to quarrel with Webster because he has not this or that fine evangelical property. He is no saint, but the wild olive wood, ungrafted yet by grace, but according to his lights a very true and admirable man .... Webster's force is part of nature and the world, like any given amount of azote or electricity .... After all his great talents have been told there remains that perfect propriety which belongs to every world-genius, which animates all the details of action and speech with the character of the whole so that his beauties of detail are endless." <sup>23.</sup> And again, "He[Webster] imparts all the experience of the Senate, and the state, and the man of the world with the county court." <sup>24.</sup> Emerson's very next entry is "Could Mr. Webster have given himself to the cause of Abolition of Slavery in Congress, he would have been the darling of this continent of all the youth, all the genius, all the virtue in America -- the tears

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20. Journals, VI, 429 - 431.

21. Journals, VI, 432.

22. Journals, VI, 433.

23. Journals, VI, 434 - 435.

24. Journals, VI, 507.

of the love and joy and pride of the world would have been his." <sup>25.</sup>

The following year he accuses Webster of having no morals. <sup>26.</sup> A few days later he adds, "There was Webster, the great cannon loaded to the lips .... Of, if God had given to this Demosthenes a heart to lead New England, what a life and death and glory for him; Now he is a fine symbol and mantel ornament ...." <sup>27.</sup> After all this criticism Emerson's next reference to Webster is to commend him for speaking always from a higher ground; <sup>28.</sup> and he includes Webster as one of his four selections for people who are "somebody" in America. <sup>29.</sup> Emerson then goes back to criticizing Webster and says of him, "Webster is a man by himself of the great mould, but he also underlies the American blight, and wants the power of the imitative, the affirmative talent, and remains, like the literary class, only a commentator, his great proportions only exposing his defect." <sup>30.</sup> Later he says, "Webster must have power and must truckle for it." <sup>31.</sup> Emerson does not mention Webster again for two years. In 1849 he said, "It is true that Webster has never done anything up to the promise of his faculties. He is unmistakably able, and might have ruled America, but he was cowardly, and spent his life on specialties. When shall we see as rich a vase again?" <sup>32.</sup>

Then at this point (1851) Emerson becomes very bitter about Webster's support of the Fugitive Slave Bill, but his comments are more political than criticism. The following is a brief sample. "Liberty ! Pho ! Let Mr. Webster,

25. Journals, VI, 508.

26. Journals, VII, 50, 331.

27. Journals, VII, 87 - 88.

28. Journals, VII, 152.

29. Journals, VII, 185.

30. Journals, VII, 218.

31. Journals, VII, 320.

for decency's sake, shut his lips once and forever on this word. The word liberty in the mouth of Mr. Webster is like the word love in the mouth of a courtesan." <sup>33.</sup> And Emerson is criticizing not only Webster but America when he says, "Webster truly represents the American people just as they are, with their vast material interests, materialized intellect, and low morals .... Webster's absence of moral faculty is degrading to the country. Of this fatal defect, of course, Webster, himself, has no perception." <sup>34.</sup>

However, on Webster's death in 1852, Emerson seems to have relented and forgiven Webster, for he says: "The sea, the rocks, the woods, gave no sign that America and the world had lost the completest man. Nature had not in our day, or not since Napoleon, cut out such a masterpiece. He brought the strength of a savage unto the light of culture. He was a man in equilibrio; a man within and without, the strong and perfect body of the first ages, with the civility and thought of the last. And what he brought he kept. Cities had not hurt him; he held undiminished the power and terror of his strength, the majesty of his demeanor. He had a counsel in his breast. He was a statesman and not the semblance of one .... Webster was there for cause; the reality, the final person, who had to answer the questions of all the faineants, and who had an answer; but alas, he was the victim of his ambition .... We are under great obligations to Webster for raising the tone of popular addresses out of rant and out of declamation to history and good sense." <sup>35.</sup> After Webster's death, his name does not appear so frequently in Emerson's Journals, though he occasionally does refer rather sarcastically to Webster's "treason." Five years after Webster's

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33. Journals, VIII, 182. Other passages on Webster's fall are found in Vol. VIII, 180 - 182, 184, 203, 335.

34. Journals, VIII, 216. .

35. Journals, VIII, 335 - 366.



death, Emerson goes back to him to say, "Webster impressed by his superb animality, and was strong as Nature, though weak in character .... What is called his fame only marks the imbecility of those who invoke it." <sup>36.</sup>

And after another five years, he says, "They drove Mr. Webster out of the world. All his mighty genius, which none had been so forward to acknowledge and magnify as they, availed him nothing; for they knew that the spirit of God and of humanity was with them, and he withered and died as by suicide." <sup>37.</sup>

The last comment on Webster in Emerson's Journals occurs in 1871 just before Emerson ceased keeping a diary. He is speaking of the great men America has produced, and he says, "Webster was majestic in his best days." <sup>38.</sup> It was a fitting comment with which to close his criticism of Webster.

Emerson does make one or two rather unimportant references to Webster in his essays. He is speaking of Webster in his essay on "Fate", when he says, "But strong natures, backwoods-men, New Hampshire giants are inevitable patriots, until their life ebbs and their defects and gout, palsy and money, warp them." <sup>39.</sup> And in his essay on "Greatness," he says, "A great style of hero draws equally all classes, all the extremes of society, till we say the very dogs believe in him. We have had such examples in this country, in Daniel Webster." <sup>40.</sup> In his lecture on "Natural History of Intellect" he says, "Webster naturally and always grasps, and therefore retains something from every company and circumstance." <sup>41.</sup>

36. Journals, IX, 136.

37. Journals, X, 114.

38. Journals, X, 370.

39. Society and Solitude, Works, VI, 13.

40. Letters and Social Aims, Works, VIII, 318.

41. Works, XII, 48 - 49.

Emerson's most severe attack on Webster is in his "Speech on the Fugitive Slave Law" which is included in the volume of essays entitled Miscellanies, but this attack is really political and most of the main ideas in the speech were written in his Journals in the first place. There are a few other references to Webster which have already been cited with reference to Channing or to Emerson's criticism of American literature<sup>42</sup> as a whole.

Thus we see that Emerson's attitude toward Webster underwent a great change between 1822 and 1871, between his first and last comments on him in his Journals. Webster was one of Emerson's early idols and he remained so until about 1839. Emerson admired him so tremendously for various reasons. He had heard Webster speak and few who heard him talk could resist falling under the spell of his overpowering personality. Secondly, Webster was extremely eloquent, and we have already seen that Emerson considered poetry the highest art and that eloquence to him was a branch of poetry. Emerson's early attitude toward Webster is well expressed in one of his poems, written in 1831.

"Let Webster's lofty face  
Ever on thousands shine,  
A beacon set that Freedom's race  
Might gather omens from that radiant sign."<sup>43</sup>

Although Emerson did not believe that Webster's eloquence was all on the same high level or that it was entirely sincere at all times, nevertheless he did believe that Webster occasionally spoke from the "inner light." He

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42. Journals, III, 383, 384, 546, 547; IV, 112; V, 17, 205.

43. Poems, Works, IX, 398.



intimates this in a letter to Carlyle in 1839 when he writes, "I cannot tell you how glad I am that you have seen my brave Senator, and seen him as I see him .... He has his own sins, no doubt, is no saint, is a prodigal. He has drunk this rum of Party too so long, that his strong head is soaked, sometimes even like the soft sponges, but the 'man's a man for a' that' .... But you must hear him speak, not a show speech which he never does well, but with cause he can strike a stroke like a smith. I owe him a hundred fine hours and two or three moments of Eloquence."<sup>44.</sup>

Emerson also admired Webster, until about 1839 at least, for his idealism, especially the idealism of his trumpet call for freedom. Van Wyck Brooks believes that Webster's demand for terrestrial freedom was paralleled by the demands of Channing ( and Emerson) for intellectual and cultural freedom.<sup>45.</sup> Webster fulfills Emerson's requirements for a true man of letters in one or two other respects, also, First of all, Webster drew much of his imagery from Nature, which is the most accurate symbol of the spirit. Secondly, Webster may be a triumph for the Understanding, but Emerson believes his Understanding is fed by the higher spiritual faculty of Reason.

Emerson wrote a very laudatory poem on Webster in 1834,<sup>46.</sup> but from 1835 on his enthusiasm for Webster died gradually as he saw Webster's early idealism disintegrating into mere political ambition, his sincerity dimmed by a desire for power. Emerson's disappointment in Webster increased steadily from 1835 on, as the slavery question became more acute and as Emerson himself became more active on the side of the Abolitionists. Emerson's disgust reached a climax in 1851 when Webster came out in favor of the Fugitive

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44. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 255 - 256.

45. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 98.

46. Poems, Works, IX, 398 - 399.

Slave Law, and he never really forgave him for this treason to his earlier ideal of liberty. Emerson softened a little toward Webster in the years after the latter's death, but his opinion of the great orator is really summed up in the brief poem he wrote in 1854.

"Why did all manly gifts in Webster fail?

47.

He wrote on Nature's grandest brow, For Sale."

## VI.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF SAMPSON REED.

Sampson Reed is a very important figure in Emerson's life because, as we have already seen, it was through Reed that Emerson came in contact with Swedenborgianism. Sampson Reed graduated from Harvard in 1818 and became very successful in the drug business. He was also very active in public affairs, and he edited for a time both the New Jerusalem Magazine and the New-Church Magazine for Children, both of which were organs of Swedenborgianism. Sampson Reed is remembered today in the field of American letters for two productions: his "Oration on Genius" (1821) and his Observations on the Growth of the Mind (1826). These works are no longer very important in themselves, but they are important for the impulse they gave to Swedenborg's philosophy in America and for their influence on Emerson's philosophy and writings. Emerson's interest in Swedenborg came from reading Reed's Observations, and a great deal of his knowledge about Swedenborgian philosophy came indirectly through Reed. Swedenborg was the Swedish philosopher and religious writer who claimed to have immediate contact with spiritual things, to see the relation of natural to spiritual things; Reed took these ideas from Swedenborg but he expressed them in much less technical language. That Emerson was influenced by Swedenborgianism is revealed not only by the many comments in his Journals but also by the fact that Emerson made Swedenborg the "Mystic" of his Representative Men.

Emerson shows in a letter to Carlyle in 1834 how he was influenced by Swedenborgianism and how Reed and Swedenborgianism were really synonymous in his own mind. He writes, "I am glad you like Sampson Reed,

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and that he has inspired some curiosity respecting his Church. Swedenborgianism, if you should be fortunate in your first meetings, has many points of attraction for you .... they esteem, in common with all the Trismegistic, the Natural World as strictly the symbol or exponent of the Spiritual, and part for part; the animals to be the incarnations of certain affections; and scarce a popular expression esteemed figurative, but they affirm to be the simplest statement of fact. Then is their whole theory of social relations- both in and out of the body - most philosophical, and, though at variance with the popular theology, self-evident. It is only when they come to their descriptive theism, if I may say so, and then to their drollest heaven, and to some autocratic not moral decrees of God, that the mythus loses me .... They are to me, however, deeply interesting, as a sect which I think must contribute more than all other sects to the new faith

which must arise out of all. " <sup>1.</sup> From this passage we can see that Emerson

was influenced by Swedenborg, and two years later in his own Nature he says, <sup>2.</sup> "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact." The appearance

of this doctrine of correspondance in Nature definitely reveals Reed's influence. Clarence Hotson also believes that Reed gave the first definite

impulse which led to Emerson's literary career. <sup>3.</sup> Although Emerson never

reversed the high opinion he held of Reed, nevertheless the two men did disagree in their interpretation of Swedenborg. Emerson believed he wrote

in parables, Reed that he wrote literally. <sup>4.</sup> Emerson was influenced by

Reed over a period of forty-five years, and this influence came not only

1. The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle, I, 32 - 33.

2. Works, I, 26.

3. Clarence Paul Hotson, "Sampson Reed, A Teacher of Emerson," New England Quarterly, April, 1929, p. 249.

4. Ibid., p. 268.



through Reed's "Genius" and Observations on the Growth of the Mind but also through his many articles on the New Jerusalem Magazine. Emerson's Journals, essays, and letters show that he was familiar with these articles; since Reed is almost unknown today, it is interesting to note that his name appears in Emerson's writings no less than fifty-one<sup>5</sup> times altogether.

Unlike his opinion of so many other writers, Emerson's attitude toward Sampson Reed changed very little in the course of his life. His early admiration lasted from 1826 until 1870. Emerson's first reference to Reed appears in his Journals for 1826, when he writes, "Our American press does not often issue such productions as Sampson Reed's observations on the Growth of the Mind, a book of such character as I am conscious betrays some pretension even to praise. It has to my mind the aspect of a revelation, such is the wealth and such is the novelty of the truth unfolded in it. It is remarkable for the unity into which it has resolved the various powers, feelings, and vocations of men, suggesting to the mind that harmony, which it has always a propensity to seek, of action and design in the order of Providence in the world."<sup>6</sup>

The following month, in a letter to Miss Mary Moody Emerson, he asks "But what, in the name of all the fairies, is the reason you don't like Sampson Reed? What swart star has looked sparely on him? Can anything be more greatly, more wisely writ? Has any modern hand touched the harp of great nature so rarely? Has any looked so shrewdly into the subtile and concealed connexion of man and nature, of

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5. Ibid., p. 276.

6. Journals, II, 116 - 117.

earth and heaven? Has any, in short, produced such curiosity to see the farther progress, the remoter results of the caste of intellect to which he belongs?"<sup>7.</sup>

At this same time, while he was still studying for the ministry, Emerson started a poem about Sampson Reed. He never finished these verses, but the few lines he did complete are a further illustration of the great esteem in which he held Sampson Reed from the time he first encountered his Observations in 1826. The poem is entitled only "S.R." and begins as follows:

"Demure apothecary,  
Whose early reverend genius my young eye  
With wonder followed and undoubting joy.  
Believing in that cold and modest form  
Brooded alway the everlasting mind,  
And that thou, faithful, didst obey the soul."<sup>8.</sup>

Emerson's next reference to Reed appears in 1830, and he says, "It was said of Jesus that 'he taught as one having authority,' a distinction most palpable. There are a few men in every age, I suppose, who teach thus .... If Sampson Reed were a talker, he were one."<sup>9.</sup>

In 1832 Emerson mentions a conversation he had with Reed. He seemed to find his ideas interesting but not really new, since they went back to the Stoics. Emerson's Swedenborgian tendencies are shown again, for he says that he and Reed agreed that "God was the communication between us

7. Journals, II, 124.

8. Representative Men, Works, IV, notes, p. 295.

9. Journals, II, 296.

and other spirits, departed or present." <sup>10.</sup> This Swedenborgian philosophy of Reed served to emphasize Emerson's innate mysticism. Emerson admired Reed tremendously because he felt that Reed wrote and talked from inspiration and intuition, as the ideal poet should write and talk. He says, "The true men are ever following an invisible Leader, and have left the responsibility of their acts with God .... The true men stand by and let reason argue for them. I talk with Sampson and see it is not him, but a greater than him, 'My Father is greater than I.' Truth speaks by him. (Can my friend wish a greater eulogy?)" <sup>11.</sup> A few weeks later we read, "It well deserves attention what is said in New Jerusalem Magazine concerning External Restraint. It is awful to look into the mind of man and see how free we are .... Outside, among your fellows, among strangers, you must preserve appearances, a hundred things you cannot do; but inside, the terrible freedom." <sup>12.</sup> This passage refers to Reed's paper "External Restraint," and Hotson points out this article furnishes suggestions for Emerson's poem "Grace" and for his "Demonology." <sup>13.</sup> Emerson's next reference to Reed appears in 1834 when he writes, "If I were called upon to charge a young minister, I would say Beware of Tradition; Tradition which embarrasses life and falsifies all teaching. The sermons that I hear are all dead of that ail .... Not so with the Swedenborgians, if their pulpit resembles their book." <sup>14.</sup> Hotson says the phrase "their book" can only refer to Reed's Observations of the Growth of the Mind. The same year, in a letter to James Freeman Clarke, Emerson

10. Journals, II, 456.

11. Journals, II, 515.

12. Journals, II, 517.

13. Hotson, op. cit., p. 258.

14. Journals, III, 421.



says, "Have you read Sampson Reed's Growth of the Mind? I rejoice to be contemporary with that man, and cannot wholly despair of the society in which he lives. There must be some oxygen yet." <sup>16.</sup> In 1835 we read, "Language itself is young and unformed. In heaven it will be, as Sampson Reed said, 'one with things.' " <sup>17.</sup> In this passage we can see that Emerson's theory of the identity of subject and object, which is one of the ideals of his theory of literary expression, must have been influenced, at least to an extent, by the Swedenborgian druggist. A few days later he says, "The mystery of Humility is treated by Jesus, by Dante, by Chaucer in his *Griselda*, by Milton, and by Sampson Reed ...." <sup>18.</sup> The following year, 1836, comes Emerson's first mention of Reed's "Oration on Genius." He says, "I have always distinguished Sampson Reed's oration on Genius, and Collin's Ode on the Passions, and all of Shakespeare as being works of genius, inasmuch as I read them with extreme pleasure and see no clue to guide me to their origin .... But, as I became acquainted with Sampson Reed's books and lectures, the miracle is somewhat lessened in the same manner as I once found that Burke's was. As we advance, shall every man of genius turn to us the axis of his mind, then shall he be transparent, retaining, however, always the prerogative of an original mind, that is, the love of truth in God, and not the love of truth for the market." <sup>19.</sup>

Emerson admired Sampson Reed because the latter had the "moral sentiment" also necessary for true greatness and beauty which even Goethe lacked. Emerson says, ".... In literature very few words are found touching the best thought; *Laodamia* .... and Sampson Reed's oration; these are of the

16. Journals, II, 116.

17. Journals, III, 492.

18. Journals, III, 496.

19. Journals, IV, 131 - 132.



highest moral class." <sup>20.</sup> Two years later he writes, "A notice of modern literature ought to include (ought it not?) a notice of Carlyle, of Tennyson, of Landor, of Bettina, of Sampson Reed." <sup>21.</sup> In 1847 the following comment appears in his Journals: "Remarkable trait in the American character is the union, not very infrequent, of Yankee cleverness with spiritualism. Thus, my Wall Street cotton-broker .... and Sampson Reed, druggist ...." <sup>22.</sup>

This passage is interesting because Emerson himself combined this same Yankee shrewdness and spiritualism that he noticed in Reed. Emerson's next notice of Sampson Reed appears almost twenty years later, in 1866, when he lists Reed and his oration on "Genius" among his "Single speech Poets." <sup>23.</sup> His last comment on the Swedenborgian druggist appears in 1869 when he says, "Yesterday finished the Tenth Reading at Chickering Hall .... I meant to show some inspired prose from Charles K. Newcomb, Sampson Reed, Mary Moody Emerson, etc., but did not." <sup>24.</sup>

Emerson must have admired Sampson Reed tremendously, for in all his comments on him there is not one word of adverse criticism. Emerson liked Reed because there was moral truth and spirituality in his writings and because he seemed to write from intuition. Reed was an important influence on Emerson because he first aroused his interest in Swedenborg and gave him his first definite literary impulse. Reed not only helped in forming Emerson's modes of expression and ideas of style, but the knowledge of Swedenborgian philosophy that Emerson gained from Reed's books and articles influenced the form and content of Nature. <sup>25.</sup>

20. Journals, V, 112.

21. Journals, V, 425.

22. Journals, VII, 333.

23. Journals, X, 147.

24. Journals, X, 283.

25. Hotson, op. cit., pp. 276 - 277.

## VII.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF BRONSON ALCOTT.

Bronson Alcott is known today chiefly as the father of Louisa Alcott, but he was one of the outstanding personalities of Emerson's time. Alcott was important then, because, until the late 1830's, it was Alcott, not Emerson, who was the leader of New England Transcendentalism.<sup>1</sup> He was also a leading figure in the establishment of the Dial. Bronson Alcott was what Frothingham calls "The Mystic of Transcendentalism," in Alcott the mystical tendencies of Transcendentalism were carried to an extreme, and his name soon stood for everything in that movement which seemed eccentric or unintelligible to the ordinary mind. Emerson's mystical tendency was held in check by his Yankee shrewdness, but there was no such check on Alcott. Emerson believed that the greatest writing could come only in moments of communion with the over-soul, but even he realized that there were limits to this. Alcott was in perpetual communion with the Infinite; everything he wrote or said or did came from intuition, from an inner inspiration. This is one of the things that Emerson admired in Alcott, one of the things that drew him to him, but Emerson was wise enough to see that this, when carried to an extreme, was also a great weakness. Emerson's tendencies toward mysticism were also held in check by his interests in science, but Alcott had no relation at all to the new and growing science.<sup>2</sup>

Alcott was an educator at heart, but his fundamental educational concepts were Platonic. He believed in pre-existence, in the inspiration of childhood; he tried to put into practice what Wordsworth had expressed

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1. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 257.

2. Moncure Daniel Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p. 148.

in his "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality."<sup>3</sup> Many of Emerson's comments on Alcott are really comments on Alcott's famous Temple School, and although these remarks are interesting they have little literary significance. Emerson first encountered Alcott in 1835, but he did not really come to know him until Alcott came to Concord in 1840, after his school failed. Emerson saw a great deal of Alcott at Concord, and at one time he even suggested that the Alcott family come and live with his own family. Emerson had ample opportunity to converse with Alcott, and he was thus able to see clearly both Alcott's strength and weaknesses. Even in his own day Alcott was noted for his "Conversations," which he held in Boston every year, not for his writings. His works have not lived because he could not express his mysticism in words, as Emerson well knew. Harold Clarke Goddard says, "It is singularly difficult to arrive at a just estimate of Alcott. The whole affinity of his mind was mystical, Neo-Platonic and Oriental writers being his favorite authors. The rarified nature of his subject matter combined with a certain deficiency in power of literary expression makes his published works inadequately representative of the man, and the critic pauses between the belief that admiring contemporaries grossly over-rated the ability of an active and elevated but withal rather ordinary kind, and the opposite view that Alcott had a touch of real genius in him, a kinship in due degree with the inspired talkers of literary history."<sup>4</sup> However, even if Alcott could not express his ideas in writing, he is nevertheless an important force in American literature because these ideas did have influence on the men with whom he associated -

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3. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 232.

4. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 338 - 339.

Emerson, Parker, Thoreau, Hawthorne, That Alcott did have some effect on Emerson cannot be denied. Gay says: "When we seek to discover just what it was that Emerson got from him we are a little puzzled. Certainly, not ideas. I think that he admired Alcott ( and he was fully aware of his limits), because he found in him an example, almost unique, of faith in the ideal. In this man was not the shadow of turning; he never thought even of defending the ideal philosophy; he assumed it, and went ahead. And to a man of Emerson's darting, searching, weighing, and selecting - in short, critical - mind, Alcott was a priceless pole, steady as Polaris itself amid the vicissitudes of speculation." The significance of Alcott to Emerson is thus expressed by Van Wyck Brooks: "But Emerson, who knew his foibles well, loved him for his copious peacefulness and for the mountain landscape of his mind, with its darting lights and shadows."<sup>6.</sup>

Emerson met Alcott in 1835, and must have been impressed by him almost immediately, because he comments on him in his Journals and his letters at least a dozen times between then and 1840, when Alcott came to Concord to live. Emerson's first reference to Alcott occurs in his Journals for 1835, when he writes of him, "A wise man, simple, superior to display, and drops the best things as quietly as the least."<sup>7.</sup> A year later, speaking of Alcott's literary ability, he writes thus: "I have read with interest Mr. Alcott's Journals in Ms. for 1835. He has attained at least to a perfectly simple and elegant utterance. There is no inflation and no cramp in his writings. I complained that there did not seem to be quite that facility of organization which we expect in the man of genius and which is to interlace his work with

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5. Robert M. Gay, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 132.

6. Brooks, op. cit., p. 273.

7. Journals, III, 559.

all nature by radiating upon all. But the sincerity of his speculation is a better merit. This is no theory of a month's standing, no peg to hang fine things on; no sham enthusiasm; no cant; but his hearty faith and study by night and day .... And whatever defects as fine writers such men may have, it is because colossal foundations are not for summer-houses, but for temples and cities. But come again a hundred years hence, and compare Alcott with his little critics." <sup>8.</sup> And in 1837 he writes of Alcott, "I could see plainly

that I conversed with the most extraordinary man and the highest genius of the time. He is a Man. He is erect, he sees .... Wonderful is his vision; the steadiness and scope of his eye at once rebukes all before it, and we little men creep about ashamed." <sup>9.</sup> Of Alcott's Recorded Conversations

Emerson says, "It is an admirable piece full of profound anticipations." <sup>10.</sup>

Shortly afterwards he writes, "They say of Alcott, and I have sometimes assented, that he is one-toned and hearkens with no interest to books or conversations out of the scope of his one commanding idea. Maybe so, but very different is his centralism from that of vulgar monomaniacs, for he looks with wise love at all real facts, at street faces, at the farmer ...." <sup>11.</sup>

Emerson did not judge Alcott's writings very severely, because he believed that "here was a new mind and it was welcome to a new style." <sup>12.</sup> This same year,

1837, Emerson also mentions Alcott in letters to both Carlyle and Fuller.

To Carlyle he says only, "A man named Bronson Alcott is great and one of the jewels we have to show you." <sup>13.</sup> His letter to Margaret Fuller is much more detailed. He writes: "Mr. Alcott is the great man, and Miss Fuller has not

8. Journals, IV, 61 - 62.

9. Journals, IV, 237.

10. Journals, IV, 149.

11. Journals, IV, 403.

12. Journals, IV, 462.

13. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, p. 122.





seen him. His book does him no justice, and I do not like to see it. I had not fronted him for a good while, and was willing to revise my opinion. But he has more of the godlike than any man I have ever seen, and his presence rebukes, and threatens, and raises. He is a teacher. I shall dismiss for the future all anxiety about his success. If he cannot make intelligent men feel the presence of superior nature, the worse for them; I can never doubt him. His ideal is beheld with such unrivalled distinction that he is not only justified but necessitated to condemn and to seek to upheave the vast actual, and cleanse the world."<sup>14.</sup> By this time Emerson had come to the conclusion that Alcott could not write, but he still clung to the high opinion he held of Alcott as a speaker. In 1839, in a letter to Carlyle, he says: "A man named Bronson Alcott is a majestic soul, with whom conversation is possible. He is capable of truth, and gives me the same glad astonishment that he should exist that the world does."<sup>15.</sup> The following year, in another letter, we read, "Bronson Alcott, who is a great man if he cannot write well, has come to Concord .... I see that some of the Education people in England have a school called 'Alcott House' after my friend. At home here he is despised and rejected of men as much as was ever Pestalozzi. But the creature thinks and talks, and I am glad and proud of my neighbor."<sup>16.</sup> Two years later, in 1842, Alcott was sent to England, by Emerson and some of his other friends, to meet these "Education people," and Emerson was also very anxious to have him meet Carlyle and Sterling. To Sterling he wrote, "About this time, or perhaps a few weeks later, we shall send you a large piece of spiritual New England, in the shape of A. Bronson Alcott, whom you must not fail to

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14. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 279.

15. The Correspondence of Emerson and Sterling, pp. 51 - 52.

16. Ibid., pp. 285 & 286.

see if you can compass it. A man who cannot write, but whose conversation is unrivalled in its way; such insight, such pure intellectual play, and such revolutionary impulses of thought .... Since Plato and Plotinus we

have not had his like."<sup>17.</sup> At the same time he wrote to Carlyle, saying,

"Bronson Alcott will probably go to London in about a month, and him I shall surely send to you, hoping to atone by his great nature for many

smaller ones that have craved to see you."<sup>18.</sup> Unfortunately, Carlyle

could not really appreciate Alcott; Emerson was very sorry that this was

the case, and he wrote again to Carlyle, saying, "As for Alcott, you

have discharged your conscience of him manfully and knightly .... He is a

great man and was made for what is greatest, but now I fear that he has

already touched what best he can, and through his more than a prophet's

egotism, and the absence of all useful reconciling talents, will bring

nothing to pass, and be but a voice in the wilderness. As you do not seem

to have seen in him his pure and noble intellect, I fear that it lies under

some new and denser clouds."<sup>19.</sup> Alcott returned from England in 1842 with

his two English friends, Wright and Lane, and they set up their great new

communistic farm known as "Fruitlands."

Emerson's longest comment on Alcott appears in his Journals in 1842 while Alcott's experiment at "Fruitlands" was at its height. He writes:

"He is a man of ideas, a man of faith .... His social nature and his taste for beauty and magnificence will betray him into tolerance and indulgence, even, to men and to magnificence, but a statute or a practice he is condemned to measure by its essential wisdom or folly. He delights in speculation, in nothing so much, and is very well endowed and weaponed for that work with

17. The Correspondence of Emerson and Sterling, pp. 51 - 52.

18. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 360.

19. Ibid., II, 14.

a copious, accurate and elegant vocabulary; I may say poetic; so that I know no man who speaks such good English as he, and is so inventive withal. He speaks truth truly; on the expression is adequate. Yet he knows only this one language. He hardly needs an antagonist, - he needs only an intelligent ear. Where he is greeted by loving and intelligent persons, his discourse soars to a wonderful height, so regular, so lucid, so playful, so new and and disdainful of all boundaries of tradition and experience, that the hearers seem no longer to have bodies or material gravity, but almost they can mount into the air at pleasure, or leap at one bound out of this solar system. I say this of his speech exclusively for when he attempts to write, he loses, in my judgment, all his power, and I derive more pain than pleasure from the perusal .... He seems to think all literature is good or bad as it approaches colloquy, which is its perfection .... He so swiftly and naturally plants himself on the moral sentiment in any conversation, unless he be a saint as Jones Very was .... It must be conceded that it is speculation which he loves, and not action. Therefore he dissatisfies everybody and disgusts many .... Another circumstance marks this extreme love of speculation. He carries all his opinions and all his condition and manner of life in his hand, and, whilst you talk with him, it is plain he has put out no roots, but is an air - plant, which can readily and without any ill consequence be transported to any place .... If it is so with his way of living, much more so is it with his opinions. He never remembers. He never affirms anything today because he has affirmed it before .... His vice, an intellectual vice, grew out of this constitution, and was that to which almost all spiritualists have been liable, - a certain brooding on the private thought which produces monotony in the conversation, and egotism in the character .... Alcott sees

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the law of men truer and farther than any one ever did. Unhappily, his conversation never loses sight of his own personality. He never quotes; he never refers; his only illustration is his own biography. So will it be always. The poet, rapt into future ties or into deeps of nature admired for themselves, lost in their law, cheers us with a lively charm; but this noble genius discredits genius to me. I do not want any more such persons to exist."<sup>20.</sup>

The next year, in 1843, Emerson says of him, "Alcott came, the magnificent dreamer, brooding as ever .... heedless that he had been uniformly rejected by every class to whom he had addressed himself, and yet just as sanguine and vast as ever;- the most cogent example of that drop too much which Nature adds to each man's peculiarity. To himself,<sup>21.</sup> he seems the only realist."

When Alcott's "Fruitlands" experiment failed and public opinion was so against him, Emerson writes, "Very sad, indeed, to see this half-god driven to the wall .... Very tedious and prosing and egotistical and narrow he is, but a profound insight, a Power, a majestic man .... I feel his statement to be partial and to have fatal omissions, but I think I shall never attempt to set him right any more. It is not for me to answer him; though I feel the limitations and exaggerations of his picture, and the wearisome personalities. His statement proves too much .... Alcott has been writing poetry, he says, all winter. I fear there is nothing in it for me.<sup>22.</sup> His overpowering personality destroys all poetic faculty." A year later he adds, "Alcott is unlimited and unballasted .... a pail of which the

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20. Journals, VI, 170 - 178.

21. Journals, VI, 472.

22. Journals, VI, 503 - 505.



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botton is taken out."

In 1845, speaking again of Alcott's literary ability, he says,  
"I know what I shall find if Alcott brings me manuscripts. I shall have  
a Salisbury plain full of bases of pyramids, to each of which I am to  
build an apex."<sup>24.</sup> A similar comment appears in 1846 when he writes,

"He looks at everything in larger angles than any other, and, by good  
right, should be the greatest man. But here comes in another trait:  
it is found, though his angles are of so generous contents, the lines  
do not meet; the apex is not quite defined, We must allow for the re-  
fraction of the lens, but it is the best instrument I have ever met

with."<sup>25.</sup> Shortly afterwards he adds, "Alcott is a man of unquestionable  
genius, yet no doctrine or sentence or word or action of his which is  
excellent can be detached or quoted."<sup>26.</sup>

The following passage on Alcott seemed to me to be particularly  
expressive: "Alcott is like a slate pencil which has a sponge tied to the  
other end, and, as the point of the pencil draws lines, the sponge follows as  
fast and erases them. He talks high and wide, and expresses himself very  
happily, and forgets all he has said. If a skillful operator could introduce  
a lancet and sever the sponge, Alcott would be the prince of writers."<sup>27.</sup>

Emerson is admitting his own obligation to Alcott when he says, "It were  
too much to say that the Platonic world I might have learned to treat as a  
cloud-land, had I not known Alcott, who is a native of that country, yet  
I will say that he makes it as solid as Massachusetts to me..."<sup>28.</sup> and

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23. Journals, VII, 50.

24. Journals, VII, 506.

25. Cabot, op. cit., I, 280.

26. Journals, VII, 525.

27. Journals, VIII, 70.

again when he adds, "The comfort of Alcott's mind is the connection in which he sees whatever he sees .... I do not know where to find in man or books, a mind so valuable to faith. His own invariable faith inspires faith in others."<sup>29.</sup>

Emerson's comments on Alcott cover a period of about forty years. In one of his later comments, in 1861, he wrote the following; "And our Alcott (what a fruit of Connecticut) has only just missed being a seraph. A little English finish and articulation to his potencies, and he would have compared with the greatest."<sup>30.</sup>

The next year, 1862, he says of Alcott as a writer, "Of Alcott, the whim of writing is a false instinct, like Goethe's for sculpture, over which both of them lost much good time."<sup>31.</sup>

Emerson's last comment appears in 1865 when he writes, "When I go to talk with Alcott it is not so much to get his thoughts as to watch myself under his influence. He excites me and I think freely."<sup>32.</sup>

There are not many references to Alcott in any of Emerson's essays, except in the few instances where he borrows sentences from the Journals. However, there is a good estimate of Alcott in his essay, "Life and Letters in New England." He is referring to Alcott when he says, "With them [the Transcendentalists] was always one well-known form, a pure idealist, not at all a man of letters, nor of any practical talent nor a writer of books; a man quite too cold and contemplative for the alliances of friendship, with rare simplicity and grandeur of perception, who read Plato as an equal, and inspired his companions only in proportion as they were intellectual, whilst the man of talent complained of the want

29. Journals, IX, 35.

30. Journals, IX, 346.

31. Journals, IX, 457.

32. Journals, X, 56.



of point." <sup>33.</sup> Another summary of his opinion of Alcott was found in a scrap marked "Influences." Emerson writes, "We have seen an intellectual torso, without hands or feet, without any organ whereby to reproduce his thought in any form of art whatever.... and only working by presence and supreme intelligence, as a test and standard of other minds. Such I call not so much men as Influences .... Perhaps the office of <sup>34.</sup>these is highest of all in the great society of souls."

On the whole, Emerson's criticism of Bronson Alcott is very just and is consistent with his theory of literature. He admired Alcott for his spiritual insight and intuition, but he also realized that Alcott's extreme mysticism led him into eccentricities and egotism. He knew that Alcott could not write, but he had a very high opinion of his powers of discourse, although he could not believe, as Alcott did, that talking was a higher art than writing. He admired Alcott's insistence on truth and moral sentiment, but at the same time he objected to his extreme impracticality, and to his shifting opinions which approached jesuitry. Emerson admitted that he owed a debt to Alcott for exciting his own mental faculties and for helping him to understand and appreciate Plato.

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33. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 341 - 342.

34. Cabot, op. cit., 281.

## VIII.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS.

Emerson was both a transcendental critic and a critic of transcendentalism. Emerson was a Transcendentalist himself and for a time was leader of the movement in New England. However, although he was at the heart of the movement, he was also able to look at the whole movement and at its exponents objectively and critically. The best expression of Emerson's attitude toward Transcendentalism as a whole appears in his lecture "The Transcendentalist", which he first read in 1842. He defines Transcendentalism as "Idealism as it appears in 1842,"<sup>1.</sup> and he goes on to say that "The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine, He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to new influx of light and power; he believes in inspiration and in ecstasy."<sup>2.</sup> Emerson was very optimistic about the value and significance of Transcendentalism to America, for he says, "There is no pure Transcendentalist, yet the tendency to respect the intentions and to give them, at least in our creed, all authority over our experience, has deeply colored the conversation and poetry of the present day; and the history of genius and of religion in these times, though impure, and as yet not incarnated in any powerful individual, will be the history of this tendency."<sup>3.</sup> Emerson was broad-minded and just in his estimate of the movement, however, because he saw and admitted the eccentricities and vagaries that the Transcendentalists were often led into.

1. Nature, Addresses, Lectures, Works, I, 330.

2. Works, I, 335.

3. Works, I, 340.

He says, "I say tendency, not realization. Our virtue totters and trips, does not yet walk firmly. Its representations are austere; they preach and denounce; their rectitude is not yet a grace. They are still liable to that slight taint of burlesque which in our strange world attaches to the zealot .... There is, no doubt, a great deal of well-founded objection to be spoken or felt against the sayings and doings of this class, some of whose traits we have selected; no doubt they will lay themselves open to criticism and lampoons, and as ridiculous stories will be told of them as of any. There will be cant and pretension; there will be subtlety and moonshine. These persons are of unequal strength, and do not all prosper."<sup>4.</sup>

Emerson's last estimate of the Transcendentalists as a group is very favorable, because to him their high aim and purpose was ample recompense for the weaknesses in the practice. He concludes, "But the thoughts which these few hermits strove to proclaim by silence as well as by speech, not only by what they did, but by what they forbore to do, shall abide in beauty and strength ...."<sup>5.</sup>

Emerson's Transcendentalists included Bronson Alcott, Charles Newcomb, Frederic Henry Hedge, Orestes Brownson, Theodore Parker, Jones Very, Elizabeth Peabody and Margaret Fuller. Miss Fuller's relations with Emerson were so peculiar and his comments on her are so numerous that, like Alcott, she requires a separate chapter. There were, of course, many other Transcendentalists, some of whom were of more actual importance to the movement than Emerson's group. However, this select group of a half-dozen really represents almost all of the phases of Transcendentalism; their interests

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4. Works, I, 355 - 356.

5. Works, I, 359.

range from critical to theological to mystical. The Transcendentalists not included in this list are omitted either because they cannot rightly be regarded as men of letters or because Emerson himself failed to comment on them.

One of the outstanding Transcendentalists in Emerson's opinion was Charles Newcomb, who is entirely unknown today. Although Newcomb is a very minor figure in the field of American letters, Emerson was very fond of him and devoted a great deal of space to him in his Journals. Newcomb led a strange, secret life, and Van Wyck Brooks speaks of him as the "Providence mystic."<sup>6</sup> Newcomb was for a time a member of the Brook Farm community, where he seems to have been rather influential. He wrote, "The Two Dolons" for the Dial, and Emerson liked Newcomb's private journal so well that he transcribed a great deal of it in order that he would have a copy of it if Newcomb ever destroyed the originals.

Emerson gives a brief sketch of Newcomb in his essay "Life and Letters in New England." He writes the following about Newcomb in connection with his reminiscences of the Brook Farm experiment; "I recall one youth of the subtlest mind, I believe I must say the subtlest observer and diviner of character I ever met, living, reading, writing, talking there, perhaps as long as the colony held together; his mind fed and overflowed by whatever is exalted in genius, whether in Poetry or Art, in Drama or Music ...."<sup>7</sup> Newcomb is mentioned very frequently in Emerson's Journals, but the following few excerpts will be sufficient to show Emerson's opinion of him. Emerson's first reference to Newcomb appears in 1842 when he writes, "In Providence I found Charles Newcomb, who made me happy by his conversation and his read-

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6. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, 243.

7. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 362.

ing of his tales." <sup>8,</sup> His best and longest criticism was written seven years later, in 1849. At this time he says: "Charles Newcomb came, but we grew incapable of events and influences. He, too, turns the conversation, if I try a general remark. His manuscripts which he brought me were six years old, but full of subtle genius. Intense solitude appears in every sentence. They are soliloquies, with abridged stenographic wit and eloquence .... He is Brahmin existing to little use, if prayer and beauty are not that .... But though Charles's mind is unsounded, and the walls taken out, so that he seems open to Nature, yet he does not accumulate his wisdom into any amount of thought, rarely arrives at a result ...." <sup>9.</sup>

The following year he speaks of Newcomb as "the unique, inspired, wasted genius." <sup>10.</sup> Emerson's final estimate of Newcomb is more favorable, however, for he writes, "Cheering amidst all this trifle was the reading of Charles Newcomb's letters: the golden age came again, the true youth, the true heroism, the future, the ideal .... Only of Charles I would give much to know how it all lies in his mind; I would know his inmost sincerity; know what reverses he makes when he talks divinely." <sup>11.</sup> Thus we see that

Emerson admired Newcomb for his inner genius and because he believed some of Newcomb's writings had real merit. However, like Alcott and Very, Newcomb was too much of a mystic for Emerson. Newcomb's genius was all inward; he could not, much to Emerson's regret, produce anything outwardly constructive.

Theodore Parker was not only one of the most important of the Transcendentalists, but he was also one of the greatest ministers that America

8. Journals, VII, 162.

9. Journals, VIII, 60 - 61.

10. Journals, VIII, 154.

11. Journals, VIII, 395.

ing of his tales." <sup>8,</sup> His best and longest criticism was written seven years later, in 1849. At this time he says: "Charles Newcomb came, but we grew incapable of events and influences. He, too, turns the conversation, if I try a general remark. His manuscripts which he brought me were six years old, but full of subtle genius. Intense solitude appears in every sentence. They are soliloquies, with abridged stenographic wit and eloquence .... He is Brahmin existing to little use, if prayer and beauty are not that .... But though Charles's mind is unsounded, and the walls taken out, so that he seems open to Nature, yet he does not accumulate his wisdom into any amount of thought, rarely arrives at a result ...." <sup>9.</sup>

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8. Journals, VII, 162.

9. Journals, VIII, 60 - 61.

10. Journals, VIII, 154.

11. Journals, VIII, 395.

ever produced . Parker's own literary accomplishments are not very significant, but he was an important influence on all New England.

Parrington gives a good estimate of him in the following passage:

"Theodore Parker became the embodiment and epitome of the New England Renaissance. More completely perhaps than any other representative, he gathered up and expressed the major revolutionary impulses of his time and world; the idealistic theism implicit in the Unitarian reaction from Calvinism; the transcendental individualism latent in the doctrine of divine immanence; and the passion for righteousness ...." <sup>12.</sup> Parker was an aggressive reformer, and his bitter attacks on contemporary conditions made him feared and hated. His greatest pleas were for social justice and for the abolition of slavery. Harold Clarke Goddard says that transcendentalism tends to "pass from its early sentimental and romantic stage into a phase of social or political activity." <sup>13.</sup> Parker represents the practical side of transcendentalism as opposed to the mystical side embodied in Newcomb, Alcott, and Verrill. Emerson and Parker were both members of the Transcendental Club. Parker was a faithful contributor to the Dial, both before and during Emerson's editorship. Later, when Parker became editor of the Massachusetts Quarterly Review, Emerson contributed a few articles to his magazine. Emerson and Parker were thus rather closely associated over a long period of years. Although much of Parker's literary output was too polemic to live long, he did write some very good papers for the Dial; Emerson admitted that some of the numbers of the Dial had a tremendous circulation <sup>14.</sup> just because they contained articles by Parker."

Emerson's first comment on Parker appears in his Journals for 1842

12. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 415 - 416.

13. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 345.

14. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 344.

when he says, "T.P. has beautiful fangs, and the whole amphitheatre likes to see him worry and tear his victims."<sup>15.</sup> In spite of the great differences in their temperaments, these two men admired each other greatly. In 1852 Theodore Parker dedicated his Ten Sermons of Religion to Emerson with a very laudatory foreword, and in return Emerson wrote a letter of appreciation to Parker. He said, "I read the largest part of it with good heed. I find in it all the traits which are making your discourses material to the history of Massachusetts, the realism, the power of local and homely illustration, the courage and vigor of treatment, and the masterly sarcasm, - now naked, now veiled, - and I think with a marked growth in power and coacervation - shall I say? - of statement. To be sure, I am in the moment thinking of speeches out of this book as well as in it. Well, you may give the times to come the means of knowing how the lamp was fed, which they are to thank you that they found burning .... We should all thank the right soldier, whom God gave strength and will to fight for him the battle of the day."<sup>16.</sup>

Emerson admitted the great gulf that lay between him and Parker, for in his Journals for 1868 he says, "Theodore Parker has filled up all his years and days and hours; a son of the energy of New England, restless, eager, manly, brave, early old, contumacious, clever. I can well praise him at a distance for our minds and methods were unlike -- few people more unlike."<sup>17.</sup> In his essay on "Eloquence" Emerson is referring to Parker when he says, "His hard head went through, in childhood, the drill of Calvinism, so that he stands in the New England assembly a purer bit of New England than any,

15. Journals, VI, 247.

16. John Weiss, Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, II, 45.

17. Journals, IX, 271.





and flings his sarcasms right and left. He has not only the documents in his pocket to answer all cavils and to prove all his positions, but he has the eternal reason in his head." <sup>18.</sup> Emerson's best estimate of Parker occurs in his essay, "Life and Letters in New England." He writes: "Theodore Parker was our Savanorola, an excellent scholar, in frank and affectionate communication with the best minds of his day, yet the tribune of the people, and the stout Reformer to urge and defend every cause of humanity with and for humblest of mankind. He was no artist. What he said was mere fact, almost offended you, so bald and detached; little cared he. <sup>19.</sup> He stood altogether for practical truth ...." One other comment of interest appears in 1854 in a letter to the English poet Clough when Emerson <sup>20.</sup> writes, "Sumner and Theodore Parker are our saints."

On the whole, Emerson admired Parker tremendously. He valued Parker's great learning, his reason, and his practicality. I think Parker's practical transcendentalism found much more favor in Emerson's sight than the mysticism of Alcott, Very, and Newcomb. Emerson was also in sympathy for the most part with Parker's ideas of social reform, particularly on the Slavery question. However, Emerson could not understand Parker's intensity and zeal. Parker's fiery temperament was the antithesis of Emerson's cold intellectuality, and Emerson with his mellow philosophy could not forgive Parker for his bitter vindictiveness.

Orestes Brownson is another Transcendentalist whom Emerson criticizes in his Journals. Brownson remained faithful to Transcendentalism although

18. Society and Solitude, Works, VII, 96.

19. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 344.

20. The Emerson - Clough Letters, no. 24.

his religious views underwent many changes. He started out as a Presbyterian minister in 1822, became a Universalist, and then a Unitarian. In 1838, he established and edited the Boston Quarterly Review. In 1844, when Brownson turned Catholic, this periodical became Brownson's Quarterly. Brownson was a staunch Democrat and a promoter of numerous socialistic schemes designed to improve the conditions of the laboring class. After his last conversion in 1844 he became an ardent polemicist on the side of Catholicism. Like Parker and Emerson, he belonged to the Transcendental Club, and he was also a contributor to the Dial. This leads one to believe that Emerson knew Brownson better than his slight comments in his Journals would indicate. Brownson also defended Emerson's "Divinity School Address" of 1838 after Andrews Norton's attack on it. Besides his articles for the various periodicals, Brownson also wrote religious, political, philosophical, and auto-biographical books. Van Wyck Brooks describes him in the following words: "Something more than a journalist, something less than a sage, Brownson was a Catholic Theodore Parker."<sup>21.</sup>

Emerson himself makes only two remarks about Brownson, both of them in the year 1842. He says, "Brownson never will stop and listen, neither in conversation, but what is more, not in solitude."<sup>22.</sup> His only other reference to him is an incidental remark which includes Brownson in a larger group. He says: "The young people, like Brownson, Channing, Greene, Elizabeth Peabody, and possibly Bancroft, think that the vice of the age is to exaggerate individualism, and they adopt the word *l'humanité* from LeRoux, and go for 'the race.' Hence the Phalanx, Owenism, Simonism, the Communities."<sup>23.</sup>

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21. Brooks, op. cit., p. 249.

22. Journals, VI, 297.

23. Journals, VI, 313-314.

Like Parker, Brownson was too intense, too polemical, too uncompromising, for Emerson. He was too much the social reformer, and Emerson was not as much in sympathy with Brownson's Catholicism and socialism as he was with Parker's abolition movement.

Elizabeth Peabody is a minor figure in American literature, but she is worth mentioning not only because she herself was a Transcendentalist but because of her relations with the more important Transcendentalists and with other note-worthy writers of that period. Elizabeth Peabody was first secretary to Dr. Channing; then she became an assistant to Alcott in his Temple School, and from the latter experience she wrote a journal called the Record of a School. She also wrote many text-books and A Last Evening with Alcott. Her main interests lay in the field of child education, and she is sometimes called "the grandmother of the kindergarten." Miss Peabody was very active in the Transcendental movement; she belonged to the Transcendental Club, she contributed to the Dial and helped to edit and print it, and in 1859 she started a transcendental periodical of her own, Aesthetic Papers, which failed after one issue. She is important because she introduced Hawthorne to her literary friends, and because her book shop became the Boston rendezvous for the rising young intellectuals, such as Emerson, Alcott, and Hedge.<sup>24</sup> Although Emerson must have known Miss Peabody rather well, he makes only two comments on her. In 1835 he writes, "I read with great delight the Record of a School. It aims all the time to show the symbolical character of all things to the children, and it is alleged,<sup>25</sup> and I doubt not truly, that the children take the thought with delight."

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24. Brooks, op. cit., pp.228 - 229.

25. Journals, III, 509.

Later, in criticizing the poetry of Ellery Channing, he says, "He breaks faith with the reader, wants integrity. Yet for Poets it will be a better book than a whole volume of Bryant and Campbell. Miss Peabody has beautiful colors to sell, but her shop has no attraction for house-builders and merchants; Mr. Allston and Mr. Cheney will probably find the way to it." 26.

Although Frederic Henry Hedge is a very important figure in New England Transcendentalism, and although Emerson mentions his name frequently, there is remarkably little criticism of him in Emerson's writings. Hedge went to Germany with Bancroft, and there he became acquainted with German idealism. Gray believes that Hedge is responsible for domesticating this German thought and thus bringing New England Transcendentalism into being. 27. Hedge not only furnished the philosophical background for the movement, but he gave it impetus by originating the Transcendental Club. He also contributed to the Dial, although he is chiefly noted in the field of letters for his German translations.

Emerson's first comment on Hedge appears in a letter to his brother Edward, written at the end of 1833. He says, "Henry Hedge is an unfolding man, who has just now written the best pieces that have appeared in the Examiner; one especially was a living, leaping Logos, and he may help me." 28. In 1839 there are two comments on Hedge in Emerson's Journals. In the first he says, "If, as Hedge thinks, I overlook great facts in stating the absolute laws of the soul; if, as he seems to represent it, the world is not a dualism, not a bipolar unity, but is two, is Me and It, then is there the alien, the unknown and all we have believed and chanted out of our deep instinctive hope

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26. Journals, VI, 358.

27. Henry David Gray, Emerson, p. 17

is a pretty dream."<sup>29.</sup> Later in the same year he adds, "Margaret Fuller and Frederic Henry Hedge must have talent in their associates. And so they find that they forgive many defects. They do not require simplicity. I require genius, and, if I find that, I do not need talent; and talent without genius gives me no pleasure. George Bradford's verdict on a poem or a man I should value more than theirs, for Hedge would like Moore, and George Bradford not."<sup>30.</sup>

Emerson's last comment on Hedge appears in 1847 in a letter to Carlyle. We read, "Henry Hedge is a recluse but Catholic scholar in our remote Bangor, who reads German, and smokes in his solitary study through nearly eight months of snow in the year, and deals out, every Sunday, witty apothegms to the lumber-merchants and township-owners of Penobscot River, who have actually grown intelligent interpreters of his riddles by long hearkening after them .... Hedge has a true and mellow heart, and I hope you will like him."<sup>31.</sup> Emerson liked Hedge because his Transcendentalism was neither mystical nor zealously reforming, but he did criticize Hedge for not accepting his own belief in dualism.

James Freeman Clarke is another figure in American letters who cannot be entirely ignored. Clarke was one of the first Transcendentalists, and he is important<sup>32.</sup> for his influence on Parker, Channing, Alcott, and Fuller. Clarke remained a Unitarian minister throughout his lifetime, and he preached in Boston, in Louisville, and in Pennsylvania, although these missionary activities interfered with his relations with the New England Transcendentalists. He was a prolific writer and turned out religious books, sermons, and magazine

29. Journals, V, 206.

30. Journals, V, 248.

31. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 135 - 136.

32. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England, p. 343.

articles, including contributions to the Dial. One of Clarke's greatest contributions to Transcendentalism came through his founding of the Western Messenger in Cincinnati in 1835. This periodical shifted from Unitarianism to Transcendentalism and was important as a forerunner of the Dial.<sup>33.</sup>

Although Emerson frequently mentions seeing Clarke, he makes only one comment on him that is at all interesting. He says, "A few clergymen, like Hedge, and Clarke, retain the traditions, but they never mention them to me, and, if they travelled in France, England, or Italy, would leave them locked up in the same closet with their sermons at home, and if they did not return would never think to send for them."<sup>34.</sup>

One of the most interesting of the Transcendentalists is Jones Very, the mystic. He was committed to the McLean Asylum for a time, although Emerson and many of the other Transcendentalists did not believe he was really insane. Very believed that everything he wrote was communicated to him by the Holy Ghost, and he would therefore never change a word of it. Van Wyck Brooks says that he also believed that he had risen from the dead and was beyond the physical world.<sup>35.</sup>

Very graduated from Harvard with distinction in 1836; for a while he tutored Thoreau in Greek and then he entered the Divinity School where he became a mystic. Emerson met Very in 1838, and he at first believed he was one of the messengers of the new era.<sup>36.</sup>

After Emerson read Very's Bowdoin senior essay showing that Shakespeare's genius was all due to the Holy Ghost, he wrote a letter to his friend Furness, saying, "Very might be insane but his critique certainly is not."<sup>37.</sup>

33. Clarence Gohdes, The Periodicals of American Transcendentalism, pp.10 - 18.

34. Journals, X, 8.

35. Brooks, op. cit., p. 204.

36. Carlos Baker, "Emerson and Jones Very," New England Quarterly, March, 1934, p.91.

37. Ibid., p. 92.

In the same year, 1838, he wrote in his Journals referring to him as a "monotone" and saying, "Jones Very came hither, two days since, and gave occasion to many thoughts on his peculiar state of mind and his relation to society. His position accuses society as much as society names it false and morbid; and much of his discourse concerning society, the church, and the college was perfectly just." <sup>38.</sup>

A week later he writes the following passage to Margaret Fuller: "Very has been here lately, and stayed a few days; confounding us all with the question whether he was insane. At first sight and speech you would certainly pronounce him so. Talk with him a few hours and you will think all insane but he. Monomania or monosania, he is very a remarkable person; and though his mind is not in a permanent state, he is a treasure of a companion and I had with him most memorable conversations." <sup>39.</sup>

At this same time he comments in his journal on Very's doctrine of will-less submission. Very tried to convert Emerson to this belief and to warn him against a life of self-direction and intellect. Emerson says, "The institutions, the cities which men have built look to him like a huge blot of ink .... He would obey, obey. He is not disposed to attack religious and charities, though false .... He thinks me covetous in my hold of truth, of seeing truth separate, and of receiving or taking it, instead of merely obeying. Will is to him all, as to me, Truth. He is sensible in me of a little colder air than he breathes .... He has nothing to do with time because he obeys .... and he is gone into the multitude as solitary as Jesus. In dismissing him I seem to have discharged an arrow into the heart of society. Whenever that young enthusiast goes he will astonish and disconcert men by dividing for

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38. Journals, V, 98 - 99.

39. Cabot, op. cit., 349 - 350.





them the cloud that covers the profound gulf that is in man." <sup>40.</sup> Again he writes, "The great distinction between talkers like Reed and Very and takers like Walker and Ripley, is, that one class speaks ab intra, and the other class, ab extra. It is of no use to preach to me ab extra." <sup>41.</sup>

The following year, 1839, Emerson edited a volume of Jones Very's verses and had it published. Although Very believed his inspiration from the Holy Ghost was infallible, Emerson did not agree with him and he selected and combined and revised Very's verses before publishing them. In the foreword to this little volume Emerson speaks of Very as being "serene, intelligent, and true" and he adds, "He gives me pleasure, and much relief after all I had heard concerning him." <sup>42.</sup>

Although Emerson does not comment specifically on Very's poetry in his Journals, his very high opinion of this volume of verse is revealed in a review he wrote for the Dial. To us today who are not acquainted with Very's poetry Emerson's estimate may seem inordinately high. However, Van Wyck Brooks gives a similar opinion, for he says, "Monotones in silver-grey, sober as a dove's breast, they were true poems, none the less. They had a sort of solemn incandescence. They were like frosted orbs of electric light. One caught their dim glow of religious feeling three generations later, partly thanks to Emerson's revisions; for no one knew better than he the importance of skill." <sup>43.</sup>

There, is, therefore, justification for Emerson's very favorable review of Very's "Essays and Poems." Emerson says: "This little volume would have received an earlier notice, if we had been at all careful to proclaim our favorite books. The genius of this book is religious, and reaches an extraordinary depth of sentiment. The author, plainly a man

40. Journals, V, 104 - 106.

41. Journals, V, 142.

42. Baker, op. cit., p. 94.

43. Brooks, op. cit., p. 205.

of a pure and kindly temper, casts himself into the state of a high and transcendental obedience to the inward Spirit .... In this enthusiasm he writes most of these verses, which rather flow through him than from him. There is no composition, no elaboration, no artifice in the structure of the rhyme, no variety in the imagery; in short, no pretension to literary merit, for this would be a departure from his singleness, and followed by loss of insight. He is not at liberty even to correct these unpremeditated poems for the press .... With the exception of the few first poems, which appear to be of an earlier date, all these verses bear the unquestionable stamp of grandeur. They are the breathings of an entranced devotion .... They are as sincere a litany as the Hebrew songs of David or Isaiah, and only less than they because indebted to the Hebrew muse for their tone and genius. This makes the singularity of the book, namely, that so pure an utterance of the most domestic and primitive of all sentiments should in this age of revolt and experiment use once more the popular religious language, and so show itself secondary and morbid. These sonnets have little range of topics, no extent of observations, no playfulness; there is even a certain torpidity in the concluding lines of some of them, which reminds one of church hymns; but, whilst they flow with great sweetness, they have the sublime unity of the Decalogue or the Code of Menu, and if as monotonous, yet are they almost as pure as the sounds of surrounding Nature." <sup>144.</sup> Emerson sent Carlyle a copy of Very's poems, saying, "I believe I shall also make Brown the bearer of a little book written by a young friend of mine in a very peculiar frame of mind,- thought by most persons to be mad,- and of the publication of which I took charge .... When you see Sterling, show him

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144. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV,

these poems, and ask him if they have not a grandeur." <sup>45.</sup>

Carlos Baker believes that the friendship between Emerson and Very came to an end shortly after the publication of these verses. Very's psychical exultation was beginning to subside, and Emerson was able to look at him more objectively, more questioningly. <sup>46.</sup> Emerson writes, "Here is Simeon the Stylite, or John of Patmos in the shape of Jones Very, religion for religion's sake, religion divorced, detached from man, from the world, from science and art; grim, unmarried, insulated, accusing; yet true in itself, and speaking things in every word. The lie is in the detachment." <sup>47.</sup> Another criticism of Very appears in the Journals for 1845: "Jones Very had an illumination that enabled him to excel everybody in wit and to see farthest in every company and quite easily to bring the proudest to confusion; and yet he could never get out of his Hebraistic phraseology and mythology, and, when all was over, still remained in the thin porridge or cold tea of Unitarianism." <sup>48.</sup> Although Emerson drew away from Very in later years, he evidently kept his high opinion of Very's verse because he included two of Very's poems in his anthology "Parnassus."

Emerson liked Very's poetry, but he early recognized Very's great weaknesses. For one thing, Very's theory of will-less submission was in direct opposition to Emerson's own theory of self-reliance. Emerson admired Very because he was an exponent of his own belief in intuition, in spiritual communication, but he realized that Very carried this belief in genius but he also believed in work. Baker says that Very represented much for which

45. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 333 - 334.

46. Baker, op. cit., pp. 95 - 96.

47. Journals, V, 220.

48. Journals, VII, 136 - 137.

Emerson stood, although Emerson recognized it as his weaker side. Emerson<sup>49.</sup> was opposed to the Hindu doctrine of passivity for which Very stood. Emerson's Yankee vigor, his desire for mental freedom and action made him critical of Very's extreme mysticism.

Thus we see that Emerson, although a Transcendentalist himself, did not hesitate to criticize Transcendentalism both as a general movement and as it was embodied in many of its exponents. Emerson was too much the shrewd Yankee to believe in carrying Transcendentalism into mysticism as Very, Alcott, and Newcomb did. On the other hand Emerson was too coldly intellectual to appreciate the reforming ardor and intensity of Parker, Peabody, and Brownson on the more utilitarian side of Transcendentalism. Emerson believed a happy medium between mysticism and practical action, and he himself belongs on this middle ground. However, Emerson did recognize the value of Transcendentalism in injecting a new and much-needed element into American literature.

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49. Baker, op. cit., p. 96.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF MARGARET FULLER.

Margaret Fuller, like Theodore Parker, is a representative of the more practical tendencies of Transcendentalism. Her father forced her education and the result was ill health and mental and emotional overstimulation. She was one of the first feminists, and her revolt made her, like Alcott, the victim of much ridicule. She taught for a while and held "conversations" in Boston; from 1840 to 1842 she edited the Dial and later became literary critic for Greeley's New York Tribune. If Margaret Fuller Ossoli had not met such an early death, her reputation today as a writer might have been quite different, for her experiences in Italy must have had considerable effect on her. She is usually referred to as the critic of Transcendentalism; but her personality was more important than any thing she wrote and her literary reputation has dwindled away to almost nothing in the last century. That she was a great influence in her own day cannot be denied. Parrington says: "The written record which Margaret Fuller left is quite inadequate to explain her contemporary reputation. In no sense an artist, scarcely a competent craftsman, she wrote nothing that bears the mark of high distinction, either in thought or style ... Yet she was vastly talked about, and common report makes her out to have been an extraordinary woman who creatively influenced those with whom she came in contact." <sup>1.</sup> In her criticism, in her social service work, and in her movement for women's rights, she represents the enthusiasm and practicality of Transcendentalism which was so lacking in Very and Newcomb.

Margaret Fuller's position as a literary critic is of particular interest <sup>2.</sup> because Emerson was her teacher in this field. She was not as good a

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1. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 426.

2. George E. De Mille, Literary Criticism in American, p. 128.

critic as Emerson because she could not write, but, like Emerson, she has been  
 "a liberalizing force in American literary opinion."<sup>3.</sup> Like Emerson, she  
 judged from the inside, and her belief in her own power corresponded to her  
 "teacher's" belief in self-reliance. Her criticism of American letters was  
 much like Emerson's in that she, too, objected to the materialism and  
 imitation in our literature, and looks hopefully to the new West.<sup>4.</sup> Unlike  
 Emerson, however, she made it one of her chief purposes in life to spread  
 continental literature and continental culture throughout the United States  
 in an attempt to counteract the barren condition of our own literature  
 and culture. Her criticism, aided by her enthusiasm and her overpowering  
 personality, must have been effective. She not only succeeded in dis-  
 seminating European culture and literature, but Goddard speaks of her as  
 "one of the best equipped, most sympathetic and genuinely philosophical  
 critics produced in America prior to 1850."<sup>5.</sup> Emerson himself says, "She  
 was here, among our anxious citizens and frivolous fashionists, as if sent  
 to refine and polish her countrymen and announce a better day."<sup>6.</sup>

Emerson and Margaret Fuller had a very interesting friendship. Because  
 of the great differences in their temperaments, their relations were rather  
 peculiar. Margaret was intense, enthusiastic; Emerson was cold, intellectual.  
 They met in 1836, when Margaret was looking for an intellectual and spiritual  
 guide to show her how a woman could cast off the fetters of conventionality  
 and make her own life rich and full.<sup>7.</sup> Emerson wrote later, "Her extreme  
 plainness, - a trick of incessantly opening and shutting her eyelids, - the  
 nasal tone of her voice, - all repelled .... I remember that she made me

3. Ibid., p. 1.

4. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, pp. 377 - 378.

5. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 343.

6. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 311

7. Harry R. Warfel, "Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson, P.M.L.A., L, 1935, p.

laugh more than I liked .... and I found something profane in the hours of  
 amusing gossip into which she drew me." <sup>8.</sup> In his Journals for 1836 he makes  
 the following comment: "How rarely can a female mind be impersonal ....  
 Margaret F. by no means free with all her superiority." <sup>9.</sup> Although Emerson  
 could not give to Margaret Fuller the intimate, warm friendship she desired,  
 nevertheless she admired him tremendously and judged everyone else by him. <sup>10.</sup>  
 In 1837 she joined the Transcendental Club, and in 1839 she even considered  
 moving to Concord. At this time he wrote to her saying, "None knows better  
 than I, more's the pity, the gloomy inhospitality of the man; the want of  
 power to meet and unite with even those whom he loves in his flinty way ....  
 Can one be glad of an affection which he knows not how to return? I am ....  
 Therefore, my friend, treat me always as a mute, not ungrateful though now  
 incommunicable." <sup>11.</sup> Margaret was a frequent visitor at the Emerson home  
 during these years, and she even gave him a few German lessons. <sup>12.</sup> However,  
 in spite of her friendly advances, she still could not get close to Emerson  
 and her continued attempts disturbed Emerson. Across one of her letters he  
 even wrote, "what shocking familiarity." <sup>13.</sup> And in 1840, he writes the  
 following in his Journals: "I rode with Margaret Fuller to the plains. She  
 taxed me, as often before, so now more explicitly, with inhospitality of  
 soul. She and C. would gladly be my friends, yet our intercourse is not  
 friendship but literary gossip .... However, often we have met, we still meet  
 as strangers. They feel wronged in such relation and do not wish to be  
 catechized and criticised. I thought of my experience with several persons

8. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 202.

9. Journals, IV, 81.

10. Warfel, op.cit., p. 584.

11. James Elliot Cabor, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 277.

12. Journals, IV, 225.

13. Warfel, op.cit., p. 582.



which resembled this, and confessed that I would not converse with the dimmest person more than one week.... H. insisted that it was no friendship which was thus soon exhausted, and that I ought to know how to be silent and companionable at the same moment. She would surprise me, - she would have me say and do what surprised myself."<sup>14.</sup>

In this year, 1840, Margaret Fuller became editor of the Dial, and her correspondence with Emerson became much more frequent. Emerson was finally forced to explain the difficulties of their relationship in a letter to her later that same year. He says, "I was content and happy to meet on a human footing a woman of sense and sentiment, with whom one could exchange reasonable words .... That is to me a solid good; it is the foundation of everlasting friendship .... But tell me that I am cold or unkind, and, in my most flowing state, I become a cake of ice .... There is a difference in our constitution. We use a different rhetoric. It seems as if we had been born and bred in different nations. You say you understand me wholly. You cannot communicate yourself to me. I hear the words sometimes, but remain a stranger to your state of mind."<sup>15.</sup> The following passage, written in 1841, explains, to a great extent, the unfortunate manner in which Emerson and Fuller reacted on each other. He writes: "I would that I could, I know afar off that I cannot give the lights and shades, the hopes and the outlooks that come to me in these strange, cold-warm, attractive-repelling conversations with Margaret, whom I always admire, most revere when I nearest see, and sometimes love; yet whom I freeze and who freezes me to silence when we seem to promise to come nearest."<sup>16.</sup> Emerson admits their great differences in temperament again in the chapters which he wrote for her memoir. He says, "She lived at a rate so much faster than mine, and which was violent com-

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14. Journals, V, 451 - 452.

15. Cabot, op. cit., I, 368 - 369.

16. Journals, VI, 87.

pared with mine .... I had always an impression that her energy was too much a force of blood, and therefore never felt the security for her peace which belongs to more purely intellectual natures .... Her strength was not my strength."<sup>17.</sup> Later he adds; "Our moods were very different; and I remember, that, at the very moment when I, slow and cold, had come fully to admire her genius, and was congratulating myself on the solid good understanding which existed between us, I was surprised with hearing it taxed by her with superfineity and halfness. She stigmatized our friendship as commercial."<sup>18.</sup> Fortunately, after 1842, her expectations grew more moderate and she finally accepted friendship on his principles."<sup>19.</sup>

In spite of the differences in their temperaments and the clash of their personalities, they admired each other tremendously. Margaret Fuller owed a great deal to Emerson's influence, and I think that she, in turn, must have had some effect on him. He speaks of her in one place as a "Friendly influence."<sup>20.</sup> His influence on her is much more noticeable, however. Her literary criticism is almost a direct outgrowth of his because she judges from within and bases her objections to American literature on Emerson's grounds of cultural dependence and materialism. She admitted that she owed her spiritual growth to Emerson. She said, "His influence has been more beneficial to me than that of any American, and from him I first learned what is meant by the inward life."<sup>21.</sup> At another time she adds, "He stops me from doing anything and makes me think."<sup>22.</sup> However, if Emerson made her

17. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 228.

18. Ibid., p. 288.

19. Warfel, op. cit., p. 593

20. Journals, V, 292.

21. Moncure Daniel Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p. 89.

22. George Willis Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 105.



think, she seems to have had much the same effect on him. In a letter to his brother William, written in 1836, we read, "An accomplished lady is staying with Lidian now, Miss Margaret Fuller. She is quite an extraordinary person for her apprehensiveness, her acquisitions, and her power of conversation. It is always a great refreshment to see a very intelligent person. It is like being set in a large place. You stretch your limbs and dilate to your utmost size."<sup>23.</sup>

Emerson's criticisms of Margaret Fuller's writings are particularly interesting because he was her teacher in the field of criticism, because of their peculiar personal relations, and because of their association through the Dial. One of his longest comments on Miss Fuller appears in his Journals for 1843 when he writes: "Margaret. A pure and purifying mind, self purifying also, full of faith in men, and inspiring it. Unable to find any companion great enough to receive the rich effusions of her thought, so that her riches are still unknown and seem unknowable .... All natures seem poor beside one so rich, which pours a stream of amber over all objects, clean and unclean, that be in its path; and makes that comely and presentable which was mean in itself; We are taught by her plenty how lifeless and outward we were, what poor Laplanders burrowing under the snows of prudence and pedantry .... She has great sincerity, force, and fluency as a writer, yet her powers of speech throw her writing into the shade. What method, what exquisite judgment, as well as energy, in the selection of her words; what character and wisdom they convey .... Meantime, all this pathos of sentiment and riches of literature, and of invention, and this march of character threatening to arrive presently at the shores and plunge into the sea of Buddhism and mystic trances, consists with a boundless

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23. Cabot, op. cit., p. 274- 275.

fun and drollery, with light satire, and the most entertaining conversation in America." <sup>24.</sup> A few days later he adds: "I read again the verses of Margaret(Fuller) with the new commentary of beautiful anecdotes she had given freshly in my mind. Of course the poems grew golden, the twig blossomed in my hands; but a poem should not need its relation to life to explain it." <sup>25.</sup>

Emerson pays a fine tribute to Margaret Fuller in his Journals for 1850, after her tragic death by shipwreck. "To the last her country proves inhospitable to her; brave, eloquent, subtle, accomplished, devoted, constant soul; if Nature availed in America to give birth to many such as she, freedom and honour and letters and art too were safe in this New World .... Her heart, which few knew, was as great as her mind, which all knew .... I have lost her in my audience .... She poured a stream of amber over the endless store of private anecdotes, of bosom histories, which her wonderful persuasion drew out of all to her. When I heard that a trunk of her correspondence had been found and opened, I felt what a panic would strike all her friends, for it was as if a clever reporter had got underneath a confessional and agreed to report all that transpired, there in Wall Street, Oh, yes, 'Margaret and her Friends' must be written but not post-haste. It is an essential line of American <sup>26.</sup> history."

Emerson is referring to Miss Fuller's letters to "C.S." when he writes, "They are full of probity, talent and wit, full of friendship, ardent affections, full of noble aspirations. They are tainted with a female mysticism which to me appears merely an affair of constitution .... In our noble Margaret her personal feeling colors all her judgment of persons, of books, of pictures,

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24. Journals, VI, 363 - 366.

25. Journals, VI, 369.

26. Journals, VIII, 115 - 119.



and of the laws of the world. This is easily felt in common women - but when the speaker has such brilliant talent and literature as Margaret, she gives so many fine names to these merely sensuous and subjective objects that the hearer is long imposed upon and so precise and glittering nomenclature cannot be of mere muscae volitantes, but must be of some real ornithology hitherto unknown to him." <sup>27.</sup> There is also an interesting comment on Fuller in a letter to Carlyle, written in 1846: "Margaret Fuller's work as critic of all new books, critic of the drama, of music, and good arts in New York, has been honorable to her. Still this employment is not satisfactory to me. She is full of all nobleness, and with the generosity native to her mind and character appears to me an exotic in New England, a foreigner from some more sultry and expansive climate. She is, I suppose, the earliest lover of Goethe in this Country, and nobody here knows him so well. Her love too of whatever is good in French, and specially in Italian genius, gives her the best title to travel. In short, she is our citizen of the world by quite special diploma." <sup>28.</sup>

Much of Emerson's best criticism of Margaret Fuller appears in the chapters he wrote for her Memoirs. He says, "Her satire was only the pastime and necessity of her talent, the play of superabundant animal spirits." <sup>29.</sup> Again he writes: "In the Dial, in July, 1841, she wrote an article on Goethe, which is, on many accounts, her best paper." <sup>30.</sup> On the whole, however, he did not have a very high opinion of Miss Fuller as a writer. In the Memoirs he again says, "In short, Margaret often loses

27. Journals, VIII, 142 - 143.

28. Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 115 - 116.

29. Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, p. 203.

30. Ibid., pp. 243 - 244.

herself in sentimentalism.... here was a head so creative of new colors, of wonderful gleams, - so iridescent that it piqued curiosity, and stimulated thought, and communicated mental activity, but she was too indulgent to the meteors of her fancy." <sup>31.</sup> He adds, "Her pen was a non-conductor," <sup>32.</sup> and "In book or journal she found a very imperfect expression of herself." <sup>33.</sup> In another place he writes: "In her writing she was prone to spin her sentences without a sure guidance, and beyond the sympathy of her readers." <sup>34.</sup> Emerson also criticized Miss Fuller for her interpretation of Nature, because it was too shallow. To Emerson, Nature was a means of communication with the Over-Soul; to Fuller Nature was beautiful but it had no deeper spiritual significance. Emerson says, "Margaret's love of beauty made her, of course, a votary of nature, but rather for pleasurable excitement than with a deep poetic feeling. Margaret made many vain attempts to describe landscape, and, to a lover of nature, who knows that every day has new and inimitable lights and shades, one of these descriptions is as vapid as the raptures of a citizen arrived at his first meadow. Of course, he is charmed, <sup>35.</sup> but, of course, he cannot tell what he sees or what pleases him."

As a final estimate of Margaret Fuller's position in the field of American letters, Emerson's best judgment occurs in one of his latest Journals. He writes: "Now, unhappily, Margaret's writing, does not justify <sup>36.</sup> any such research. All that can be said is that she represents an interesting hour and group of American cultivation; then that she herself was a fine,

31. Ibid., p. 280.

32. Ibid., p. 294.

33. Ibid., p. 324.

34. Ibid., p. 337.

35. Ibid., pp. 263 - 264.

36. Emerson is here referring to some research work of Miss Fuller which Miss Josephine Peabody, Elizabeth Peabody's sister, was then doing.





generous, inspiring, vinous, eloquent, talker, who did not outlive her influence; and a kind of justice requires of us a monument, because crowds of vulgar people taunt her with want of position." <sup>37.</sup> With this estimate we leave Emerson's "Cassandra." <sup>38.</sup>

Emerson and Fuller had the same standards of criticism, but Miss Fuller could not write, as Emerson knew and admitted, He objected to her mystical tendencies, and, as with Goethe, to her love of culture ~~for~~ its own sake. Also, Miss Fuller was concerned with the evils of society, while Emerson was interested in the goodness of the individuals. He also objected to her spiritual perception of Nature. Margaret Fuller was too sentimental, too emotional, and too intense for Emerson, in her temperament as well as in her writings.

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37. Journals, VIII, 250.

38. Journals, IX, 201.

## WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING ( the younger )

William Ellery Channing, the younger, was a nephew of Emerson's earliest idol, Dr. Channing. He is usually referred to merely as Ellery Channing to distinguish him from his famous uncle. Ellery Channing was a poet, brilliant but incalculable. He left Harvard because it bored him and settled down in Concord so that he could write his poetry and be near Emerson. Although he wrote and had published some half dozen volumes of poetry in his lifetime, he was almost unknown as 'a poet in his own day, and he certainly is an obscure figure today. Poe, in "Graham's Magazine", attacked Channing's first verse so devastatingly that it was no wonder Channing was unable to achieve any reputation afterwards. Much to the disgust of Emerson and Thoreau, he carried his Transcendentalism so far into his poetry that after he had been inspired to write something he would not change a line of it. Besides his poetry, he wrote prose for the Dial. He also wrote a Life of Thoreau and edited some of Thoreau's posthumous works. He was really a closer friend of Thoreau than he was of Emerson, but he was the only person besides Thoreau whom Emerson enjoyed walking with. In his essay, "Concord Walks," in the volume Natural History of the Intellect, Emerson, speaking of the value of a good and skillful companion on his walks, refers to Channing when he says, "If one is so happy as to find the company of a true artist, he is a perpetual holiday and benefactor, and ought only to be used like an oriflamme or a garland, for feasts and lay-days, and parliaments of wit and love."<sup>1</sup> But besides valuing Ellery Channing as a walking companion, Emerson had a remarkably high opinion of at least some of Channing's poetry.

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1. Works, XII, 176; Journals, VIII, 130 - 131.

Emerson's first criticism of Channing was written in 1840. He says, "Channing's poetry and -----'s have a certain merit which unfits them for print. They are proper manuscript inspirations, honest, great, but crude. They have never been filed or defiled for the eye that studies surface ... This is the right poetry of hope, no French correctness, but Hans Sachs and Chaucer rather." <sup>2.</sup> A year later Emerson adds, "But Ellery, though he has fine glances and a poetry that is like an exquisite nerve communicating by thrills, yet is a very imperfect artist, and, as it now seems, will never finish anything. He does not even like to distinguish between what is good and what is not, in his verses, would fain have it all pass for good, for the best, and claim inspiration for the worst lines." <sup>3.</sup>

Emerson's longest criticism of Channing appears in 1843. "Ellery's verses should be called poetry for poets, they touch the fine pulses of thought and will be the cause of more poetry and of verses more finished and better turned than themselves; but I cannot blame the North American and Knickerbocker, if they should not suspect his genius .... and when Ellery's muse finds an aim, whether some passion or some fast faith, any kind of thing on which all these wild and sometimes brilliant beads can be strung, we shall have a poet. Now he fantasies merely, as dilettanti in music. He breaks faith continually with the intellect. The sonnet has merits, fine lines, gleams of deep thought, well worth sounding, worth studying, if only I could confide that he had any steady meaning before him, that he kept faith with himself; but I fear that he changed his purpose with every verse,

2. Journals, V, 417.

3. Journals, VI, 46.

was led up and down, ~~to~~ this and that, with the exigencies of the rhyme, and only wanted to write and rhyme somewhat, careless how or what, and stopped when he came to the end of the paper." <sup>4.</sup>

And again he says, "I hate this sudden crystallization in my poets. A pleasing poem, but here is a rude expression, a feeble line, a wrong word. 'I am sorry' returns the poet, 'but it stands so written.'" <sup>5.</sup>

Several years later, in 1847, we find Emerson remarking that "Ellery Channing has written a lively book on Rome .... He has the reputation of being a man of genius and this is some guarantee of it; he has approached sometimes the lightness and pungency of his talk, but not often." <sup>6.</sup> A little earlier in this journal he writes, "A mood suffices Ellery Channing for a poem. 'There, I have sketched more or less in that color and style, You have a sample of it. What more would you get, if I should work on forever?' He has no proposition to support or affirm. He scorns it. He has, first of all Americans, a natural flow, and can say that he will. I say to him, 'If I could write as well as you, I would write a great deal better.'" <sup>7.</sup>

Eight years later, in 1855, we find Emerson commenting again that "Ellery Channing's poetry has the merit of being genuine, and not the metrical commonplaces of the magazine, but it is painfully incomplete. He has not kept faith with the reader; 'tis shamefully indolent and slovenly. He should have lain awake all night to find the right rhyme for a verse, and he has availed himself of the first one that came; so that it is all a babyish incompleteness." <sup>8.</sup>

4. Journals, VI, 357 - 358.

5. Journals, VI, 243.

6. Journals, VII, 303.

7. Journals, VII, 230.

8. Journals, VIII, 541.

Emerson also says that, "He has a more poetic temperament than any other in America, but the artistic executive power of completing a design, he has not. His poetry is like the artless warbling of a vireo .... He must have instruction also."<sup>9.</sup>

Channing's poetry is indigenous to New England and I think Emerson liked it for this reason. He writes, "Channing, who writes a poem for our fields, begins to help us. That is construction ...."<sup>10.</sup> And again, he says, "And Ellery makes a hazy, indefinite impression, as of miscellaneous music, without any theme or tune. Still, it is an autumnal air and like the smell of the herb, 'Life Everlasting' and syngeneious flowers. 'Near Home' is a poem which would delight the heart of Wordsworth, though genuinely original, and with a sympathy of plan that allows the writer to leave out all prose. 'Tis a series of sketches of natural objects, such as abound in New England, enwreathed by the thoughts they suggest to a contemplative pilgrim."<sup>11.</sup>

Emerson's last criticism of Ellery Channing in his Journals does not appear until 1871, when he writes, "Channing's poetry does not regard the reader. It is written to himself; it is his strict experience, the record of his moods, of his fancies, of his observations and studies, and will interest good readers as such .... He will write as he has ever written, whether he has readers or not. But his poems have to me and to others an exceptional value for this reason. We have not been considered in their composition, but either defied or forgotten, and therefore read them securely, as original pictures

9. Journals, IX, 54.

10. Journals, IX, 184.

11. Journals, IX, 180 - 181.

which add something to our knowledge, and with a fair chance to be surprised  
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 and refreshed by a novel experience."

Emerson's criticisms of Ellery Channing as they appear in the Journals tend to be adverse, rather than favorable. Even when Emerson is praising Channing's poetry in the Journals, he always mentions Channing's limitations and defects. His attitude as it appears in his reviews of Channing for the Dial is quite different, however. In the Dial papers there is no censure but only unreserved praise. This is interesting because one would be inclined to accept the Journals as the more accurate expression of Emerson's true opinion. However, the inconsistency is not as great as it would appear, because the Dial papers were written between 1840 and 1843 and even his comments in his Journals are rather favorable then. In the years after that Emerson seems to have acquired a better and more critical perspective on Channing's poetry. His reviews of Channing as they appeared in the Dial are interesting, however, not only for themselves but for the glimpse they give us of that paper.

In his review entitled, "New Poetry" Emerson is speaking of Channing's verses when he says, "Our first feeling on reading them was a lively joy. So then the Muse is neither dead nor dumb, but has found a voice in these cold Cisatlantic States. Here is poetry which asks no aid of magnitude or number, of blood or crime, but finds theatre enough in the first field or brookside, breadth and depth enough in the flow of its own thought. Here is self-repose, which to our mind is stabler than the Pyramids; here is self-respect which leads a man to date from his heart more proudly than from Rome. Here is love which sees through surface, and adores the gentle

nature and not the costume. Here is religion, which is not of the Church of England, nor of the Church of Boston. Here is the good wise heart, which sees that the end of culture is strength and cheerfulness. In an age too which tends with so strong an inclination to the philosophical muse, here is poetry more purely intellectual than any American verses we have yet seen, distinguished from all competition by two merits; the fineness of perception; and the poet's trust in his own genius ...." <sup>13.</sup>

Emerson follows this laudatory comment with several examples of Channing's poetry and he concludes the review by exclaiming, "May the right hand that has so written never lose its cunning! May this voice of love and harmony teach its songs to the too long silent echoes of the Western Forest." <sup>14.</sup>

In a later review (1843) Emerson continues in much the same vein although with less detail. He says, "we have already expressed our faith in Mr. Channing's genius, which in some of the finest and rarest traits of the poet is without a rival in this country. This little volume has already become a sign of a great hope and encouragement to the lovers of the muse. The refinement and sincerity of his mind. not less than the originality and delicacy of the diction are not merits to be suddenly apprehended, but are sure to find a cordial appreciation. We would willingly invite any lover of poetry to read "The Earth-Spirit," "Reverence," "The Lover's Song," "Death," and "The Poet's Hope." <sup>15.</sup>

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13. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV, 512 - 513.

14. Ibid., p. 524.

15. Ibid., p. 551



Emerson's opinion of Ellery Channing appears again in his correspondence. In a letter to John Sterling<sup>16.</sup> Emerson writes, "I love Ellery so much as to have persuaded myself that he is a true poet, if these lines should not show it. Read them with as much love in advance as you can."<sup>17.</sup> A very similar passage occurs in a letter to Carlyle in 1843 when Emerson mentions Channing's poems and says, "....Whereof give me, I pray you, the best opinion you can. I am determined he shall be a poet, and you must find him such."<sup>18.</sup>

In a few instances, Emerson's opinion of Ellery Channing as a poet seems to be influenced by his fondness for Channing as a person. On the whole, however, he realized that he could never make a poet of Channing, and he was perfectly cognizant of his weaknesses. Emerson believed in writing from intuition as Channing wrote, but he also believed that what was written by inspiration could be revised carefully afterwards. Ellery Channing, like Jones Very, carried his belief in intuition. To an extreme which Emerson could not accept. But he did approve of Channing for his artist's appreciation of Nature and because he saw in some of Channing's verses the beginning of an indigenous American literature.

16. Emerson and Sterling never met but both men were influenced by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and especially by Carlyle. Carlyle brought them into contact with one another by letter and they corresponded rather frequently until Sterling's premature death.
17. Correspondence of Emerson and Sterling, p. 77.
18. Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, p. 39.

## XI.

## EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF THOREAU.

Emerson's criticism of Thoreau is important because Thoreau is one of the few writers of Emerson's day whose reputation has been increasing rather than declining and because Emerson was one of the first critics to appreciate Thoreau's genius. If Emerson influenced Thoreau, he was in turn influenced by Thoreau, and for this reason the relationship between the two men becomes most significant. Emerson heard of Thoreau while the latter was still at Harvard, and he wrote to President Quincy recommending him for a scholarship. They met in 1837, after Thoreau's graduation. Thoreau was twenty, Emerson was thirty-four. They became friends immediately and this friendship lasted until Thoreau's untimely death in 1862. Thoreau came back to his family in Concord after he left Harvard, and his friendship with Emerson ripened rapidly. The only two people whom Emerson enjoyed walking with were Thoreau and Ellery Channing; Emerson and Channing were the only two whom Thoreau enjoyed. These walks were important in the development of their friendship and in the exchange of their ideas. Their influence on each other was mutual - Emerson owed as much to Thoreau in respect to the material world as Thoreau owed to him in respect to the world of spirit.<sup>1</sup> Thoreau added a scientific, factual foundation to Emerson's poetic flights of imagination about Nature. However, it was really Emerson's philosophy of Nature which Thoreau adopted and then carried to a point to which Emerson could not go.<sup>2</sup> Thoreau carried Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and

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1. Norman Foerster, Nature in American Literature, p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 41.

individualism to its logical extreme. Although Thoreau taught Emerson how to really appreciate Nature, how to really see and hear and describe and interpret her manifestations, nevertheless the two men did not accept Nature in the same way. Thoreau sought Truth in Nature; Emerson accepted Nature as a symbol of the Truth which lay beyond Nature. Both men were probably influenced by each other's beliefs, and in spite of the difference in their temperaments as well as in their beliefs their friendship continued to prosper. In 1841 Emerson asked Thoreau to come and live with him so that he could learn the art of manual labor from Thoreau. To his brother William, Emerson wrote the following: "He is to have his board for what labor he chooses to do, and he is thus far a great benefactor and physician to me, for he is an indefatigable and a very skilful laborer, and I work with him as I should not without him, and expect to be suddenly well and strong. Thoreau is a scholar and a poet, and as full of buds of promise as a young apple-tree."<sup>3</sup> Thoreau lived at the Emersons from 1841 to 1843, and he was greatly loved by the whole family. In 1843 Thoreau and Emerson were drawn even more closely together by the Dial. Thoreau had joined the Transcendental Club rather late, but he does unquestionably represent one aspect of transcendentalism. His transcendentalism manifests itself "as a spiritualized feeling for nature, a fine dissolvent of convention, a pervasive and contagious influence toward natural and simple living."<sup>4</sup> Thoreau aided Emerson in editing the Dial, and he exerted a salutary effect on the magazine both in his own contributions and in the watchful eye he kept on the contributions of others.<sup>5</sup> Thoreau, like Emerson, was a pioneer of American Oriental studies, and together they made

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3. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, II, 447.

4. Cambridge History of American Literature, I, 345.

5. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 291.

selections from the great bibles of the world for the Dial. This was really the first attempt in America to encourage appreciation for these ethnical scriptures. <sup>6.</sup>

During this year, 1834, Emerson and Thoreau carried on a copious correspondence. Much of it concerns the Dial, but much of it also serves to reveal the warm, human values underlying their friendship. <sup>7.</sup>

In 1845 Thoreau took up his abode at Walden, but in 1847, while Emerson was in England, he again took up his abode as paterfamilias at the Emersons. During this period their correspondence again flourished, although after Emerson's return home their friendship grew colder. They saw less of each other because when they were together they argued almost incessantly.

Thoreau felt that Emerson patronized him, that Emerson belonged to the upper classes. <sup>8.</sup> However, Thoreau never really lost his great respect and admiration for Emerson, while many of Emerson's most appreciative comments on Thoreau were written during this period. Emerson also wrote a fine tribute to Thoreau after the latter's premature death in 1862, and, with Channing, published Thoreau's posthumous books and collected his letters. Emerson's criticism of Thoreau is of the utmost importance for two reasons. The intimate personal relationship of the two men and Emerson's early recognition of Thoreau's genius both give his criticism real significance. However, if Emerson saw a value in Thoreau which most of his contemporaries failed to see, he was also perfectly aware of his defects at the same time. Emerson's estimate of Thoreau, made almost a century ago, coincides to a remarkable extent with the opinion of most of our present-day critics.

6. George Willis Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 85.

7. F. B. Sanborn, "The Emerson - Thoreau Correspondence," Atlantic Monthly L XIX (May, 1892), p. 577.

8. Brooks, op. cit., p. 296.

Thoreau's name appears as frequently as any other in Emerson's Journals, for Emerson not only comments on Thoreau but quotes his sentiments with deep approval. Emerson's first comment on Thoreau appears in his Journals for 1833, when he writes: "I delight much in my young friend who seems to have as free and erect a mind as any I have ever met."<sup>9</sup> A year later, in 1839, Emerson says, "Last night, came to me a beautiful poem from Henry Thoreau, 'Sympathy.' The purest strain, and the loftiest, I think, that has yet pealed from this unpoetic American forest."<sup>10</sup> This same year he writes to Carlyle, saying, "I have a young poet in this village named Thoreau, who writes the truest verses."<sup>11</sup> And a little later he compares the poetry of Thoreau and Ellery Channing favorably with Landor, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Augustine.<sup>12</sup> Emerson is beginning to become a little more critical of Thoreau, however, with the passing of the years. In 1841, after Thoreau had come to live with him, Emerson writes: "I am familiar with all his thoughts - they are my own quite originally dressed. But if the question be, what new ideas has he thrown into circulation, he has not yet told that which he was created to say."<sup>13</sup> A year later we read, "Last night Henry Thoreau read me verses which pleased, if not by beauty of particular lines, yet by the honest truth, and by the length of flight and strength of wing; for most of our poets are only writers of lines or of epigrams. These of Henry's at least have rude strength, and we do not come to the bottom of the mine. Their fault is, that the gold does not yet flow pure, but is drossy and crude .... But it is a great pleasure to have poetry of the second

9. Journals, III, 395.

10. Journals, V, 241.

11. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 256.

12. Journals, V, 282.

13. Journals, VI, 74.



degree also, and mass here, as in other instances, is some compensation for superior quality, for I find myself stimulated and rejoiced like one who should see a cargo of sea-shells .... though there should be no pearl-oyster nor one shell of great rarity and value among them." <sup>14.</sup> Emerson valued Thoreau for his "simplicity and clear perception," <sup>15.</sup> but at the same time he and Thoreau used to argue frequently. He accuses Thoreau of the "fault of unlimited contradiction," and says that a paper of Thoreau's makes him "nervous and wretched to read it, with all its merits." <sup>16.</sup> And again he says, "Henry will never be a writer; he is active as a shoemaker." <sup>17.</sup> This same year, in a letter to Carlyle, he writes, "Henry Thoreau - a poet whom you may one day be proud of; a noble manly youth, full of melodies, and inventions." <sup>18.</sup> One of Emerson's most interesting criticisms of Thoreau appears in a letter to Thoreau himself, written in 1843 while Emerson, with Thoreau's assistance, was editing the Dial. Speaking of Thoreau's poem "Winter Walk" he writes: "I mean to send the Winter's Walk to the printer tomorrow for the Dial. I had some hesitation about it, notwithstanding its faithful observation and its fine sketches of the pickerel-fisher and of the woodchopper, on account of mannerism, an old charge of mine, - as if, by attention, one could get the tricks of rhetoric; for example, to call a cold place sultry, a solitude public, a wilderness domestic (a favorite word), and in the woods to insult over cities, whilst the woods, again, are dignified by comparing them to cities and armies." <sup>19.</sup>

Emerson's next comment on Thoreau appears three years later, in 1846, in a

14. Journals, VI, 304 - 305.

15. Journals, IV, 397.

16. Journals, VI, 440 - 441.

17. Journals, VI, 463.

18. The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 335.

19. F. B. Sanborn, "The Emerson-Thoreau Correspondence," Atlantic Monthly.





letter to a friend. He says, "In a short time, if Wiley and Putnam smile, you shall have Henry Thoreau's Excursion on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, a seven days' voyage in as many chapters, pastoral as Isaac Walton, spicy as flag-root, broad and deep as Menu. He read me some of it under an oak on the river-bank the other afternoon, and invigorated me." <sup>20.</sup> Two years later, in 1848, we read, "Henry Thoreau is like the wood-god who solicits the wandering poet and draws him into antres vast and deserts idle, and bereaves him of his memory, and leaves him naked, plaiting vines and with twigs in his hand." <sup>21.</sup>

A few months afterwards he writes: "Nothing so marks a man as bold imaginative expressions, Henry Thoreau promises to make as good sentences of that kind as anybody." <sup>22.</sup> His next comment is less favorable, however, for he adds,

"Thoreau wants a little ambition in his mixture. Fault of this, instead of being the head of American engineers, he is captain of huckleberry party." <sup>23.</sup>

But Emerson must have known that Thoreau preferred the huckleberry party to the engineers. Emerson admitted more than once the mental likeness between himself and Thoreau. In 1852 he says: "Thoreau gives me, in flesh and blood and pertinacious Saxon belief, my own ethics. He is far more real, and daily practically obeying them, than I; and fortifies my memory at all times with an affirmative experience which refuses to be set aside." <sup>24.</sup> His next

comment on Thoreau appears in 1854, after the publication of Walden. He writes to a friend that "All American kind are delighted with Walden, as far as they have dared say. The little pond sinks in these very days as

20. Cabot, op.cit., p. 204.

21. Journals, VII, 498.

22. Journals, VIII, 178.

23. Journals, VIII, 228.

24. Journals, VIII, 303.



tremulous as its human frame. I do not know if the book has come to you yet, but it is cheerful, sparkling, readable, with all kinds of merits, and rising sometimes to very great heights. We account Henry the undoubted king of all American lions."<sup>25.</sup>

However, at this time Emerson's conversations with Thoreau begin to become less frequent, probably because of the arguments they had while they were together. From 1856 until 1859 Emerson's remarks on Thoreau are almost entirely criticisms of Thoreau's argumentative nature. He says, "If I knew only Thoreau, I should think cooperation of good men impossible .... Centrality<sup>26.</sup> he has, strong understanding, and the higher gifts, - the insight of the real, or from the real, and the moral rectitude that belongs to it; but all this and all his resources of wit and invention are lost to me, in every experiment, year after year, that I make, to hold intercourse with his mind. Always some weary captious paradox to fight you with, and the time and temper wasted."

In the last few years of Thoreau's life, Emerson became less hostile again. In 1862 he writes: "A man must have his root in Nature, draw his power directly from it, as a farmer, a miller .... or Thoreau, or Agassiz does."<sup>27.</sup> Again he says, "Henry avoids commonplace, and talks birch bark to all comers, reduces them all to the same significance."<sup>28.</sup> Shortly after Thoreau's death Emerson writes: "If there is a little strut in the style of Henry, it is only from a vigour in excess of the size of his body. I see many generals without a command, besides Henry."<sup>29.</sup> Emerson was one of the first men to appreciate Thoreau's journals, which remained

25. Cabot, op.cit., p. 284.

26. Journals, IX, 15 - 16.

27. Journals, X, 400.

28. Journals, IX, 117.

29. Journals, IX, 427.

unpublished for so many years, but which today form a great part of the foundation on which Thoreau's reputation rests. Emerson is speaking of his memory of Thoreau when he says, "Henry Thoreau remains erect, calm, self-subsistent, before me, and I read him most truly in his Journal, but he is not long out of mind when I walk, and, as today, row upon the pond." <sup>30.</sup>

Emerson must have realized he owed much of his own appreciation of Nature to Thoreau, but I do not think he realized the significance of his forecast about Thoreau: "If we should ever print **Henry's Journals**, you may look for a plentiful crop of naturalists. Young men of sensibility must fall an easy prey to the charming of Pan's pipes." <sup>31.</sup> And in 1863 Emerson writes:

"In reading Henry Thoreau's journal, I am very sensible of the vigour of his constitution. That oaken strength which I noted whenever he walked or worked .... Henry shows in his literary task. He has muscle, and ventures on and performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him, I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality. 'Tis as if I went into a gymnasium and saw youths leap, climb, and swing with a force unapproachable, though their feats are only continuations of my initial grapplings and jumps." <sup>32.</sup> The last two re-

ferences to Thoreau in Emerson's Journals occur in 1870 and 1871 when he speaks of Thoreau's "affirmative genius," <sup>33.</sup> and when he refers to Thoreau as belonging to the class of drastic men, the class of men who can do things. <sup>34.</sup>

30. Journals, IX, 425.

31. Journals, IX, 430.

32. Journals, IX, 522.

33. Journals, X, 312.

34. Journals, X, 341.

Not only does Emerson mention Thoreau very frequently in his Journals, but Charles Woodbury, in his Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, says that Emerson talked most often (and most tenderly) of Thoreau.<sup>35.</sup> Of Thoreau Emerson said, "His character reminds me of Massillon. One could jeopard anything on him. A limpid man, a realist with caustic eyes that looked through all words and shows and bearing with terrible perceptions. He was a greater Stoic than Zeno or Scaevola or Xenophanes - greater, because nothing of impurity clung to him, a man whose core and whose breath was conscience .... His fault was that he brought nothing near to his heart, he kept all influences toward his extremities."<sup>36.</sup> At another time Emerson said, "His style has been sometimes criticized as opaque, but that is a quality frequently found in the reader. It was a style that refused compromise as did the man.... It is better to translate him than Epictetus or Marcus Antonius. He looked inward, inward at the soul of things. Conscientious, earnest, he talked in plain words to the superstitious, and commanded his publishers not to change a line. Thus his pages seem profane and sometimes blasphemous. He did not hesitate at shocking any weather worn creed or belief. His poetry is of a new order .... He was penetrated with the elder classical influence; he breathed the antique. Yet it was impossible for him to copy words or anything.... Thoreau has an always increasing number of readers, and the selectest class of any American in all Christendom. The Week on the Concord River is his noblest work, pervaded with delightful ideas."<sup>37.</sup>

Thoreau is also one of the few writers whom Emerson mentions in his essays. In "Greatness" he is speaking of Thoreau when he says, "You say of some new person, that man will go far - for you see in his manners that the

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35. Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 76.

36. Ibid., p. 79.

37. Ibid., pp. 88 - 90.

recognition of him by others is not necessary to him." <sup>38.</sup> Emerson's longest and most complete single criticism of Thoreau is in his essay "Thoreau" in Lectures and Biographical Sketches. Thoreau was an individualist and an iconoclast from his earliest years, and Emerson calls him, "the bachelor

of thought and Nature." <sup>39.</sup> A few pages later Emerson says, "No truer American existed than Thoreau. His preference of his country and condition was genuine, and his aversion from English and European manners and tastes almost reached contempt." <sup>40.</sup> Emerson continues, "He had a strong common

sense .... He had always a new resource .... He lived for the day, not cumbered and mortified by his memory." <sup>41.</sup> Emerson attributes Thoreau's genius to more than his common sense, however. He says, "I must add the cardinal fact, that there was an excellent wisdom in him, proper to a rare class of men, which showed him the material world as a means and symbol. This discovery, which sometimes yields to poets a certain casual and interrupted light, was in him an unsleeping insight." <sup>42.</sup>

Emerson realized that Thoreau was truly one of the first real American men of letters, for he says: "Mr. Thoreau dedicated his genius with such entire love to the fields, hills and waters of his native town that he made them known and interesting to all reading Americans, and to people over the sea." <sup>43.</sup>

Of Thoreau as a poet Emerson writes: "His poetry might be bad or good; he no doubt wanted a lyric quality and technical skill, but he had the source of poetry in his spiritual perception .... His own verses are often rude and defective. The gold does not yet run pure, is drossy and crude. The thyme

38. Society and Solitude, Works, VIII, 303.

39. Works, X, 454.

40. Works, X, 459.

41. Works, X, 462.

42. Works, X, 464.

43. Works, X, 466.



and marjoram are not yet honey. But if he want lyric fineness and technical merits, if he have not the poetic temperament, he never lacks the casual thought, showing that his genius was better than his talent .... his poem entitled "'Sympathy'" reveals the tenderness under that triple steel of stoicism, and the intellectual subtilty it could animate. His classic poem 'Smoke' suggests Simonides, but is better than any poem of Simonides." <sup>44</sup>

In concluding this essay on Thoreau, Emerson says: "The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost. It seems an injury that he should leave in the midst his broken task which none else can finish, a kind of indignity to so noble a soul that he should depart out of Nature before yet he has been really shown to his peers for what he is .... Wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, ~~wherever~~ there is beauty, he will find a home." <sup>45</sup>

Emerson's last reference to Thoreau was made in 1873 in his address at the opening of the Concord public library. His criticism of Thoreau ends, appropriately enough, on an optimistic and prophetic note. He says, "Henry Thoreau we all remember as a man of genius, and of marked character, known to our farmers as the most skillful of surveyors, and indeed better acquainted with their forests and meadows and trees than themselves, but more widely known as the writer of some of the best books which have been written in this country, and which, I am persuaded, have not yet gathered half their fame ...." <sup>46</sup>

Emerson's prophecies about Thoreau's future reputation have proved remarkably accurate. Thoreau has really begun to come into his own only since

44. Works, X, 474 - 476.

45. Works, X, 484 - 485.

46. Miscellaneous, Works, XI, 500.





the publication of his complete Journal in 1906. Before that time Thoreau was often charged with imitation of Emerson, and he was frequently judged as a lesser Emerson. The two men did have much in common, and, to an extent, they did influence each other, but both remained decided individualists.

Emerson liked Thoreau for his adherence to Truth, and to the moral sentiment. He approved of Thoreau because Thoreau, like himself, had spiritual insight and saw the material world as a symbol. Their results were different, however, for Thoreau remained interested in the facts of Nature for their own sake as well as for their transcendental connotation. Emerson's love of Nature grew deeper through his association with Thoreau, but he could never approach Nature from the purely scientific point of view as Thoreau could. There was also a difference in the temperaments of the two men. Emerson was genial and kindly while Thoreau was sharp and bitter. Emerson did not like society, but he tolerated it at least. Thoreau's aversion to society was so strong that it often manifested itself in sheer rudeness. This was Emerson's individualism and self-reliance carried to an extreme that Emerson himself could not quite accept. However, in spite of their differences, the two men were friends throughout Thoreau's lifetime, and there is no doubt that each profited by the other; Emerson's criticisms of Thoreau as a writer show his keen judgment, and are especially interesting in the light of Thoreau's present position in American letters. He approved of Thoreau's use of American materials, and he enjoyed a few of Thoreau's poems, but, on the whole, he realized that the best of Thoreau's writing, the best of his thoughts and ideas, the best of the man himself, lay in his unpublished journals.

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## XII.

EMERSON'S CRITICISM OF THE NEW ENGLAND WRITERS OUTSIDE OF  
THE TRANSCENDENTAL GROUP.

The new England Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century was not a unified movement, at least not until the formation of the Saturday Club in 1855.<sup>1</sup> As Robert Morss Lovett says, "If the center of America's literary solar system in the first half of the nineteenth century was Massachusetts Bay, it was a binary star, with one nucleus at Cambridge and another at Concord."<sup>2</sup> Since the Concord group was composed of Transcendentalists, Concord became almost a synonym for the transcendental movement. The "Sage of Concord" was the leader of New England Transcendentalism; his neighbors were Bronson Alcott and Henry Thoreau and Ellery Channing, while the lesser lights of Transcendentalism such as Fuller, Very, and Newcomb were frequent visitors at Emerson's. The other half of literary New England made up the Boston and Cambridge group, the "Brahmin caste," as Holmes himself christened them. The Brahmins, Lowell, Holmes, and Longfellow, were the exact antithesis of the Transcendentalists, and the rise of this "genteel" literature parallels the Victorian period in England and represents the swing of the pendulum from transcendental individualism back to conventional conservatism. Parrington says: "There were other ideals than those of transcendentalism and social reform in the New England of the renaissance - ideals of culture, of scholarship, of belles lettres, to which the Brahmin mind contributed, and which came to dominate genteel New England and for a

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1. Fred Lewis Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, p. 578.

2. John Macy, American Writers on American Literature, p. 177.

generation largely influenced American letters .... Brahmin Boston might turn Unitarian with Channing, but it was at heart neither French romantic nor German idealist; it desired rather culture for its own sake, and scholarship it regarded as the handmaid of culture .... The essence of the genteel tradition was a refined ethic<sup>3</sup>ism."

Of course, there are a few New England authors, such as Bryant and Whittier, who do not really belong to either group, while one writer, Hawthorne, touches both groups. However, there is a line of demarcation between the Transcendentalists and the New England writers of Brahmin or rural New England classes, and it is this difference which makes Emerson's criticism of the non-Transcendentalists of particular interest. His judgments, except in the case of Hawthorne, have proved to be unusually accurate, although his comments on these New England writers are remarkably scarce considering the literary importance of these men and Emerson's relations with them.

The Saturday Club, which was founded in 1855 in an attempt to concentrate the literary forces of New England, was primarily a Harvard affair, composed of Harvard professors such as Holmes, Longfellow, Norton, Agassiz, and Pearce. A few Harvard alumni (Emerson, Dana, Motley, and Prescott) joined the club, and there were even fewer outsiders (Whittier and Hawthorne are the most outstanding)<sup>4</sup>. Emerson was the only Concord representative of any consequence, for Thoreau did not like social gatherings of any kind and Hawthorne, though a member, never entered into the spirit of the club in any way.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, II, 435.

4. Pattee, op. cit., p. 579.

5. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 504.

The Saturday Club is of the utmost importance not only because it gave Emerson a good basis on which to rest his criticism of this other New England group of writers, but because out of this club, in 1857, came the Atlantic Monthly. This was the first American magazine that was at all adequate; "one that at the same time could be as profound as Emerson and yet as sparkling as Holmes."<sup>6.</sup> Under Lowell's editorship, the Atlantic Monthly published much of the best work of the members of the the Saturday Club, although New England Renaissance was already beginning to show traces of decadence.

William Cullen Bryant was born a decade before Emerson, but in spirit he resembles the later group of New Englanders who did not accept Transcendentalism. Bryant used American materials, but he was untouched by Transcendentalism. Like the Cambridge writers, Bryant is under the shadow and influence of the Old World rather than of the new.<sup>6a.</sup> His faith in God is more like Longfellow's than Emerson's, and, unlike Emerson, he perceived Nature through the senses only, not intuitively. It is Bryant's orthodoxy which places him with the "Brahmins." Although Bryant moved to New York in 1825, in spirit he is definitely a New Englander, not a Knickerbocker.<sup>7.</sup> Emerson himself says, "Bryant is perfect; New York has not hurt him."<sup>8.</sup>

Emerson's first comment on Bryant appears in 1835; "If Milton, if Burns, if Bryant, is in the world, we have more tolerance, and more love for the changing sky, the mist, the rain, the bleak overcast day, the

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6. Pattee, op. cit., p. 579.

6a. Ibid., p. 310.

7. Ibid., p. 299.

8. Journals, X, 65.

indescribable sunrise and the immortal stars. If we believed no poet survived on the planet, nature would be tedious. " <sup>9.</sup> The following year he writes: "So of Bryant's poems, -- chaste, faultless, beautiful, but undercharacterized! So of Greenough's sculpture -- of Dr. Channing's preaching. They are all feminine or receptive, and not masculine, or creative." <sup>10.</sup> In 1838 we read "I have been to New York and seen Bryant and Dewey, and at home seen Jones Very .... and I begin to conceive hopes of the Republic." <sup>11.</sup> Five years later, in 1843, he says, "Ellery Channing's verse with all its imperfections is a better book for Poets than a whole volume of Bryant." <sup>12.</sup> This same year he mentions Bryant in a review of James Percival's poems written for the Dial; "Bryant has a superb propriety of feeling, has plainly always been in good society, but his sweet oaten pipe discourses only pastoral music." <sup>13.</sup>

In 1864, a Bryant Festival was held in New York. Emerson seems to have taken part in the festival, and his longest and most favorable comments on Bryant appear at this time. He writes: "Bryant has learned where to hang his titles, namely, by tying his mind to autumn woods, winter mornings, rain, brooks, mountains, evening winds, and wood-birds. Who speaks of these is forced to remember Bryant. He is American. Never despaired of the Republic. Dared name a joy and a gentian, crows also. His poetry is sincere. I think of the young poets that they have seen pictures of mountains and sea-shores, but in his that he has seen mountains and has the staff in his hand." <sup>14.</sup>

9. Journals, III, 449.

10. Journals, IV, 87.

11. Journals, IV, 423.

12. Journals, VI, 358.

13. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV, 554.

14. Journals, X, 76 - 77.



A few days later he adds: "Bryant. His sincere, balanced mind has the enthusiasm which perception of Nature inspires, but it did not tear him; only enabled him, gave him twice his power; he did not parade it, but hid it in his verse .... 'True bard, but simple.' I fear he has not escaped the infirmity of fame, like the presidential malady, a virus once in, not to be got out of the system; he has this, so cold and majestic as he sits there, - has this to a heat which has brought to him the devotion of all the young men and women who love poetry, and of all the old men and women who once were young. 'Tis a perfect tyranny. Talk of the shopmen who advertise their drugs or cosmetics on the walls and on the palisades and huge rocks along the railways;- why, this man, more cunning by far, has contrived to levy on all American Nature and subsidized every solitary forest and Monument Mountain in Berkshire or the Katskills, every waterfowl, every partridge, every gentian and golden rod, the prairies, the gardens of the desert, the song of the stars, the Evening Wind, - has bribed every one of these to speak for him, so that there is scarcely a feature of day and night in the country which does not - whether we will or not - recall the name of Bryant. This high-handed usurpation I charge him with, and on top of this, with persuading us and all mankind to hug our fetters and rejoice  
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in our subjugation."

Emerson held a high opinion of Bryant's poetry for its sincerity and for its use of American materials. In these respects Bryant was a forerunner  
16.  
of Emerson, as Emerson well knew.

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15. Journals, X, 80 - 82.

16. Robert M. Gay, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 228.



However, Emerson thought Bryant's poetry lacked force and character; it was too classical, and too conservative. Also, Emerson appreciated Bryant's careful observation and love of Nature, but Bryant did not carry this far enough to suit Emerson. **Bryant** saw the beauty of Nature through the senses; he saw this beauty as God's handiwork and as a soothing and healing virtue; Emerson went beyond this to view the natural world as a symbol of the spiritual world.

John Greenleaf Whittier was not a "Brahmin" but he is related to that group because his main interest was in ethicism and because he was not a Transcendentalist.<sup>17.</sup> However, Whittier's New England was not the New England of Boston and Cambridge but the Massachusetts of the village and farm. Emerson has surprisingly little comment on Whittier; he seems to have been in sympathy with Whittier mainly because Whittier, like himself, was an Abolitionist.

In 1839 he writes, "Abolition is poetic, has produced good verse, Whittier's, for example ...."<sup>18.</sup> However, it is almost twenty-five years later before Emerson says anything more about Whittier's poetry. It is not until 1863 that he says, "We can easily tell, of Whittier or Longfellow or Patmore, what suggestion they had, what styles of contemporaries have affected their own. We know all their possible feeders."<sup>19.</sup> This is one of Emerson's few criticisms of Longfellow also. The next year Emerson writes, in speaking of the bad influence of cities on literary men, that Whittier is still unspoiled.<sup>20.</sup> His only other comment on Whittier is a criticism not only of Whittier but of all the other literary figures of

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17. Parrington, op. cit., p. 362.

18. Journals, V, 301.

19. Journals, IX, 507 - 508.

20. Journals, X, 65.



the times. Emerson says, " .... and I should say, that a string of poems prefixed to Ben Jonson's or Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, by their friends, are more seriously thought than the pièces which would now in England or America be contributed to any call of literary friendship. And yet, if Whittier, Holmes, Lowell, Channing, Thoreau, Bryant, Sanborn, Wasson, Julia Howe, had each made their thoughtful contribution, there might be good reading."<sup>21.</sup> Emerson could not have been in sympathy with Whittier's orthodox religion or with his conception of Nature, which, like Bryant, saw mainly its healing power.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was neither a Brahmin nor a Transcendentalist, and yet in some ways he touches both groups. Farrington says: "Cool, detached, rationalistic, curiously inquisitive, he looked out upon the ferment of the times, the clash of rival philosophies and rival interests, only to bring them into his study and turn upon them the light of his critical analysis. One after another he weighed the several faiths of New England, conservative and radical and transcendental, and ended skeptic."<sup>22.</sup> Although he was not a Transcendentalist, his association with the Peabodys and his venture into the Brook Farm experiment relate him to the Transcendentalists. He is related to the other New England group through his romanticism and his love of the Old World.

Emerson and Hawthorne knew each other for many years, but they could never become intimate friends. Hawthorne lived in the Old Manse at Concord from 1842 until 1846, and in 1852 he and his wife established themselves in their own little villa at Concord. Both Hawthorne and Emerson belonged to

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21. Journals, X, 30 - 31.

22. Farrington, op. cit., p. 442.

the Saturday Club, also, but with all their contacts the two men could not really get near each other. As Cabot says, "They admired and liked each other personally, but they were very unlike in nature .... They interdispised each other's moonshine, as very amiable and pretty, but rather childish."<sup>23.</sup>

Hawthorne is one of the few writers whom Emerson underestimated. Hawthorne's writings did not appeal to Emerson personally, and Emerson had a difficult time in liking literature which did not offer him something that he himself could profit by.

Emerson's first comment on Hawthorne appears in 1838. He writes: "Elizabeth Peabody brought me yesterday Hawthorne's Footprints on the Seashore to read. I complained that there was no inside to it. He and Alcott together would make a man."<sup>24.</sup>

In 1839 he writes, "It is no easy matter to write a dialogue. Cooper, Sterling, Dickens, and Hawthorne cannot."<sup>25.</sup>

And a little later, speaking of Charles Dickens, he says, "Like Cooper and Hawthorne he has no dramatic talent. The moment he attempts dialogue the improbability of life hardens to wood and stone."<sup>26.</sup>

It is interesting to note that the above two references in connection with Hawthorne are also Emerson's only two comments on James Fenimore Cooper.

Three years later, in 1842, we read, "Nathaniel Hawthorne's reputation as a writer is a very pleasing fact, because his writings are not good for anything, and this is a tribute to the man."<sup>27.</sup> This was the year that Hawthorne moved to Concord, and later in the fall he and Emerson went on

23. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 375 - 376.

24. Journals, IV, 479.

25. Journals, V, 257.

26. Journals, V, 261.

27. Journals, VI, 240.

two-day walking tour. However, in his account of this walk Emerson says nothing about their conversation or about the man himself. The following year, 1843, in a letter to Thoreau, he writes: "Hawthorne walked with me yesterday afternoon, and not until after our return did I read his Celestial Railroad, which has a serene strength which we cannot afford not to praise, in this low life."<sup>28.</sup> In a letter to Sterling he says: "My neighbors are

Ellery Channing, Thoreau, and Hawthorne, a writer of tales and historiettes, whose name you may not have seen, though he too prints books. All these three persons are superior to their writings."<sup>29.</sup> And in 1846 Emerson

writes: "Hawthorne invites his readers too much into his study, opens the process before them. As if the confectioner should say to his customers, 'Now, let us make the cake.'<sup>30.</sup>" Woodbury says that when Emerson spoke

of Hawthorne, he spoke hesitatingly, as if not fully aware yet of the shadowy quality of his mind.<sup>31.</sup> However, Emerson did say: "Hawthorne lived afar

from us. He was always haunted by his ancestry. His gait and moods were of the sea. He had kinship to pirates and sailors .... His writings are of the terrible, the grotesque, and sombre. There is nothing joyous in them. His genius was for the unhappy and her side. It is the same with Hugo. No man ought to write so."<sup>32.</sup>

Emerson has a long passage in Hawthorne in his Journals for 1864 just after Hawthorne's death. He says: "I thought there was a tragic element in the event .... in the painful solitude of the man, which, I suppose, could not longer be endured, and he died of it. I have found in his death a

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28. F. B. Sanborn, "The Emerson-Thoreau Correspondence," Atlantic Monthly, (May, 1892), LXIX, 589.

29. The Correspondence of Emerson and Sterling, pp. 89 - 81.

30. Journals, VII, 183.

31. Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 64.

32. Ibid., p. 64.

surprise and disappointment. I thought him a greater man than any of his works betray, that there was still a great deal of work, in him, and that he might one day show a purer power .... It was easy to talk with him, - there were no barriers, only, he said so little that I talked too much, and stopped only because, as he gave no indications, I feared to exceed. He showed no egotism or self-assertion, rather a humility, and at one time, a fear that he had written himself out."<sup>33.</sup> Emerson also refers to Hawthorne when speaking of the Brook Farm experiment in his essay "Life and Letters in New England." He writes: Hawthorne drew some sketches, not happily, as I think; I should rather say, quite unworthy of his genius. No friend who knew Margaret Fuller could recognize her rich and brilliant genius under the dismal mask which the public fancied was meant for her in that disagreeable story."<sup>34.</sup> Emerson's last reference to Hawthorne, however, is more favorable. In 1873, in his address at the opening of the Concord public library, he says: "Nathaniel Hawthorne's residence in that Manse gave new interest to that house, and his careful studies of Concord life and history are known wherever the English language is spoken."<sup>35.</sup>

Emerson liked and admired Hawthorne the man, but he could not truly appreciate Hawthorne's writings. To Emerson, Hawthorne's tales seemed immature and shallow, and Hawthorne's shadowy romanticism held no appeal for the shrewd Yankee part of Emerson. Emerson's most important criticism, however, is against Hawthorne's pessimism, which was the antithesis of his own optimistic philosophy.

33. Journals, X, 39 - 40.

34. Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Works, X, 363 & 364. Emerson is here referring to the fact that the character of Zenobia in A Blithedale Romance is usually interpreted as a portrait of Miss Fuller.

35. Miscellanies, Works, XI, 501.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is the first real "Brahmin" to come under the fire of Emerson's criticism. Longfellow's position in the Cambridge group of writers is well summed up by Farrington, who says: "If the highest aspirations of the Brahmin nature sought satisfaction in poetry, Longfellow may be reckoned its most characteristic product. In his work the romantic, the sentimental, and the moralistic, blended in such just proportions, and expressed themselves with such homely simplicity as to hit exactly the current taste .... and with his courteous manners he fitted easily into the little world of Cambridge Brahmins." <sup>36.</sup> Emerson

has remarkably little comment to make on Longfellow. In his Journals, besides the remark already quoted in reference to Whittier, he says only that, "Longfellow is a poet because he has said 'the plunging wave.'" <sup>37.</sup>

Emerson does criticize Longfellow a little more fully, however, in a review of Longfellow's "The Spanish Student" written for the Dial. Emerson writes, "A pleasing tale, but Cervantes shall speak for us out of LaGitanilla. 'You must know, Preciosa, that as, to this name of Poet, few are they who deserve it,' .... 'Is it then so bad a thing to be a poet?' asked Preciosa. 'Not bad,' replied the Page, 'but to be a poet and nought else, I do not hold to be very good. For poetry should be like a precious jewel, whose owner does not put it on every day, not show it to the world at every step; but only when it is fitting, and when there is a reason for showing it.'" <sup>38.</sup>

Although this is really Emerson's last criticism of Longfellow, his remark at Longfellow's funeral is interesting and worth mentioning. Emerson walked up to the coffin, turned to look at Longfellow for the last

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36. Farrington, op. cit., pp. 439 - 440.

37. Journals, I, 561.

38. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV, 552 -3.

time; then he turned to a friend and said, "That gentleman was a sweet, beautiful soul, but I have entirely forgotten his name."<sup>39.</sup>

Oliver<sup>40</sup> Wendell Holmes is the "Brahmin of the Brahmins," and yet Emerson's criticism of him is more favorable and more frequent than of any other New England writer in this group. Emerson might have known Holmes a little more intimately through the Saturday Club, and Holmes' writings no doubt appealed more to Emerson's turn of mind than did the writings of Longfellow or Lowell.

In a conversation with Charles Woodbury, Emerson said, "The connecting link between England and America is Oliver Wendell Holmes. If that acute-minded man had been born in England, they would never have tired of making much of him. He has the finest sensibility, and catholicity of taste without which no large and generous nature can be developed. Everything interests him. He has phases which make him as welcome to Bacchus as Minerva."<sup>41.</sup>

In 1846, speaking of the celebration in honor of Everett's inauguration at Cambridge, Emerson writes that "Holmes' poem was a bright sparkle."<sup>42.</sup> But it was not until thirteen years after this that Emerson paid his greatest tribute to Holmes in his speech at the dinner to Dr. Holmes. This speech appears in Emerson's Journal for 1859, and the following passages are excerpts from it:

"When I read the Atlantic, I have had much to think of the beneficence of wit, its vast utility; the extreme rarity, out of this presence, of the

39. Monroe Daniel Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p. 362.

40. Farrington, op.cit., p. 455.

41. Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 62.

42. Journals, VII, 169.



pure article .... Why, look at the fact. Whilst, once, wit was extremely rare and sparse-sown, - rare as cobalt, rare as platina, - here comes the Doctor and flings it about like sea-sand, threatens to make it common as newspapers; is actually the man to contract to furnish a chapter of Rabelais or Sidney Smith once a month, - buckets-ful of Greek fire against tons of paunch and acres of bottom. Of course, the danger was that he would throw out of employment all the dunces, the imposters, the slow men, the stock writers; in short all the respectabilities and professional learning of the time. No wonder the world was alarmed .... Sir, I have heard that when nature concedes a true talent, she renounces for once all her avarice and parsimony, and gives without stint. Our friend here was born in happy hour, with consenting stars. I think his least merits are not small. He is the best critic who constructs. Here is the way of dictionaries in this country. All very well; but the real dictionary is the correct writer, who makes the reader feel, as our friend does, the delicacy and inevitableness of every word he uses, and whose book is so charming that the reader has never a suspicion, amid his peals of laughter, that he is learning the last niceties of grammar and rhetoric. What shall I say of his delight in manners, in society, in elegance, - in short, of his delight in Culture, which makes him a civilizer whom every man and woman secretly thanks for valuable hints? What, then, of his correction of popular errors in taste, in behavior, in the uncertain sciences, and in theology, attested by the alarm of the synods? And this is only possible to the man who has the capital merit of healthy perception, who can draw all men to read him; whose thoughts leave such cheeful and perfumed memories, that when the newsboy

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enters the car, all over the wide wilderness of America, the tired traveller says, 'Here comes the Autocrat to bring me one half hour's absolute relief from the vacant mind.'<sup>43</sup>.... For really, that is not praise of any man, I admire perception wherever it appears .... Who is Wendell Holmes? If it shines through him, it is not his, it belongs to all men and we hail it as our own."

And in 1862 we read, "What a convivial talent is that of Wendell Holmes! He is still at his Club, when he travels in search of his wounded son; has the same delight in his perceptions, in his wit, in its effect, which he watches as a belle the effect of her beauty; would still hold each companion fast by his spritely, sparkling, widely allusive talks, as at the Club table; tastes all his own talent, calculates every stroke, and yet the fountain is unfailing, the wit excellent, the savoir vivre and savoir parler admirable."<sup>44</sup>

In 1864, speaking of a meeting of the Saturday Club, Emerson says, "It was a quiet and happy evening, filled with many good speeches, and a fine poem by Holmes, read so admirably well that I could not tell whether in itself it were one of his best or not."<sup>45</sup> Six years later he writes, "Wendell Holmes hits right in every affectionate poem he scribbles, by his instinct at obeying a just perception of what is important, instead of feeling about how he shall write some verses touching the subject."<sup>46</sup>

In his essay on "Clubs" in Society and Solitude Emerson is referring to Holmes in the following passage: "How delightful after these disturbers is the radiant, playful wit of .. one whom I need not name, -- for in every

<sup>43</sup>. Journals, IX, 226 - 9.

<sup>44</sup>. Journals, IX, 466 - 7.

<sup>45</sup>. Journals, X, 26.

<sup>46</sup>. Journals, X, 335.

society there is his representative. Good nature is stronger than tomahawks. His conversation is all pictures; he can reproduce whatever he has seen; he tells the best story in the country, and is of such genial temper that he disposes all others irresistibly to good humor and discourse." <sup>47.</sup>

And in the manuscript book "Gulistan" Emerson writes of Holmes, "By his perfect finish, cabinet finish, gem finish, gem carved with a microscope on the carver's eye, and which perfection appears in every conversation, and in his part in a business debate, or at a college dinner table as well as in his songs .... Wonderful fertility and aptness of illustration. He is an illustrated magazine with twenty thousand accurate engravings .... His undersize might perhaps be suggested by his writings to one who had never seen him. It is compensated by the consummateness, as of a humming bird or of a flower, which defies the microscope to find a defect in Nature's favorite." <sup>48.</sup>

James Russell Lowell is another member of this Cambridge group. Parrington says: "He was not of the Concord line of transcendentalists individuals, nor of the militant strain of reforming enthusiasts; but of the true Brahmin line of Josiah Quincy and Oliver Wendell Holmes - men of sound culture who could serve God valiantly in the Social station in which He had placed them, without wanting to pull down the old church to build a new. He would serve culture rather than causes. His gifts were Brahmin gifts, his prejudices were Brahmin prejudices; he remained at bottom a Harvard conservative, content with his birthright, hopeful that his ways were God's ways." <sup>49.</sup> Considering Lowell's fame and importance as a

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47. Works, VII, 233.

48. Works, VII, 422.

49. Parrington, op. cit., p. 460.



writer and critic, Emerson has remarkably little comment on him.

Emerson's first mention of Lowell occurs in 1857 in connection with a meeting of the Saturday Club. Emerson says, "The flower of the feast was the reading of three poems, written by our three poets, for the occasion. The first by Longfellow, who presided, the second by Holmes; the third, by Lowell, all excellent in their way." 50.

Five years later he writes: "We shall not again disparage America, now that we have seen what men it will bear. What a certificate of good elements in the soil, climate, and institutions is Lowell, whose admirable verses (The Bigelow Papers) I have just read! Such a creature more accredits the land than all the fops of Carolina discredit it." 51.

Emerson's last comment on Lowell appears in 1868 when he writes: "In poetry, tone, I have been reading some of Lowell's poems, in which he shows unexpected advance on himself, but perhaps most in technical skill and courage, It is in talent rather than poetic tone, and rather expresses his wish, his ambition, than the uncontrollable interior impulse which is the authentic mark of a new poem...." 52.

Emerson recognized and admired Lowell's talent, and the Bigelow Papers evidently appealed to him by their native American quality. However, he realized that Lowell lacked that genius which comes from spiritual insight, from communion with the Over-Soul. To Emerson books were secondary things; man was greatest in nature where he could commune with the infinite. To Lowell, literature was an end in itself; nature, from which he derived no more than a childish delight, was greatest in man.

50. Journals, IX, 96.

51. Journals, IX, 359.

52. Journals, X, 267.

Because Emerson himself was a Transcendentalist, he could not enter fully into the spirit of these New England writers outside of Transcendentalism. The writings of the Cambridge group are for the most part less forceful and less indigenous. Emerson recognized the talents and the good points of these writers, but he also felt that the absence of a transcendental philosophy in them deprived them of spirituality and true genius.

Bryant was sincere and he did use American materials, but his orthodox beliefs formed a barrier between Emerson and himself. Also, his appreciation of Nature merely as a sanative influence was not transcendental enough for Emerson, and it was the same with Whittier. Emerson did admire the spirit of freedom which he found in Whittier's abolition verses, however. Emerson's failure to appreciate Hawthorne arises largely from Hawthorne's pessimism, from his outworn Calvinistic belief in sin, and from his romantic attachment to Europe. Emerson had a sincere admiration for Holmes' wit and sparkle, but he seemed to think Longfellow would have been a better poet if he had written less. Lowell was promoting an indigenous literature in his Bigelow Papers, but it was through talent not genius.

Emerson did not place as high a value on the writings of the Cambridge Brahmins as on the literary products of the Transcendentalists. However, his estimates have proved to be remarkably accurate in the light of current opinion. Parrington says: "Concord has risen as Cambridge and Beacon Street have declined, and in the shadow of Emerson and Thoreau, the wit of Back Bay is in danger of being obscured." <sup>53.</sup> Van Dyck Brooks, also, writes that "Ironically enough, it was Boston and Cambridge that grew to seem provincial, while the local and even parochial Concord mind, which had always been universal, <sup>54.</sup> proved to be also natural."

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53. Parrington, op. cit., p. 451.

54. Brooks, op. cit., p. 530.

## XIII.

## EMERSON'S MISCELLANEOUS CRITICISM.

Emerson criticizes many writers who are neither Transcendentalists nor Brahmins, who do not, in fact, belong in any category. This miscellaneous group ranges from such well-known figures as Walt Whitman and Bret Harte to such obscure near-poets as Pierpont and Percival, and in almost every case Emerson's criticism is limited to one or two remarks.

Walt Whitman is the most important figure among these miscellaneous writers, and Emerson's criticism of him is the most interesting. Whitman admitted that he owed much to Emerson. Whitman is reported to have said,<sup>1.</sup> "I was simmering, simmering, simmering; Emerson brought me to boil." There is an Emersonian flavor in Leaves of Grass. Whitman's demands for a national literature in the Preface to Leaves of Grass show the influence of Emerson's "American Scholar" address. Gohdes says that "Whitman's egoism in Leaves of Grass is the sublime apotheosis of Emerson's Yankee self-reliance."<sup>2.</sup> Gohdes proves that Whitman was acquainted with Emerson's ideas before the publication of Leaves of Grass in 1855, and he believes that Emerson is responsible for changing Whitman from a second-rate journalist into a prophet of Democracy.<sup>3.</sup> However, if Whitman imitates Emerson by basing his thought on self-reliance and individualism, he is at least original in his interpretation and application of these principles. Foerster says Whitman's poetic vision is "strikingly like that of the New England Transcendentalists and at the same time strikingly unlike ....

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1. Norman Foerster, Nature in American Literature, p. 202.

2. Clarence L.F. Gohdes, "Whitman and Emerson," Sewanee Review, LXXVII, 79.

3. Ibid., p. 80.

Leaves of Grass repeats the Transcendental love of nature, faith in individualism, and prophecy of democracy .... but Whitman's conception of them is nowise Emerson's." <sup>4.</sup> Emerson remains always cool, serene, detached, refined; Whitman is intense, emotional, vigorous, crude. Emerson believed in dualism, in the correspondence of native and spirit, while <sup>5.</sup> Whitman makes the two into a blurred unity. In spite of these differences, in spite of the fact that Emerson's New England background and his own critical theory were offended by Whitman's lawlessness in the subject matter and form of his poetry, nevertheless Emerson's transcendental belief in the power of Western democracy made him recognize the sincerity <sup>6.</sup> and strength behind Whitman's crudities.

In July, 1855, after the publication of Leaves of Grass Emerson wrote the following letter to Whitman. "I am not blind to the wonderful gift of Leaves of Grass. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our Western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perceptions only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a

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4. Foerster, op. cit., pp. 201 - 2.

5. Ibid., pp. 204 - 5.

6. Cohdes, op.cit., p. 85.



1. The first step in the process of creating a new product is to identify a market need. This involves conducting market research to understand the preferences and behaviors of potential customers. Once a need is identified, the next step is to develop a concept that addresses this need. This concept should be unique and offer a clear value proposition.

2. After developing the concept, the next step is to create a prototype. This allows the team to visualize the product and test its functionality. The prototype should be built using the most appropriate materials and methods to accurately represent the final product. Testing the prototype helps identify any design flaws or areas for improvement.

3. Once the prototype is refined, the next step is to develop a business plan. This plan should outline the production process, distribution channels, and marketing strategy. It should also include financial projections to estimate the costs and potential revenue of the product. A solid business plan is essential for securing funding and guiding the overall development of the product.

4. The final step in the process is to launch the product into the market. This involves manufacturing the product at scale and distributing it through the chosen channels. Marketing efforts should be implemented to create awareness and drive sales. Monitoring the product's performance in the market is crucial to ensure it meets customer expectations and allows for any necessary adjustments.

In conclusion, the process of creating a new product is a multi-step journey that requires careful planning, execution, and monitoring. By following these steps, businesses can increase their chances of developing a successful product that meets market needs and drives growth.

sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging." On the receipt of this letter Whitman wrote Emerson a mawkish letter hailing him as "master," but it seems to be more sentimental than sincere. When the next edition of Leaves of Grass appeared, Whitman exploited Emerson's appreciation of the book by printing the sentence "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." above Emerson's name on the cover of every copy. The letter was printed without Emerson's consent, and he admitted he would not have been as enthusiastic had he known it was for publication. He said: "There are parts of the book where I hold my nose as I read. One must not be too squeamish when a chemist brings to him a mass of filth and says, 'See, the great laws are at work here also;' but it is a fine art if he can deodorize his illustration. However, I do not fear that any man who has eyes in his head will fail to see the genius in these poems. Those are terrible eyes to walk along Broadway. It is all there, as if in an auctioneer's catalogue." <sup>8.</sup> Although Emerson was annoyed by Whitman's exploitation, his anger did not really last very long and he soon forgave him. <sup>9.</sup> His initial attitude toward Leaves of Grass evidently changed, however, between his letter to Whitman in July, 1855, and his letter to Carlyle in May, 1856. In the latter he says: "One book, last summer, came out in New York, a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American, - which I thought to send you; but the book throve so badly with the few to whom I showed it, and wanted good morals so much, that I never did. Yet I believe now again, I shall. It is called Leaves of Grass, was written and printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, New York,

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7. George W. Cooke, Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 233.

8. Moncure D. Conway, Emerson at Home and Abroad, p. 360.

9. Emory Holloway, Whitman, p. 143.

named Walter Whitman; and after you have looked into it, if you think that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it." <sup>10.</sup> After Emerson's disgust at Whitman's use of his letter died away, his attitude toward Whitman seems to become more favorable again. From this time until Emerson's death in 1882 the two men met at least twenty times and were good friends although they could never become intimate. Emerson gave letters of introduction to Whitman to introduce him to Sumner and Chase, and during the war he sent him money for the wounded soldiers. They occasionally dined together in New York and Whitman dined once in Concord at Emerson's, in 1872. Their most famous meeting was on the Boston Common on 1861 and Holloway believes <sup>11.</sup> this to have been a significant and crucial point in Whitman's life. Emerson wanted Whitman to omit certain passages of "Children of Adam" from Leaves of Grass, but Whitman said that he felt the conviction in his <sup>12.</sup> own soul that he must do it his own way. Emerson could not answer this argument since he, too, believed in following one's inner dictates. Gohdes says that Whitman tried to minimize his obligations to Emerson because <sup>13.</sup> everyone else attributed so much influence to him. Whitman admitted that he had called Emerson "master," but he added: "So I did - and master <sup>14.</sup> he was for me then. But I got my roots stronger in the earth." However, Gohdes believes that Whitman was fascinated by Emerson throughout his entire life and that the supreme importance of Emerson to Whitman appears particularly in Whitman's later life when he not only read Emerson's books but kept <sup>15.</sup> his portrait near him and referred to him over two hundred times.

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10. Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 251.

11. Holloway, op.cit., p. 165.

12. Gohdes, op. cit., p. 88.

14. Ibid., p. 92.

13. Ibid., p. 91.

15. Ibid., pp. 92 & 93.

Emerson's comments on Whitman are few, but they are all interesting pieces of criticism.

Emerson's first comment on Whitman after this letter to Carlyle in 1856 appears in his Journals, for 1863 when he writes: "Good out of evil .... One must thank Walt Whitman for service to American literature in the Appalachian enlargement of his outline and treatment."<sup>16.</sup> In a conversation with Charles Woodbury Emerson said, "Leaves of Grass, by Walt Whitman, is a book you must certainly read. It is wonderful. I had great hopes of Whitman until he became Bohemian. He contrasts with Poe, who had an uncommon facility for rhyme, a happy jingle. Poe might have become much had he been capable of self-expression."<sup>17.</sup> This passage is of particular interest because this is also Emerson's only criticism of Poe. In 1866 he writes: "I suspect Walt Whitman had been reading these Welsh remains when he wrote his Leaves of Grass. Thus Taliessin says -

'I am water, I am a wren,

I am a workman, I am a star;

I am a serpent;

I am a cell, I am a chink;

I am a depositary of song, I am a learned person."<sup>18.</sup>

In his essay, "Art and Criticism" he writes, "Ought not the scholar to convey his meaning in terms as short and strong as the smith and the drover use to theirs? .... Whitman is our American master, but has not got out of the Fire-Club and gained the entree of the sitting rooms."<sup>19.</sup> And in a conversation

<sup>16.</sup> Journals, IX, 540.

<sup>17.</sup> Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 62.

<sup>18.</sup> Journals, X, 147.

<sup>19.</sup> Natural History of Intellect, Works, XII, 285 - 6.

with F. B. Sanborn Emerson said that Leaves of Grass was a combination of the Bhagavad Gita and the New York Herald.<sup>20.</sup>

There is also an interesting passage in Burroughs' note book for December, 1870. Burroughs writes: "Walt said a friend of his, Mr. Marvin, met Emerson in Boston the other day and when Whitman was mentioned Mr. Emerson said, 'Yes, Walt sends me his books. But tell Walt I am not satisfied, not satisfied. I expect - him - to make - the songs of the - nation - but he seems to be content to make - the inventories! Walt laughed and said it tickled him much.'"<sup>21.</sup>

Emerson's last criticism of Whitman was made in a conversation in 1877 with Edward Carpenter who asked him what he thought of Whitman. Emerson laughed and said, "Well, I thought he had some merit at one time: There was a good deal of promise in his first edition - but he is a wayward, fanciful man .... He had a noisy fire engine society. And he took me there and was like a boy over it, as if there had never been such a thing before."<sup>22.</sup>

Emerson's admiration of Whitman may have lessened with the years, but nevertheless he was one of the first men in America to appreciate Whitman's genius.<sup>23.</sup> Emerson's influence on Whitman was also of the utmost importance. In his demand for a national literature, in his individualism, and in his democracy, Whitman was following in the path which Emerson had laid out in his "American Scholar" address. However, Emerson realized that Whitman carried this individualism too far. Whitman's crudities were offensive to Emerson's innate refinement, and the freedom of his metre and verse violated Emerson's more classical theories of prosody, but Emerson did admire the strength and

20. Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman, p. 276. note.

21. Life and Letters of John Burroughs, I, 144.

22. Edward Carpenter, Days with Walt Whitman, p. 166

23. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 440.

vigor and native American qualities which he found in Whitman. Conway adds that "The Oriental largeness and optimism which Emerson admired in ancient books are not to be found in any modern page except that of Walt Whitman."<sup>24</sup>

Emerson seemed to believe, however, that Whitman's poetry, although it was grand in scope, was lacking in distinctness.

Emerson looked to the West for a true American literature, as we have already seen, and he was evidently familiar with the works of at least two members of this new Western group of writers. However, in neither one did he seem to find the promise and stimulation for which he was seeking.

Emerson has only two comments to make on Bret Harte, who was just beginning to come into his own after the Civil War. After he met Bret Harte in 1871 he wrote: "Bret Harte's visit. Bret Harte referred to my essay on Civilization, that the piano comes so quickly into the shanty, etc., and said, 'Do you know that, on the contrary, it is vice that brings them in? It is the gamblers who bring in the music to California, and so throughout?' I told him that I spoke also from Pilgrim experience, and knew on good grounds the resistless culture that religion effects."<sup>25</sup> His only other remark is in his essay on "Greatness" in Letters and Social Aims when we read, "Bret Harte has pleased himself with noting and recording the sudden virtue blazing in the wild reprobates of the ranches and mines of California."<sup>26</sup> Emerson also had personal contacts with Mark Twain and he liked certain passages in Innocents Abroad, but he was not actively influenced by him.<sup>27</sup> There is one other writer who belongs to the West in spirit only and that is Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune for so many years. Greeley became the spokesman

<sup>24</sup>. Conway, op. cit., p. 360.

<sup>25</sup>. Journals, X, 362 - 3

<sup>26</sup>. Works, VIII, 317.

<sup>27</sup>. Ernest Larchand, "Emerson and the Frontier," American Literature, III, (1931 - 1932), p. 173.

for Western democracy, and he threw himself whole-heartedly into the agrarian movement. Like Emerson, he saw the West as America's rising star, although he was much more radical than was Emerson. The only comments on Greeley in Emerson's Journals refer to his political views, but there is an interesting passage in a letter to Carlyle. On his return from a lecture tour to Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois, in 1854, he writes: "Greeley of the New York Tribune is the right spiritual father of all this region; he prints and disperses one hundred and ten thousand newspapers in one day, - multitudes of them in these very parts .... He does all their thinking and theory for them, for two dollars a year." 28.

Emerson never lost his own faith in the West, however, and his comments at least reveal his interest in the West and his cognizance of the new writers it was producing.

Emerson was also aware of the influence and currents at work in the East. Pattee calls the middle decade of the nineteenth century "The Feminine Fifties," 29. and Emerson's criticisms reveal that he was conscious of the number of women writers in America. Besides Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Peabody, both of whom belong to an earlier generation, Emerson comments on no less than five of these feminine writers.

Julia Ward Howe is a typical member of "The Feminine Fifties." She produced several more volumes of poetry after publishing Passion Flowers in 1854. Later in life she turned to essays and lectures at which she was much more successful, although a great deal of this success was due to her personality. However, Emerson seems to have a very high opinion

28. Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 234.

29. Fred Lewis Pattee, The First Century of American Literature, p. 565.

of her as a poetess. He says, "I honour the author of Battle Hymn and of The Flag. She was born in the city of New York. I could well wish she were a native of Massachusetts. We have no such poetess in New England." 30.

Another feminine writer whom Emerson also over-estimated is Catherine Sedgwick, who is partly responsible for the beginnings of the domestic novel in America. She wrote a great many novels, such as A. New England Tale and The Travelers, but none of her literary work has proved to have any permanent qualities. Emerson makes only two comments on her, both in the year 1838. In a letter to Carlyle he says, "I think in a fortnight I shall need to write again, - probably to introduce to you my countrywoman, Miss Sedgwick, the writer of affectionate New England tales and the like ...." 31. His only other comment appears in his Journals. He says, "How noble a trait does Miss Sedgwick draw in her Mrs. Hyde when Lucy Lee says, 'It makes people civil to speak to her.' How we glow over these novels. How we drive and calculate and shuffle and lie and skulk in life!" 32.

Harriet Beecher Stowe belongs to the New England group of writers and her best work deals with New England life. However, she spent several years in Ohio and West Virginia, and her most famous book and the only one which Emerson comments on, Uncle Tom's Cabin, really belongs in the field of Southern literature. In his essay "Success" Emerson is of course referring to Uncle Tom's Cabin when he says, "We have seen an American woman write a novel of which a million copies were sold, in all languages, and which had one merit, of speaking to the universal heart, and was read equally with interest to three audiences, namely, in the parlor, in the kitchen,

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30. Journals, X, 325.

31. Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, I, 234.

32. Journals, IV, 458.



and in the nursery of every home." <sup>33.</sup> This same passage also occurs in Emerson's journal for 1852, but he adds the following sentence to it there: "What a lady read in the drawing room in a few hours is retailed to her in the kitchen by the cook and the chambermaid, week by week; they master <sup>34.</sup> one scene and character after another."

Helen Hunt Jackson is known today chiefly for her novel Ramona, although she was a prolific writer. Her literary career began late in life, but in a brief time she turned out poetry, juvenile literature, travel sketches, essays, household hints, and novels. Her work has all disappeared now, but Emerson seemed to have a very high opinion of her. He writes: "Newport. My chief acquisition was the acquaintance of Mrs. Helen Hunt, Sarah Clarke's friend, and her poetry I could heartily praise. The sonnet 'Thought' and 'Ariadne's Farewell' were the best, but all had the merit <sup>35.</sup> of originality, elegance, and compression."

Louisa May Alcott is the last writer of the Feminine Fifties whom Emerson comments on. Daughter of the Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott, she is now more widely known than her once-famous father. Emerson knew her from her childhood days on, but his only reference to her was in a conversation with Charles Woodbury. He said, "Louisa Alcott is a natural source of stories. When she was seven years old she was the delight of the community, writing dramas and building theatres at her father's and the neighbors' houses. She composed a hymn while yet a girl; wrote a book (which has been printed under the name of Moods) when she was sixteen; another

33. Society and Solitude, Works, VII, 286.

34. Journals, VIII, 346 - 7.

35. Journals, X, 252.

a book of fables, before she was twenty. At nineteen the papers began buying her stories. She did not want to grow to womanhood. She went out as a governess, and wrote a story of her experiences for the Atlantic; but they could not understand it, and told her she had better continue as a teacher .... She produced her hospital sketches in 1865, and is now (1868), I believe, bringing out what will be her best yet, Little Women. We all think this is due to her publishing friend, who told her she must write a girls' book, while she insisted she could not .... She is, and is to be, the poet of children. She knows their angels." <sup>36.</sup> This is Emerson's only comment in Louisa Alcott, but his forecast has proved to be remarkably accurate.

Washington Irving belongs to the generation preceding Emerson; his best work was done while Emerson was still in college. Emerson has only one comment to make on Irving, and that appears in 1822, a year after his graduation from Harvard, in a letter to his classmate John B. Hill. He writes, "Our economical citizens have been quite dead to Bracebridge Hall, since its price was known. I have neither read it nor seen a single individual who has read it. The extracts which I have met with have disappointed me much, as he has left his fine Sketch-Book style for the deplorable Dutch wit of Knickerbocker, which to me is very tedious." <sup>37.</sup> It is interesting to note that in this case Emerson preferred Irving's imitative English manner of writing to his own native American style.

Emerson was well acquainted with the anti-slavery poets and orators, since he himself was an ardent abolitionist. However, most of his remarks

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36. Charles J. Woodbury, Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson, pp. 100 - 1.

37. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 92.

on these men. (Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, and William Lloyd Garrison) rather to their political views and not to their writing or oratory. Of Sumner he says nothing, of Phillips he says only, "While I admired his eloquence, I had not the faintest wish to meet the man. He had only a plat-form-existence, and no personality."<sup>38.</sup> Ten years later, in 1865, he

adds, "I feel that his patriotism or his moral sentiment are not primarily the inspiration of his career, but his matchless talent of debate and attack."<sup>39.</sup> Emerson comments on Garrison, the poet, however, as well

as on Garrison the orator. In 1843 Emerson reviewed Garrison's Sonnets and Other Poems for the Dial, saying, "Mr. Garrison has won his palms in quite other fields than those of the lyric muse, and he is far more likely to be the subject than the author of good poems .... Yet though this volume contains little poetry, both the subjects and the sentiments will everywhere command respect."<sup>40.</sup>

Of Garrison the orator Emerson says: "Garrison is a virile speaker; he lacks the feminine element which we find in men of genius. He has great body to his discourse, so that he can well afford occasional flourishes and eloquence."<sup>41.</sup> Emerson sympathized with the anti-slavery views of these men, and he realized that they could move audiences, but he knew that none of them had genius, not even the genius of eloquence which Webster had.

Emerson also knew the work of some of the nineteenth century near-poets, who had a tremendous reputation in their own day but who have faded into obscurity during the last hundred years. Percival and Pierpont and and Richard H. Dana were at one time among the seven ranking poets of America.<sup>42.</sup>

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38. Journals, VIII, 434.

39. Journals, X, 111.

40. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV, 550.

41. Journals, VII, 97.

42. Fattee, op. cit., p. 375.



Of James C. Percival Van Wyck Brooks says, "He is the classic example of the almost good in poetry. A typical manic-depressive, whose life was a mass of pathetic oddities, he was an admirable geologist .... He was one of the most remarkable American philologists of his time, and, as a linguist, a rival of George Borrow .... He made interesting experiments in Greek and German metres."<sup>43</sup> His Prometheus was hailed as equal to Byron's Childe Harold, and his poetry as a whole was regarded as the most classical in America. Emerson wrote a review of Percival's The Dream of a Day, and other Poems, for the Dial, in 1843, saying: "Mr. Percival printed his last book of poems sixteen years ago, and every school boy learned to declaim his 'Bunker Hill.' Since which time, he informs us, his studies have been for the most part very adverse to poetic inspirations. Yet here we have specimens of no less than one hundred and fifty different forms of stanza. Such thorough workmanship in the poetical art is without example or approach in this country .... But unhappily this diligence is not without its dangers. It has prejudiced the creative power .... Our bard has not quite so much fire as we had looked for, grows warm but does not ignite; those sixteen years of adverse studies have had their effect on Pegasus, who now trots soundly and resolutely on, but forbears rash motions, and never runs away with us .... He is the most objective of the American Poets .... and does his best."<sup>44</sup>

John Pierpont, known today only as the grandfather of John Pierpont Morgan was famous in the nineteenth century as clergyman, poet, and reformer. His most important poetical works were his Airs of Palestine (1816) and his

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<sup>43</sup>. Brooks, op. cit., p. 375.

<sup>44</sup>. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV,

Anti-Slavery Poems (1843). In a review written for the Dial Emerson says: "Mr. Pierpont has a good deal of talent, and writes very spirited verses, full of points. He has no continuous meaning which enables him to write a long and equal poem, but every poem is a series of detached epigrams, some better, some worse. His taste is not always correct, and from the boldest flight he shall suddenly alight in very low places. Neither is the motive of the poem ever very high, so that they seem to be rather squibs than prophecies or imprecations; but for political satire, we think the 'Word from a Petitioner' very strong, and the 'Gag' the best piece of poetical indignation in America."<sup>45</sup> Emerson realized that neither Percival nor Pierpont were real poets; they had talent and sincerity but no genius and no actual ability.

We conclude Emerson's criticism of American literature with his comments on Richard Henry Dana, the younger, son of the poet. Van Wyck Brooks says, "With all the positive traits his father lacked, robust and self-reliant, - he had been one of Emerson's pupils, - he was a day-dreamer, like his father, and capable of mystical ecstasies."<sup>46</sup> After the publication of his book, Dana became the sailors' lawyer and spent his life battling for their rights. Emerson wrote a review of Two Years Before the Mast for the Dial: "This is a voice from the fore-castle. Though a narrative of literal, prosaic, truth, it possesses something of the charm of Robinson Crusoe. Few more interesting chapters of the literature of the sea have ever fallen under our notice .... This simple narrative, stamped with deep sincerity, and often displaying an unstudied, pathetic eloquence, may lead to reflections which were argument and sentimental

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45. Ibid., pp. 549 - 50.

46. Brooks, op.cit., p. 308.

appeals do not call forth."<sup>47.</sup> And in a letter to his brother William, Emerson wrote: "Have you seen young Dana's book? Good as Robinson Crusoe, and all true. He was my scholar once, but he never learned this of me,<sup>48.</sup> more's the pity." Emerson recognized the value of Dana's book, and his appreciation is as valid today as it was almost a hundred years ago.

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47. Nature, Addresses, Dial Papers, Works, National Library Edition, IV, 525.

48. Cabot, op. cit., p. 115.

## CHAPTER IV.

## C O N C L U S I O N.

Although Emerson's position as a critic of American literature has been unduly neglected, this investigation proves him to be a keen and searching critic of American letters in the nineteenth century. His judgments are based on his own theory of criticism, which is the logical product of his life, his philosophy, and the times in which he lived.

Emerson's external life is important, of course, but not as important as the subtler influence at work within his mind. His poverty, his ill-health, the death of his first wife and his two brothers, and his renunciation of the ministry created in him the need and desire for some philosophy which would relate him more clearly to life. From the beginning the tendencies of Emerson's thought were always idealistic and slightly mystical. Through his reading he early became acquainted with the idealistic philosophy of Plato and of Plotinus, the Neoplatonist. While Emerson was encountering these ideas at Harvard, they were being given added impulse by the introduction into America of German thought and philosophy based on these Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrines. From Kant came the distinction of Reason and Understanding; from Schelling the perception through intuition of the identity of subject and object. Although a little of this German thought was brought back directly to Harvard in 1819 by Everett, Ticknor, and Bancroft, most of it entered America through the intermediary sources of the English Romanticists. Dr. Channing was



most influential in introducing this English Romanticism into America, and his importance to all America as well as to Emerson, cannot be overestimated. Channing not only introduced the English Romanticists into this country, but he aroused Boston from its Calvinism and thus prepared an audience for Emerson. He also demanded a national literature, and it was this cry which Emerson himself took up years later. Coleridge was an important influence because in his *Universal Reason* we see the counterpart of Emerson's *Over-Soul*. Although Emerson began to feel himself a part of Nature when he was a boy in Concord, he owes to Wordsworth much of his spiritual appreciation of Nature as well as his pantheism and his preference for plain language. Carlyle affirmed Emerson's Transcendentalism and self-reliance although his pessimism was at variance with Emerson's underlying optimism. When this German idealism and English romanticism were superimposed on New England Unitarianism, the result was New England Transcendentalism, a movement of which Emerson was at the same time a product and a germinating spirit.

All these forces were at work within Emerson's mind from 1817 on, but they did not become focused until his trip to Europe in 1832. His meetings with Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle served to affirm his doctrine of self-reliance, his belief in his own powers, for he believed they all lacked insight and spiritual truth. His visit to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris was also important because it gave him an evolutionary point of view proving the gradation of matter to spirit. This affirmed his optimism and helped to break down his remaining traditional Puritan beliefs.

Emerson's matured philosophy, expressing his belief in the *Over-Soul*, his idea of Nature as a symbol, and his doctrine of self-reliance, first

appeared in Nature, published in 1836. His life after that changed very little. His contacts with his Transcendentalist friends and neighbors such as Thoreau and Alcott strengthened his own Transcendental Beliefs, and his late reading of oriental literature gave added support to his own mystical tendencies. However, Emerson's Yankee shrewdness not only kept him from going to extremes, in his philosophy, but it also made him very aware of what was going on in the world around him. Emerson was particularly alive to the rapidly developing West, and it was to the West he looked for an indigenous literature. The individualism, democracy, and optimism of the frontier all find expression in Emerson. The interaction of all these forces produced not only Emerson the writer and philosopher but also Emerson the critic.

Emerson's theory of literature and criticism is the logical product of his life, his philosophy, and his times. He believed that literature and criticism should be transcendental, moral, and intuitive. He recognized the superiority of genius over talent, while at the same time he felt that talent could correct and improve what was written by inspiration. His belief in self-reliance made him express freely his own personal ideas in his criticism, although this occasionally led him into some iconoclastic opinions. Emerson's criticism is based on the standard of the Ideal in literature, a standard which no one yet has reached or can reach, and this tends to make him a little too harsh in his judgments sometimes.

Emerson's theory of criticism is not only coherent, but he is consistent in his application of it. Although there are flaws in this theory which led Emerson to make errors in judgment, nevertheless on the whole his criticisms are remarkably accurate and penetrating. It is interesting to

note that many of Emerson's opinions coincide with the opinions of today rather than with the opinions of his own time.

His criticism of American literature as a whole is based on three points: its dependence on Europe, its materialism, and its failure to use American materials. His self-reliance and individualism, his belief in his own powers and those of his country made him impatient with America's dependence on and imitation of European culture, while his Transcendentalism makes him impatient with the materialism of American letters which widens the gap between the real and the ideal. His belief that the West would produce a new and indigenous literature is really too optimistic, however, and it is no wonder that he never saw the expected fulfillment of promise,

All the evils that Emerson saw in American literature, as a whole, he saw in American periodical literature. These periodicals were in the front ranks in their demands for a national literature, and yet they printed only English materials or third-rate American materials. Even the Dial, although it injected native and spiritual qualities into an otherwise barren field, fell far short of its desired aim. Emerson thought the newspapers to be on an even lower level than the periodical reviews, but in both fields his unbounded optimism again asserted itself, and he again saw the great possibilities of the future.

Emerson realized that Channing had done a great deal not only for him but for all New England, but he could not see why Channing did not do even more. Channing was moral and spiritual and occasionally even eloquent, but he could not go beyond Unitarianism into Transcendentalism. Emerson also recognized the debt that America owed to Ticknor, Bancroft, and Everett for the significant role they played in the dissemination of

German thought, but at the same time he criticized all the American historians and scholars for their heaviness and mechanical qualities, for their lack of spirit and vigor.

Webster's eloquence placed him among Emerson's catalogue of poets, and his demand for terrestrial freedom paralleled Emerson's own demand for mental and spiritual freedom. After Webster supported the Fugitive Slave Law, Emerson saw that he was lacking in spirituality and moral sentiment.

Although Emerson was a Transcendentalist and believed in a transcendental literature and criticism, nevertheless he also criticizes the Transcendentalists rather harshly - Emerson was too shrewd a Yankee to believe in either the extreme mysticism of one aspect of Transcendentalism, or the crusading reforms of its more practical phase. Emerson criticized Jones Very, Bronson Alcott, Charles Newcomb, and Ellery Channing because they all carried their transcendentalism too far into mysticism. Also, they all believed their writing came through intuition and for that reason they would not labor over it, and Emerson was forced to conclude that none of them could really write. Emerson criticized Margaret Fuller, Orestes Brownson, and Theodore Parker because he could neither understand nor approve their reforming proclivities. They were all too intense for Emerson's cold intellectuality.

Emerson was one of the first men to appreciate Thoreau and to recognize the significance that Thoreau's journals would have if they were ever published. He admired Thoreau's truth, spiritual insight and appreciation of Nature, but he objected to his sharpness and to the extreme to which he carried the idea of self-reliance.

Emerson also criticized the New England writers outside the Transcendentalists group. He realized that the Cambridge and Boston writers were neither indigenous nor forceful, but were still too much under the spell of Europe. He appreciated Bryant's love of nature and his use of American materials, he admired Holmes' sparkling wit, and he recognized an indigenous quality in Lowell's Biglow Papers though it was too self-conscious. Longfellow was too prolific a writer to be uniformly poetic, while Hawthorne's writings were too pessimistic, Calvinistic, and romantic. None of these writers were Transcendentalists and hence, to Emerson, they all lacked the necessary spiritual insight.

Emerson was also one of the first men to appreciate what Walt Whitman was attempting to do in the fulfillment of his own demands for an indigenous literature. However, he objected to a certain blurring of detail in Whitman as well as to the vulgarity into which Whitman's extreme self-reliance led him. Emerson realized that Pierpont, Percival, and Garrison could never be real poets, and he also forecast Louise Alcott as a great children's author.

In all of these estimates Emerson shows himself to be a remarkably keen and accurate critic of American letters. However, there are certain flaws in Emerson's theory of criticism which led him into errors of judgment and which helped to keep him from being a great critic. His transcendentalism led him to apply a spiritual criticism to a material age, and the result is that he occasionally overrated some one who had spiritual insight but nothing else, as in the case of Sampson Reed, Jones Very, and Ellery Channing. At the same time his insistence on the moral sentiment led him to underestimate art for art's sake. For this reason he dismissed Poe as

"the jingle man" and failed to see any of the beauty of Hawthorne's writings, while the moral value he saw in Julia Ward Howe and Sampson Reed gave them a higher place in American literature than they deserved. His intellectuality and lack of emotion also hinder him occasionally from accurately judging writings which had any great emotional depth. For this reason he could not fully appreciate Whitman or even Margaret Fuller. These flaws in Emerson's critical theory are nowhere more apparent than in his own poetry. However, the strongest factor in preventing Emerson from becoming a great critic was his own lack of interest in criticism. He wanted to be, and therefore was, primarily a poet and philosopher, not a critic. Nevertheless, if Emerson is not a great critic, he is a good critic and an important critical force through his influence on Fuller, Whitman, Burroughs, and even on some of our modern critics. His critical judgments are not only remarkably accurate, but they are not inconsiderable in quantity and cover almost the entire field of nineteenth century American literature. His criticism ranges from such well-known figures as Hawthorne and Thoreau to such obscure writers as Verry, Reed, and Percival, who, however, were not unimportant in Emerson's day. His criticism also includes the early nineteenth century writers like Irving and Bryant as well as such later men as Whitman and Harte.

Emerson did not criticize on the basis of art for art's sake as Poe did, nor did he regard literature as an end in itself as Lowell did. Emerson is a good critic because his criticism is not detached from life; rather, he relates literature to the times in which he lived, to science, culture, politics, history, religion, and economics. Emerson's most

sincere criticism appears in the fragments scattered throughout his Journals. The professional book reviews he wrote for the Dial have a tendency to overestimate American authors almost as if he were attempting to encourage the growth of American literature by praising what there was. In spite of the defects of his critical theory and in spite of the fact he was not primarily a critic, nevertheless Emerson was a keen and searching critic of American letters.

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