

THE SELF-CULTURE MOVEMENT
IN NEW ENGLAND: 1820-1860

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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By

Robert James Richards

AN ABSTRACT

Submitted to the College of Science and Arts
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ABSTRACT

In the four decades between Jackson and Lincoln, Americans in general and New Englanders in particular became preoccupied as never before or since with the idea of disseminating the fruits of culture among the masses. Lacking adequate formal, institutionalized means to achieve their goal, they turned quite naturally to a number of more or less informal, un-institutionalized activities involving a measure of self-directed effort. These activities, hitherto regarded by scholars as disparate phenomena in our cultural history, are here considered as related facets of a more inclusive movement which I have chosen to call the Self-Culture Movement.

Such undertakings as the Lyceum, the museum and library movements, Brook Farm and Fruitlands, Mechanics Institutes, etc., I have regarded as outgrowths of the same widespread ideal, receiving their impetus and in return helping to reinforce the philosophy of self-culture then being popularized by liberal thinkers and reformers, particularly Degerando, Channing, and the Transcendentalists.

In studying this aspect of the Romantic milieu, I have also concluded that the Transcendentalists' interest in cultural activities was not, as many have supposed, a mere adventitious corollary to their doctrines of individ-

ualism but was instead a consuming preoccupation. Emerson in his study, Parker and Clarke in their pulpits, Ripley and Alcott in their Utopian communities, Fuller at her editorial desk and Thoreau at Walden were all seeking the same goal by different paths.

This thesis then, attempts to reconstruct a phase of the Romantic milieu in the light of the then current cultural ideals; and in the process it offers a monistic interpretation of Transcendentalism which differs from the commonly accepted view of the West Street Circle as a group of idealistic theorists divorced from the realm of practical realities.

I have traced the backgrounds of the self-culture ideal in the seventeenth and eighteenth century; I have noted its decline and virtual disappearance during the high tide of Calvinism; and I have shown how it re-emerged with the revival of Puritan intellectualism in the era of Emerson and Mann. This thesis makes much of the popular writings on self-culture by Degerando, Channing, Emerson and others, which provided a philosophical rationale for the movement. Much also is said of the practical activities by which reformers sought to implement their ideals. The thesis concludes with an explanation of the disappearance of the self-culture movement (though not of the ideal) after the Civil War, and it offers for the future course of the humanities several suggestions arising from an understanding of the successes and failures of reformers in the Romantic decades.

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PREFACE

Bibliographies in recent years have abounded with entries in the area of American Romanticism. Particularly numerous, it seems to me, have been the articles and dissertations dealing with various phases of Transcendentalism. Many also have undertaken a study of educational theories and practices of that period. Indeed, to judge from the number of such studies alone, one might wonder if every possible avenue of approach in these fields has not been previously explored. Yet, despite the tremendous volume of material already in existence, new areas of investigation continually are opening to scholars. It is my hope that the following pages may serve such a purpose--the opening of one of these areas for future study.

Without trying to minimize the importance of many earlier studies of Transcendentalism and of early nineteenth-century cultural ideals, I must point out one striking inadequacy which most of them share. In treating the educational practices and theories of Romantic New England, nearly all have concentrated on the more institutionalized aspects of education, while manifold ramifications of the ideal on an informal, uninstitutionalized level have been largely overlooked. No one, moreover, has proved the Transcendentalists' interest in cultural ideals to be more than adventitious, perhaps a corollary to Transcendental individu-

alism.

This thesis, then, attempts to correct one deficiency of many earlier works by concentrating on the more informal aspects of Romantic educational theory and practice. The approach has been to bring together several consequents of the then prevalent cultural ideal--the lyceum, the museum and library movements, Brook Farm and Fruitlands, the Mechanics' Libraries, etc.,--and to consider them not as disparate phenomena in our cultural history but as related facets of a much more inclusive movement which I have chosen to call the Self-Culture Movement.

Partly as a result of my inquiries into these areas, I have also drawn the conclusion in the following pages that Transcendental interest in the cultural activities of the period was not merely casual or accidental but entirely purposeful; that, indeed, for many of the Transcendentalists culture of self and culture of others became an all-consuming preoccupation.

I do not wish to imply that the existence of a self-culture motif in our country's development is a discovery on my part. To be sure, most students of American cultural history have recognized its existence; and many have commented upon phases of the movement in the process of writing on the more general theme of our total cultural heritage. But to the best of my knowledge, no one has yet undertaken to draw together the multifarious

elements of the movement and to understand them as related manifestations of a single ideal. On this basis I think I can claim some degree of originality.

I believe that no other heretofore neglected aspect of the American Romantic milieu is more deserving of attention than that which I have begun to examine here. I believe this not only because of the insight into our cultural past which it can provide but because of the important implications it has for the present and future state of the humanities. Surrounded as we are with the mass media of communication and other opportunities for self-culture that the nineteenth century never dreamed of, it would seem a shame if we could not profit from their successes and failures and approach nearer to the goal for which they strove.

Involved as the idea of self-culture is with that considerable body of activities aimed at the diffusion of knowledge among the masses, it does not seem improbable that a study of the movement might be of greater value to the educational historian than to the student of American literature, though it is as the latter that I have approached the subject here. My primary objective has been to reconstruct an aspect of the Romantic milieu for the value it may have toward understanding the atmosphere in which nineteenth-century American writers lived and worked.

To some extent the self-culture idea appears on

the surface in a survey of American literature itself, but a vast majority of the articles written on the subject and widely read one hundred years ago has not come down to us in the form of what we would regard as significant literature. Innumerable pamphlets and newspaper and magazine articles preaching the doctrine of self-improvement have become lost or are buried in a few major libraries so that one might be led to the erroneous conclusion that people living in the first half of the nineteenth century had no more stimulus than that provided by the limited number of literary treatments of the subject. It is on these literary sources, however, that I have had to rely mainly for this thesis, since much of the sub-literary material on self-culture was inaccessible to me for the present. Yet it is possible, even with the limited data at my disposal, to sketch a fairly accurate picture of the movement and to begin fitting it into its proper place in America's past development. The following pages merely point the direction which subsequent studies of the self-culture movement might pursue in much greater detail.

I have purposely limited the scope of this study to New England between the years 1820 and 1860, the era from Jackson to Lincoln, though it has been necessary to glance occasionally at other sections of the country, at England in the same period, and at other eras of history in order to connect the movement with the broader frame-

work of developments. Admittedly, the years with which I have circumscribed the movement are somewhat arbitrary, for it is impossible to say with certainty when any movement begins or ends. I have tried merely to indicate by these dates the general period during which the self-culture idea seems to have reached its fullest flowering. Actually, the movement had its roots in a period long before 1820, as I will attempt to show in the beginning. Moreover, it will be apparent that the movement has never entirely disappeared from the American scene, even down to the present day. Witness the multitude of correspondence courses, adult extension programs and continuing education endeavors carried on by a number of colleges and universities for a single illustration. These I take to be outgrowths and extensions of the same set of values and goals which became so firmly entrenched in American thought in the crucial period shortly to be considered. The self-culture movement did tend to fade from view after the Civil War, but it was only because its goals, like those of Transcendentalism, were quietly absorbed into the American way of life and needed no longer to be constantly paraded before the public eye.

Aside from the arbitrary dates with which I have circumscribed the movement, there is one other limitation to which objection might be raised. That is the confinement of this study to New England. My only answer to

this is that New England more than any other part of the country, was the real center of the movement, the source from which most of the influence emanated to other sections of the nation.

INTRODUCTION

Education is perhaps the most daring panacea ever held before the multitude by devoted reformers and humanitarians. The prophets seek to persuade the mass of men that they can best govern themselves through their own enlightened intellect; that the end of life itself is the development of individual powers. And certainly nowhere else have the prophets been more zealous or the mass of men more credulous than in America, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century.

It would be impossible to say with certainty that any single influence contributed most to the creation of this passion for education. Perhaps that nebulous influence we call the American Dream--the desire to rise and make the most of one's self--would serve as well as any other to explain the phenomenon; but whatever the real explanation may be, the fact remains that from the very beginning of our national existence, the desire to cultivate one's self, intellectually, morally and physically, has been almost the American religion.

To say that this self-culture motive has been a part of the American "climate of opinion" from the beginning is to avoid one possible misconception at the outset of this study. It would be a mistake to assume that the movements for educational reform and the diffusion of knowledge in the decades from Jackson to Lincoln were

purely Romantic phenomena simply because they were more pronounced then than ever before. The truth is that the goals and ideals of education which the Romantic period brought to fruition have their roots deep in seventeenth and eighteenth-century backgrounds. The Puritans, from the very nature of their faith, felt popular education to be a necessity, because "that old deluder, Satan," lay in wait for the souls of those who could not read the Scriptures and thus come to know God and His word at first hand.

It would also be a mistake, however, to go much before the seventeenth century and assume that the objective of widespread knowledge among the masses had always been an avowed aim of our culture. In historical fact, we have had only about two centuries of open acknowledgment of a general right of access to the tools of learning. For at least ten centuries during the formative period of our Christian era, the widespread propagation of critical and factual information was not only physically difficult but was also anathema to all the powers that ruled the community of Christendom. The idea of democratizing education is modern, scarcely yet stable in the pattern of society.

It would appear, then, that the instruments for the diffusion of knowledge are an organic part of the structure of relatively free civilization. The great social movements which rescued European culture from a form of

tyranny, for example, were closely linked with the principle of the popularization of knowledge. The intellectual foundations of authoritarian churches and states could not withstand the spread of methods of experimental reasoning beyond the easily disciplined bounds of a narrow scholar caste.

The widening of popular ideas has always effected social change more efficiently than the power of armies and the machinations of politicians. The diffusion of learning is the only way in which free human societies can ever hope to achieve an intelligent adaptation to their environment.

The theory mentioned earlier--that the instruments for popularizing knowledge are an organic part of a free society--places these instruments in as close a relation to the social pattern as political parties are. Their origin is linked with the emergence of democracy as an ideal of social organization; so their development is linked with the same forces that extended economic and political opportunities to increasing numbers of the population.

But democracy would have fared badly in our country if its flowering had been forced to wait solely upon the creation of a large number of formal institutions for the diffusion of learning. In America unorganized, informal means of education have always been necessary for individual survival. While the patterns were being laid out.

on which the formal education of the American people has subsequently developed, it was to a number of these informal agencies and to the whole program of self-culture that people turned to keep their faculties alert.

SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUNDS
OF THE SELF-CULTURE MOVEMENT

The differences between the settlers of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay Colonies are less notable than the ties which bound them together. The Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth in 1620 were Separatists, i.e., they had broken away from the Anglican Church. The Massachusetts Bay settlers of 1630 were reforming Anglicans and rejected the principle of Separatism. Indeed, the circumstances of the migration of these two groups had been different; yet they were united by a consciousness of their common faith. Both groups accepted the congregational form of church polity; the theocratic ideal and moral qualities of both groups were essentially the same; and they had in common the Calvinistic creed, environmental factors, and the Bible. Whatever differences existed were eventually obliterated, and we may regard both as Puritan in the broad sense.¹

It was no accident that the desire for higher education expressed itself early among these colonists. Puritanism had been strong in the universities of England, and American historians have noted that a surprisingly large proportion of Puritans who came to the new world were university graduates. It is probably safe to say that no other community in the world had as high a per-

1. Ralph Barton Perry, Puritanism and Democracy, p. 72. Hereafter referred to as Perry.

centage of learned men as did the Bay Colony in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is little wonder, therefore, that one of the first things the Massachusetts Puritans did was to arrange in 1636 for the establishment of a college, which they named Harvard in honor of its benefactor.

But it was not only higher education that concerned the Puritans. Popular education was also felt to be a necessity in order that all could at least read the Scriptures and thus come to know God's bidding. As early as 1642 the Bay Colony decreed that every town be responsible for the education of the young; and in 1647 the famous Act of the Massachusetts Bay Colony formally provided that every town of fifty families should maintain a teacher of reading and writing and that each town of one hundred families should establish a grammar school.²

Other colonies soon followed the example of Massachusetts. As one historian notes, every town in Connecticut soon had its provision for elementary education and each county its Latin school. Plymouth was fairly well provided, at least on the statute books; and even Rhode Island, which seems to have been a bit backward, had at least one school as early as 1640.³

Yet, despite all this expressed desire for widespread education, one must not assume that the good in-

2. Massachusetts Records, II, 203.

3. James Truslow Adams, The Founding of New England, p. 369. Hereafter referred to as Founding.

tentions were carried out immediately in practice. We can, perhaps, take pride in the spirit which motivated the founding of Harvard and the passing of the Act of 1647; but the laws on the statute books by no means reflect the acts or habits of the community. James Truslow Adams in his Frontiers in American Culture cautions us wisely in this regard. "One of the very worst sources of information for the historian on the social or cultural conditions of an earlier period," he says, "are the statute books. This is most emphatically true of laws with regard to education. Lack of law observance in this regard, more especially in New England states and in the state of New York until well into the middle of the nineteenth century was notorious."⁴

Even if we grant this wide disparity between Puritan theory and practice with regard to formal education, however, there still remains the fact of Puritan intellectualism which expressed itself variously in less formal ways. For one thing, these colonists exercised their minds to an unusual extent on the fundamentals of politics and practical economics. Innumerable speeches on every occasion, even if they did appeal too often to the passions and prejudices rather than to intellect, succeeded in stirring things up and causing more discussion. An immense amount of informal education must have come from

4. James Truslow Adams, Frontiers in American Culture, p. 82. Hereafter referred to as Frontiers.

talk. In New England there were the town meetings, which were superb schools in which to learn about self-government and public affairs. Extremely practical instruction in economic theory resulted for the Jamestown and Plymouth settlers from the failure of the blue-printers in England.. Then, too, for a long time in New England there were the sermons, which often dealt with more than theology. The colonist had to go to church to keep up on politics and public affairs. The famous sermon of Hooker in Connecticut in 1638 is a good example, for on this occasion the whole plan and philosophy of the Connecticut government was announced to the people from the pulpit. There were also annual election sermons in both Connecticut and Massachusetts and many "artillery" sermons, all of which dealt with non-theological subjects.

Mention of sermons, of course, reminds us that the colonists also found ample opportunity for intellectual exercise in the labyrinth of theological disputation. It behooved the New Englander, particularly at the mandatory church services of Massachusetts, to know what orthodoxy was; and he had to sharpen his wits on sermons in order to remain orthodox. To follow sermons hours long from point to point called for mental concentration which is seldom required of adult students today.

The opportunities for self-culture which were available to the Puritans, however, had their disadvantages.

In the absence of almost any books other than theological and considering the powerful intellectual stimulus of the sermons, the result of much early informal education seems to have been mainly an intensified preoccupation with the problems of theology and a notable extension of the influence of the clergy. One student of the period put it this way:

Although her devotion to education was to bear noble fruit in years to come, and is one of the chief contributions of New England to our national life, its original object, and almost the sole use to which it was put, was religious, and it may be questioned whether its earlier influence upon the people at large was not narrowing rather than broadening.⁵

Aside from the town meetings and sermons, colonial America came under at least one other influence which contributed to the cause of popular education. Through Robert Boyle, who served as governor of the Corporation for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, the impact of the Rosicrucians probably made itself felt to a certain extent in this period. An international secret society of the seventeenth century which helped break down the barriers to popular education, the Rosicrucians first made a slogan of the term "diffusion of knowledge"; and it was their "Invisible College" at Oxford, founded about 1645, which later developed into the Royal Society of which Boyle

5. Founding, p. 370.

was a charter member.⁶ To what degree the Rosicrucians' doctrine was accepted in seventeenth-century New England one can only guess; but it is more than probable that many colonists knew of Boyle and the Royal Society's program.

Having traced some of the colonial backgrounds of our subject thus far in point of time, we are faced with the fact of a rather sudden discontinuation of what appeared to be a growing movement for mass education. For a period beginning at the turn of the century, progress in New England seemed to come to a halt, and the educational goals set forth in the Act of 1647 faded from popular view. The most probable explanation of this phenomenon seems to me to be related to a general decline in zeal and a growing "lukewarmness" among the second and third generations after settlement, especially in matters of religious observance. A number of admonitory sermons of the period complained of this lack of fervor, which, it seems likely, prevailed in secular activities as well as in religion.

Then, too, there were the cold realities of poverty, deprivation, hard work, and squalor which forced their way into the New England scene, leaving little time or energy or incentive for cultural pursuits.

6. Hans Nicolas, "The Rosicrucians of the 17th Century," British Institute of Adult Education Journal, VII (1934-35), 229-40.

Even in well-settled and prosperous Massachusetts, Adams observes, "the intellectual quality of the Puritan commonwealth had greatly deteriorated by the end of the third generation."⁷ But whatever the real explanations may be for the dissipation of cultural ideals in New England, it is a fact that the revival of faith in the efficacy of education had to await the revival of intellectualism in the era of Emerson and Mann.

Meanwhile, outside New England certain other developments were taking place which have a bearing on our subject. In the eighteenth century one of the leading advocates of education was Thomas Jefferson. It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of the place education held in Jefferson's philosophy, for all during his mature life he worked for a more general diffusion of learning among the people. His connection with the University of Virginia and with William and Mary College need not be elaborated upon here, but it might be well to note some of the demands and expectations which Jefferson and others of his time placed upon education. Foremost in the minds of many was the realization that education is a necessary adjunct to the republican form of government. Because it was believed that human institutions rest on principles and not merely on historical accidents

7. Frontiers, p. 61.

or irrational forces, it was also believed that the best guarantee of the soundness of human institutions lay in the development and dissemination of knowledge.

As Jefferson himself said:

Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day. Although I do not, with some enthusiasts, believe that the human condition will ever advance to such a state of perfection as that there shall no longer be pain or vice in the world, yet I believe it susceptible of much improvement, and most of all, in matters of government and religion; and that the diffusion of knowledge among the people is to be the instrument by which it is to be effected.⁸

Elsewhere, in his report of the Commission of Education appointed in 1818 by the governor of Virginia, Jefferson set forth the objects of education. These are, he said:

1. To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;
2. To enable him to calculate for himself and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts in writing;
3. To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties;
4. To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;
5. To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor and judgment;

8. Thomas Jefferson, Writings, X, 25.

6. And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed.⁹

Jefferson, then, viewed an enlightened electorate as a prime necessity if democracy was to succeed. He saw in education the potentialities for creating national unity and overcoming the divisive forces in society. From the foregoing it is evident that the idea of education as a panacea did not spring up overnight in the romantic period. Rather it had a long background in Puritanism and Jeffersonianism.

But Jefferson, for all his democratic ideals and talk about giving to every citizen the tools of learning, would scarcely have advocated the form which the philosophy of mass education took in later years. Jefferson looked to talent for leadership. While he embraced the idea that all talent does not reside with hereditary aristocracy, and while he preserved an unshakable faith in the natural man, stripped of station and wealth, he did err in one particular, as Perry observes:

Like all doctrinaire exponents of democracy, he Jefferson was too ready to identify the universal man, definable in terms of reason and conscience, with the common man, forgetting that the commonness of the common man connotes vulgarity--the average rather than the eminent.

9. Quoted by James C. Carter, The University of Virginia: Jefferson Its Father and His Political Philosophy, pp. 10-11.

quality--and that men in the mass are brought even lower than their average by the effect of emotional contagion...¹⁰

In brief, a democracy which Jefferson never dreamed of, or at least, never hoped to see, wrecked his scheme for education founded on a selective basis of character and ability.

More closely related to our subject of self-culture, perhaps, is another fact of eighteenth-century background which must be noted. Merle Curti observes of the century preceding the dawn of Romanticism that "almost every colonial town advertised private evening schools where one might learn mathematics, accounting, modern languages, and other subjects useful to those seeking to climb in the ranks of commerce."¹¹ Although the lower ranks of society did not enjoy equal opportunities with those above them, particularly in the matter of libraries, they did have certain facilities for acquiring knowledge. Ambitious artisans might use what were known as proprietary libraries by paying a specified fee for membership. The majority may have found the fee too steep, but in that case they could turn to other means following the example of the Junto organized in Philadelphia in 1727 by Benjamin Franklin. Originally the Junto was a club consisting of twelve tradesmen who

¹⁰. Perry, p. 136.

¹¹. Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, p. 43. Hereafter referred to as Curti.

had banded together for the purpose of mutual self-improvement. In his Autobiography Franklin describes the organization as "a club for mutual improvement [in which] each member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of morals, politics, or natural philosophy, to be discussed by the company..."¹² It was also a primary concern of the club to acquire books for use by the general membership. The Junte was thus a forerunner of the later Mechanics' Associations, and for that matter, may be regarded as an intermediary step between the Puritan mid-week meeting and the Lyceum of the nineteenth century.

Still another fact of eighteenth-century background which aided in the dissemination of knowledge among the masses has been noted by Adams. By the time of the Revolutionary War, he observes, there were many weekly news sheets, in fact almost as many papers per capita as there are now.¹³ On matters of importance there was also at certain periods, a large pamphlet literature.

Probably it was from such encouraging signs as we have just noted that Washington was able to conclude optimistically in a letter of June 8, 1783, to the governors of the states: "The foundation of our empire was not laid in the gloomy age of ignorance and superstition; but at an epocha when the rights of man-

12. Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography, pp. 80-81.

13. Frontiers, p. 91.

kind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period."¹⁴ Washington did not ignore the fact that Providence had been generous in the matter of resources; but he emphasized the "treasures of knowledge" which afforded Americans the unique opportunity of combining the resources of nature with those of the mind. He continues in the same letter:

The researches of the human mind after social happiness have carried to a great extent. The treasures of knowledge... are laid open for our use, and...may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of government.

This note of optimism is in direct contrast to the gloomy retrospection of DeWitt Clinton in viewing an earlier era of our history:

The settlement of this country was...made with a view to the acquisition of wealth; knowledge was out of the question...This country was also planted at a time when the intellectual world was involved in cimmerian darkness. The scholastic philosophy was the reigning knowledge of the times;--a philosophy of words and notions, conversant only in logical distinctions, abstractions and subtleties; which left real science wholly uncultivated to hunt after occult qualities, abstract notions, and objects of impertinent curiosity.¹⁵

Conditions had obviously changed a great deal between the days of settlement to which Clinton alluded and the "foundation of our empire," that is, the creation

14. George Washington, Writings, X, 256.

15. DeWitt Clinton, "An Introductory Discourse delivered before the Literary and Philosophical Society of New York, May 4, 1814," North American Review, I (1815), 392. Hereafter referred to as Clinton.

of an independent nation of which Washington wrote. Still discussing the pre-Revolutionary period, Clinton continues:

A provincial government...was entirely incompetent to call into activity the ennobling propensity of our nature. A small population, scattered over an extensive country and composed almost entirely of strangers to literature; a government derivative and dependent, without patronage and influence, and in hostility to the public sentiment; a people divided into political and religious parties, and a parent country watching all their movements with a stepmother's feelings, and keeping down their prosperity with the arm or power, could not be expected to produce those literary worthies who have illuminated the other hemisphere.¹⁶

Certainly by the time of Washington's letter there was ample justification for a changed view of conditions. The "cimmerician darkness" had begun to vanish; the veil of scholasticism was lifting; and the provincial government which had failed to arouse the "ennobling propensities" of human nature was a thing of the past. Viewing these facts plus a number of previously noted conditions overlooked in Clinton's not altogether accurate picture of the colonial period, the mass of Americans could, indeed, look forward to greener days as the eighteenth century drew to a close.

16. Clinton, p. 395.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY REVIVAL OF CULTURAL IDEALS

The youth growing up between 1800 and 1830 were exhilarated by the breaking down of intellectual barriers and the opening of wide new fields of speculation. The discipline of Calvinism, with its social order and habits of orthodoxy, remained for a time; but the transition from American Puritanism to American democracy was nearly complete. This transition, as Perry points out, was at once a revolution and an evolution. "As a revolution," he says, "it represented the triumph of the Enlightenment over the Awakening of which the puritanism of Jonathan Edwards was an embodiment."¹ Whereas Puritanism taught reliance on faith, revelation, and authority, the Enlightenment proclaimed the accessibility of truth to the faculty of reason when freed of prejudice, tyranny, and superstition. Puritanism was theocratic, intolerant, and distrustful of natural inclinations; the Enlightenment was humane and optimistic. This, then, was the revolutionary aspect of the transition. The change appeared to be abrupt, because the difference between the two orientations was thrown into sharp relief.

In dealing with the evolutionary aspect of the transition, however, Perry shows the change to be more

1. Perry, p. 147.

gradual, more the result of a deep-seated kinship between puritanism and democracy working like a leaven from within. Perry's analysis of the common bonds between these two cults is a penetrating one, and I should like to quote from it at some length here. He bases his comparison on the premise that posterity has lost sight of the close ties between Calvinism and the ideas which constitute the basic creed of democracy because of the habit of identifying Calvinism with its excesses. "Memories of theocracy and doctrinal bigotry," he states, "have obscured the predisposition of puritanism to democracy."²

The deepest bond between puritanism and democracy was their common respect for the human individual irrespective of his place in the ecclesiastical, political or economic institutions....Placing the Bible in the hands of every believer to read and interpret encouraged the individual to exercise his wits. This intellectual self-reliance favored the coalescence of the Puritan Awakening and the democratic Enlightenment. In both cults there was a body of higher truths to which the individual might aspire through his own efforts. And both cults stimulated popular education, because common men were assumed to have minds and were encouraged to use them.³

The rest of Perry's analysis I have summarized here in outline form for the sake of brevity.

1. Both cults provided a sublimation of worldly success and both gave their blessing to the doctrine of laissez-faire.
 - a. To the Puritan, wealth got

2. Perry, p. 197.

3. Perry, pp. 192-93

through thrift and energy were evidence of godliness in pursuing his "calling."

- b. Democracy saw the enlightened pursuit of individual happiness conducive to the happiness of others.⁴

2. Both cults respected the dignity of man.
 - a. "The conception of progress through enlightenment, and the conception of a universe contrived expressly for the segregation of the saved and the damned, testified alike to the individual's high place in the design of the cosmos."⁵
3. Both cults accepted the principle of contract in government.
 - a. Puritan theocracy was a contract among the believers by which they agreed to obey God.
 - b. The democratic state was conceived of as a contract among individuals by which they agreed to obey a temporal authority.
4. As congregationalists, the Puritans, particularly the Separatists, were inclined against monarchy and habituated to representative or popular government.
5. Both cults saw man as originally endowed with faculties requisite for his salvation and by which he might be trusted to govern himself. In both cults man had fallen from grace.
 - a. In the case of puritanism man had fallen by pride and temptations of the flesh.
 - b. In the democratic orientation, man had fallen through abuses of institutional authority.
6. In both cults the condition of returning to perfection was freedom.

I have taken the space here to present Perry's views because I think they help to explain the revival of

4. Perry, pp. 193-96.

5. Perry, p. 194.

Puritan intellectualism in the nineteenth century. The best that was in Puritanism had simply lain dormant for a time, submerged in the high tide of Calvinistic dogma. It took only the conspiring of kindred forces in the nineteenth century to restore these best qualities quite naturally to prominence, and thus to help pave the way for the tremendous educational advances of succeeding decades..

What, then, were some of these kindred forces which contributed to the revival of the self-culture ideal in the nineteenth century? First, it should be observed that the years from 1789 to 1830 were years of transition from the dominance of classicism to romanticism in American cultural life. Once established, this new romanticism favored the revival of education for the masses, because inherent in its doctrines was a changed view of mankind.. Young liberal preachers like Charles Chauncy and Unitarians like William Ellery Channing helped to bring about the changed view by proclaiming that man was not only improvable but that man was, indeed, perfectible. In Ralph Waldo Emerson, the optimism, the self-confidence, the sense of equality which were part of the new romanticism flamed eventually into the doctrine that all men are divine. But while those in the liberal theological movement flung their challenge in the teeth of Calvinism, they retained a central feature of Cal-

vinism's practical teaching, namely that the elevation of mankind could be attained only by effort. That it was the duty of man to control his conduct and that he possessed the power to mold his character had ever been a part of Calvinistic discipline, particularly in New England. The only differences in this doctrine as it came to be applied by nineteenth-century liberals lay in the belief, first, that the elevation of mankind was open to all rather than to a body of "elect"; and, second, that self-improvement was not merely a solemn duty but a thrilling opportunity. Under the impulse of national elation and among a people imbued, like Emerson, with optimism and self-confidence, how much more appealing were the new liberal preachments than the dolorous version of Calvinism which had animated the clergy of America up to that time! It was like finding a sure key to the treasures of earth and heaven.

The liberal theological movement which began around the turn of the century as a denial of the principles of Calvin gradually developed into a strong denomination itself. By 1832 its ideas were sufficiently formulated to cause Emerson to resign his Unitarian ministry in Boston; for there had come to be, as Carl Russell Fish has commented, "a new orthodoxy among the unorthodox."⁶ Before this happened, however, the move-

6. Carl Russell Fish, The Rise of the Common Man: 1830-1850, p. 187. Hereafter referred to as Fish.

ment's liberalizing influence had made itself felt, and the cry had been taken up outside the pulpit.

If it was true, as the rising school of romantic idealists maintained, that all creation was an emanation from a Divine Source, then man, as the highest form of creation, must be a part of God and hence not depraved but capable of rising toward perfection. Transcendentalism thus provided a philosophical rationale for American individualism, helped produce the cult of the common man, and contributed greatly to the cause of mass education. In the view of men like Emerson, who is generally regarded as the guiding spirit of Transcendentalism, learning and godliness were inseparable. As he declared in Self-Reliance, that optimistic statement of man's self-sufficiency, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." Again in the same essay he declared, "The power which resides in Man is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do nor does he know until he has tried....We but half express ourselves." Such premises made easy the step which Emerson took in The American Scholar to a declaration of cultural independence. Emerson decries imitation of foreign tastes and opinions and declares that foreign travel adds nothing to our true self-revelation. "It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Travelling, whose idols are Italy, England, and Egypt, retains its fascination for all edu-

cated Americans," Emerson concludes. Thus it would seem that Emerson placed a great deal of confidence in the self-culture ideal as a tool of self-conscious nationalism.

At least one, Thoreau, followed Emerson's doctrines in practice. Together they taught the need for self-realization through extreme individualism. Most of their associates, on the other hand, leaned toward collectivism, but their ultimate goal of self-improvement was the same. Of Emerson, Thoreau, and their associates, and of Transcendentalism in general we shall have more to say presently.

For the time being, let us examine some more of the reasons for the revival of the cultural ideal in the early nineteenth century. We have mentioned the changed view of mankind, implicit in romanticism, which the liberal clergy promoted; we have mentioned the philosophical rationale which transcendental idealism provided. Still a third factor in the revival lay in the doctrines of the Enlightenment. For if it was true, as John Locke maintained, that the mind at birth was a tabula rasa upon which experiences recorded a story of character development, then it was largely up to education to supply the right direction for experience. Here, if one was needed, was the psychological rationale for American individualism and the cause of mass education.

A fourth aspect of the romantic milieu favorable

to the revival of educational goals was a kind of primitivism which expressed itself variously in the cult of the common man, in manhood suffrage, abolitionism, feminism, pacifism, utopia-building and in many other ways. Inherent in most of these movements was the feeling of need for diffusing knowledge among the masses.

Jacksonian liberalism, which came to the fore during the romantic period, also played an important role. Imbued with a sense of mission to put down tyrants and aristocracy wherever they appeared, this new liberalism viewed education as a potent class leveller. Not only that, but the extensive reform sentiment which attended the rising tide of liberalism viewed mass education as the ideal medium through which to work changes without political revolution.

It was in a world-wide current of this liberalism that Jackson was elected in 1828 following the reaction against the French Revolution. Up to that time the cultural heritage of the American people had been largely an aristocratic one; even the efforts of the preceding generation for cultural independence had scarcely affected the life of the masses. Now a renewed passion for equality seized the imagination of the populace, and it became all-important to abolish special privilege, not only in respect to physical possessions but in respect to political opportunity and cultural property as well. "In America," according to Ralph Barton Perry,

"the Jacksonian era represents the reaffirmation of democratic principles in terms of the relatively untutored and underprivileged masses."⁷ The Jacksonian spoils system was an assertion that the average rather than the eminent man was qualified for office. As Jackson himself said, "...in a free government the demand for moral qualities should be made superior to that of talents."⁸ Thus was realized the idea expressed in the Declaration of Independence that political power ascends from those who live under it.

Democratization of culture presented a more difficult problem. Education was considered the key to success and there was an overwhelming desire to possess it, but the means were not immediately available outside the realm of self-cultivation. The spirit of the times was expressed in a report of the working men of Philadelphia two years after Jackson took office. They unanimously resolved that:

....there can be no real liberty without a wide diffusion of real intelligence; that the members of a republic should all be alike instructed in the nature and character of their equal rights and duties as human beings, and as citizens;...that until means of equal instruction shall be equally secured to all, liberty is but an unmeaning word and equality an empty shadow..."⁹

More vehement in his approach was Stephen Simpson,

7. Perry, p. 137.

8. Quoted by Perry, p. 138.

9. J. R. Commons, ed., A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, V, 99-100.

who somehow felt that the right of the masses to cultural equality was being obstructed by selfishness on the part of a privileged few:

...the most formidable obstruction to the attainment of justice in the distribution of labor, and the consequent opinion of honor and merit attaching to industry, instead of disgrace, is to be found in the pride and lofty bearing of the literary, erudite, intellectual, and scientific classes. The educated are generally the rich; and where the exception prevails, necessity, or accident, as in the case of labor, soon brings the object under the influence and within the patronage of the affluent...

Literature and education, thus affianced to opulence, naturally feel a strong repugnance to share their intellectual dominion with the mass of society or to look upon ignorance with a feeling of complacency or even tolerance. ¹⁰

Further on Simpson succeeds in pointing up the strange paradox in the position of those who contends had a vested interest in education:

It is admitted on all hands by the philanthropists of the age that the condition of society demands amelioration. They affect to sympathize with the misery and exhort to reform the depravity of man. They call upon the laboring mass to cease their crime and to study frugality, yet refuse them education to give them a knowledge of virtue, and deny them that justice which would rescue them from beggary. The problem lies in the insincerity of their concern and is solved by the pertinacity of their injustice. By imposing the compul-

10. Stephen Simpson, "Political Economy and the Workers," The Working Man's Manual: A New Theory of Political Economy, on the Principle of Production the Source of Wealth. Reprinted in Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy, edited with an introduction by Joseph Blau, p. 149. Hereafter referred to as Blau.

sion to labor for a meager subsistence, they have degraded the minds and obliterated the principles of those upon whom they make a requisition for qualities which can only belong to intelligence and competence...It is, therefore, a mere pretense to affect regard for the happiness of society and at the same time deny the means by which alone it can be made happy.¹¹

Much of the same tenor is contained in an address by Theophilus Fisk to the Mechanics of Boston on May 20, 1835. He congratulates this group on its recent drive to reduce the working day to ten hours, for he sees in such a step the promise of increased leisure to be expended in self-culture.

Knowledge and virtue being the only sure foundations of American Liberty, you have taken the proper steps toward resumption of your sacred rights. By reducing the number of hours of labor, you give yourselves opportunity to obtain that knowledge which is power. They whose god is gain have long feared that if the laborer should be allowed to take his nose from the grindstone five minutes at a time, he would be learning how to govern and provide for himself so he must be compelled to toil on like a galley slave at the oar.¹²

Fisk, like Simpson, doubts the sincerity of reformers and rather cynically imputes hidden motives to those who outwardly, at least, seem to favor an improved condition for the working man.

There is not a nabob in Boston that would raise a finger to prevent the "ten hour system" if he thought the great work of reform would stop there; for all that could be remedied in a hundred ways by partial legislation next winter. But the great fear

¹¹. Blau, p. 150

¹². Theophilus Fisk, "Capital against Labor," New York Evening Post. Reprinted in Blau, p. 204.

of those who grow rich upon your industry is that if you get time to improve your minds, you will get your eyes open to the monstrous frauds that have been perpetrated upon you by the heathen idolaters, the worshippers of Mammon.¹³

Pronouncements like these of Simpson and Fisk were not at all uncommon in the Jacksonian era. As we mentioned before, there was a passion for equality, an urgent insistence that the fruits of culture be spread on the public boards. Despite the strong language in which much of the social protest was couched, however, and despite the bitter epithets about the educated class, it was true that few, if any, would have suggested pulling that class from its pedestal. The passion for equality took more the form of an insistence that all men could become gentlemen rather than that gentlemen should cease to be. To paraphrase a saying of that period which wittily summed up the idea: every Tom, Dick, and Harry wished to have knowledge meted out so that he might become Mr. Thomas, Mr. Richard, or Mr. Henry.

The most important single plank in the platform for diffusion of knowledge among the laboring masses was, of course, the tax-supported school. There were some, to be sure, who expressed opposition on the grounds that education had always been a family matter and there was no need to change. Some argued that free schools merely would fill the bellies of the indigent at the expense of the taxpayer, while others claimed

13. Blau, p. 207.

that schooling for the poor would result in the loss of self-respect and initiative and would pauperize them. Certain unenlightened industrialists, as Fisk indicated, doubtless maintained that prosperity depended on an abundant supply of laboring persons comparatively uneducated.

Not all men and women of position and influence, though, were convinced. Probably only a handful of those who were accused of monopolizing culture would have denied the laboring masses the chance, per se, of becoming gentlemen. It is doubtful that selfish motives were as much a deterrent as the labor propaganda of the time declared they were. The question in the minds of many thinking people was not over the natural right of every human being to moral and intellectual culture. The question was whether the finer fruits of civilization could be democratized without being vulgarized. A form of intellectual snobbery, it would appear,--a regard for themselves as the guardians of cultural purity--was more to be blamed in the educated minority than selfishness..

Edward Everett, spokesman for the New England industrialists, contradicts the impression that the upper class was as base as labor seemed to think. He could reject the doctrine that all are entitled to education at the public expense, but he held that the responsibility for educating the masses rested on great

public, moral, and political foundations.

Catherine Beecher wrote in a letter to a friend:

The education of the common people, then, who are to be our legislators, jurymen, and judges, and to whom all our dearest interests are to be entrusted, this is the point around which the wisest heads, the warmest hearts, the most powerful energies should gather, for conversation, for planning, for unity of action and for persevering enterprise.¹⁴

George Emerson and Alonzo Potter in their book

The School and Schoolmaster wrote that a man with thrift, honesty and obedience (which his schooling was expected to provide) could be counted upon to work "more steadily and cheerfully, and therefore, more productively, than one who, when a child, was left to grovel in ignorance and idleness."¹⁵

Romantic humanitarianism, which ran parallel to the movement for class equality in the Jacksonian era, we may take as another contributing factor in the revival of the self-culture ideal. Humanitarianism, in fact, was bound up in the same spirit which produced equalitarianism; but where the latter was a harsh self-assertion of the individual, the new humanitarianism represented democracy's benevolent and universalistic aspect. As Jacksonian democracy was practical and realistic, the humanitarian movement represented aspiration to

14. Quoted by Curti, p. 352. The letter is now housed among the Monroe Collection of Henry Barnard Papers at New York University.

15. George Emerson and Alonzo Potter, The School and Schoolmaster, p. 113.

perfection. In the words of Ralph Barton Perry, the humanitarian movement "incited the individual to reform himself, and it was a part of his self-reform that he should devote himself to the corrections of social evil and to the making of a better society."¹⁶

The humanitarian movement achieved enduring results. In addition to giving a new social impulse to religion, it stimulated temperance reform; the application of democratic principles to the status of women; the creation of hospitals; prison reform; and above all, under Henry Barnard and Horace Mann, the expansion of popular education and the foundation of colleges.

The movement, as Perry, again, points out, had its humanistic as well as humanitarian aspect. It demanded that individuals should merit their liberty and utilize it for the development of the higher potentialities of human nature. "It supplemented concern for men's bodies, appetites, and needs with concern for personal development."¹⁷

In connection with the self-culture revival, which we have seen was inextricably bound up in the whole romantic spirit, it is necessary at this point to sketch briefly the revolution in the philosophy of educational methods which began to appear in the early 1800's. Rising up in opposition to the Lancastrian system of mass

16. Perry, p. 139.

17. Perry, p. 141.

education then current, the new Pestalozzian philosophy took root in Europe, and before long ardent educational reformers began transplanting the ideas of the famous Swiss pedagogue to American soil. Complete disregard for the individual's personality had been the keynote of the Lancastrian system, the practice of which involved one teacher training a few of the older and brighter pupils who in turn became "monitors" responsible for drilling their younger schoolmates. It was thus possible for one teacher to oversee the education of as many as five hundred pupils at a time--a neat arrangement from the economic standpoint, but hardly from an educational standpoint. And even where the Lancastrian system was not in vogue in many of the small schools, rote memorizing prevailed. Consequently, Pestalozzi established a school in his native land where Rousseau's ideas could be put into practice and modified in the light of actual experience with children. Pestalozzi believed that the development of man proceeded according to natural laws and that the teacher's function was to assist nature in achieving the harmonious development of all the faculties. Education should be moral and religious, natural and not mechanical, and it should be based upon the needs of the individual. Intuition and reasoning should be developed so that a man could continue his own education beyond school; and mere memory work should be discouraged. It

was the work of the school to fit the child for future self-culture.

In America one of the earliest reflections of Pestalozzian teaching was in the school established by Joseph Neef and William Maclure at New Harmony, Indiana, in the regime of Robert Owen, who had himself used the ideas of the Swiss educator in his schools at New Lanark. The end of the New Harmony community terminated this experiment in education, but the work of adapting the new ideas to American conditions was carried on by others.¹⁸ In many ways the school at Brook Farm, of which we shall say more later, was the epitome of all that was idealistic in American educational reform. Another experiment was the Temple School of Bronson Alcott, who endeavored to put his Pestalozzian theories into practice despite the lack of encouragement for his innovations.¹⁹

Elizabeth Peabody, one of the ablest and best informed women of Boston, was Alcott's assistant in the school; and it is her careful notations that provide us with its history.²⁰ There all of Alcott's theories were applied. Children were taught as individuals, each making progress at his own rate of speed. Discipline,

18. Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, p. 246. Hereafter referred to as Tyler.

19. Dorothy McCuskey, Bronson Alcott, Teacher, pp. 87-90.

20. Elizabeth Peabody, Record of a School.

on the other hand, was considered a social matter, and problems of that kind were referred to the whole school for solution. There was no corporal punishment; a quiet, harmonious atmosphere and an interesting round of activities were usually effective in maintaining order. There was an obvious emphasis on self-analysis in the Temple school curriculum.²¹ And the need for spiritual culture in the harmonious development of children ranked foremost in Alcott's educational philosophy.²²

Another ardent advocate of Pestalozzian methods was George Bancroft, who, upon his return from Göttingen University, founded the Round Hill School at Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1823. The twenty-page Prospectus published by Bancroft and an associate named Cogswell sets forth the Swiss ideal of schools as an instrument of self-realization.²³

Catherine Beecher likewise saw the major flaw in the old Lancastrian system, and consequently she wrote in 1829 in "Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education":

The time may come when the world will look back with wonder to behold how much time and effort have been given to the mere cultivation of the memory, and how little mankind has been aware of what every teacher, parent, and friend could accomplish in forming the social, intellectual, and moral

21. Tyler, p. 247.

22. A. Bronson Alcott, The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture, passim.

23. Bancroft-Cogswell, Prospectus of a School.

character of those by whom they are surrounded.²⁴

If a single name had to be chosen to represent American educational reform in the romantic period, it would of necessity be Horace Mann, who in 1837 became the Secretary to the newly established Massachusetts Board of Education. It is not our purpose here to go into Mann's total educational philosophy nor his role in the public education movement, but only to indicate some of his views related to the subject of self-culture. Mann, in the first place, was an ardent environmentalist, believing that to improve man's environment was to improve man himself. As he wrote in one of his educational documents, "I would give to every human being the best opportunities to develop and cultivate the faculties which God has bestowed upon him....Having done this, I would leave him...to find his level..."²⁵ Here is the clear-cut position of the nineteenth-century liberal who believed that once the artificial barriers were down, self-culture would do the rest. Popular education was necessary if the seed implanted by the impartial hand of nature in the mind of both the ignorant peasant and the most profound philosopher were to germinate. Believing as he did that an educated body of men could never remain permanently poor, Mann could not be expected to

24. Quoted by Henry Steel Commager, Living Ideas in America, p. 566. Hereafter referred to as Commager.

25. Quoted by Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Early America, p. 441. Hereafter referred to as Wish.

sympathize with means other than schooling for righting economic injustices. Viewing education as "the balance wheel of the social machinery," Mann thus wrote in his famous Twelfth Annual Report of 1848:

Now surely nothing but universal education can counter-work this tendency to the domination of capital and the servility of labor. If one class possesses all the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it matters not by what name the relation between them is called...But, if education be equally diffused, it will draw property after it by the strongest of all attractions...Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is a great equalizer of the conditions of men,-- the balance wheel of the social machinery.²⁶

Finally, it should be noted that the unqualified acceptance of education as a means of social amelioration was the natural corollary to the dominant belief in individualism which Mann, like a good many other leading thinkers, shared.²⁷

Another educator who must be ranked second only to Mann as an innovator and prophet was Henry Barnard, one-time president of the University of Wisconsin and St. John's College and the first United States Commissioner of Public Education. Barnard did not conceal his belief that the great mass of the urban laborers would remain in the economic class of their parents; but he thought that however humble their circumstances, it was possible for them to lead decent lives and to participate with

²⁶. Commager, p. 567.

²⁷. Merle Curti, The Social Ideas of American Educators, p. 125. Hereafter referred to as Social Ideas.

the well-to-do in the cultural values and the activities of the mind. In Barnard's realistic view there is thus attached an esthetic value to education for its own sake, a value which is to be sought even if education does not promise economic advancement. Nevertheless, Barnard did share the deep faith that educators and the American public have placed in the ameliorative aspects of widespread enlightenment; and he could not altogether escape the idea that self-culture is married to the profit motive:

As a laborer one should endeavor to cultivate in himself those qualities, to attain that knowledge and skill which will make his service most acceptable to the capitalist. He should serve his employer faithfully, bringing all his intelligence to bear upon his work. He will then serve society by making capital upon which he is employed as productive as possible, and will earn for himself the reward of high wages. If his wages be lower than desirable, he should seek for the means of obtaining higher, taking care, at the same time, not to engage in strikes or any other means whose real tendency is the opposite of the one sought for. Should there be no means of immediately obtaining higher wages, he should endeavor to increase his productiveness as the only means of increasing the store out of which wages are paid...²⁸

The major reform Barnard advocated, an increasing emphasis upon utilitarian disciplines in the curriculum, favored rather than militated against the new industrial order which was rapidly becoming dominant. In opposing the prevailing emphasis on book learning and in urging

28. Social Ideas, p. 158.

that education promote whatever was practical and useful, Barnard was indeed an innovator and a prophet.²⁹

Finally, then, we see that the revolutionary educational philosophies of the early nineteenth century along with the several other romantic phenomena discussed in this chapter became the factors in a revival of the self-culture ideal. It would not be correct in conclusion, however, to assume that these forces, which we have listed separately for the sake of analysis, existed in a vacuum or operated in a cause-and-effect relationship to any single movement. Actually, all of them--renewed puritan intellectualism, theological liberalism, philosophical idealism, extreme individualism, primitivism, educational progressivism, Jacksonian democracy, humanitarianism (the list of isms in the nineteenth century seems endless)--all of them, I repeat, existed together, fixed upon many and varied goals, and interacted mutually toward their attainment. Even the self-culture movement itself, which we have regarded rather exclusively, cannot be isolated from the rest of the milieu. But, as is the case with fitting in a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, we have to consider it separately for a time in the relationship to other single parts before its place in the whole can be properly ascertained.

29. Social Ideas, p. 158.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORAL BASES OF THE SELF-CULTURE MOVEMENT

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the part which many of the leading intellectuals of the period played in the self-culture movement. It was they who gave direction and purpose to the aspirations and efforts of the average citizen. Indeed, without the moral and philosophical bases which the intelligentsia provided, it is safe to say that many of the practical activities with which the movement was implemented would never have come to fruition; the movement itself very likely would have atrophied midway in its development. T. R. Adam in his The Worker's Road to Learning very correctly observes in this connection that:

There is scant evidence for the belief that mature people long for specific opportunities to discipline their minds. The process of continued learning is generally based on enticement; on some seductive promise of material advantage or of social gain, or of increased personal power. The inspiration comes from without in the form of commands, a challenge, or a promise.¹

It was the moral philosophers of the nineteenth century who offered the challenge and the promise with their teaching of the concept that man is a free agent designed to achieve mental and spiritual progress on the way toward perfection. Here in the work of leading thinkers of the period was "the inspiration from without" to

1. T. R. Adam, The Worker's Road to Learning, p. 30. Hereafter referred to as Road.

which Adam referred.

Fortunately, America in the 30's and 40's was congenial to the ideas of many of these moral philosophers. The deeply rooted Christian concept of moral self-improvement was popularized by one Dr. Thomas Dick, a Scottish writer celebrated for his reconciliation of science and religion. Harper's Family Library in 1833 published Dick's On the Improvement of Society by the Diffusion of Knowledge in which the argument was advanced that the dissemination of learning together with the moral renovation always accompanying such diffusion would eventually overcome man's natural depravity. Dick's name, according to Merle Curti, was a household word in America during the romantic era.²

Another of these moral philosophers, M. le Baron De gerando (also spelled De Gerando), is especially important for the literary and cultural historian, both as an influence in the thought of Emerson and as an author on the subject of self-culture. His book The Visitor of the Poor had been translated from French (by "A Lady of Boston" with an introduction by Joseph Tuckerman, Boston, 1832) and had attracted some attention in the Christian Examiner and the North American Review. His work on the history of philosophy was also well known in this country.³ But the work which concerns us here is his Concerning

2. Curti, p. 355.

3. Howard Mumford Jones, America and French Culture, 1750-1848, p. 450

Moral Perfection, or Self-Education, the translation of which by Elizabeth Peabody was reviewed at length in the Christian Examiner (1830) by the Rev. George Ripley, a prominent Unitarian minister of Boston and later one of the prime movers in the Brook Farm experiment in self-culture. Ripley saw Degerando's book as a synthesis of the optimistic faith in the perfectibility of human nature, the romantic cult of individualism, and the moral struggle implicit in Christian doctrine.⁴ Ripley's essay became the subject of considerable discussion and helped to draw attention to the book, which, according to Ripley, "certainly approaches more nearly to our idea of a perfect treatise on the application of moral philosophy to human improvement, than any one with which we are acquainted."⁵

Degerando begins by postulating five kinds of good, the attainment of which is necessary to the perfection of man. These five kinds of good are derived from the senses, the affections, the intellect, the moral faculty, and the religious faculty, respectively.

Two essential conditions, therefore, serve as a basis to our progress; one is, that we should know how to find the end which is best in itself; the other is, that we should be capable of attaining it. Hence we have two great moral powers, upon which seems to depend our progress; namely, the Love of

4. George Ripley, "Degerando on Self Education," Christian Examiner, VIII - IX (1830), 70-107. Hereafter referred to as Ripley, "Degerando".

5. Ripley, "Degerando," p. 76.

Good, and Self-Government.⁶

Degerando then declares that by cultivating in ourselves the Love of Excellence as a substitute for the principle of self-interest all communities instead of declaring war will be by "one continued alliance, progressively developed upon the largest scale."⁷ He thus appears to see self-culture of the individual as a necessary foundation for peace and continued freedom.

Elsewhere Degerando sees self-culture as necessary for political stability and for creative enterprise:

If you wish to teach obedience, you must teach two things, rectitude and self-control; the one as Law, the other as the means of fulfilling it.⁸

Those alone persevere and finish, who have learned to be masters of themselves.⁹

Regarding the proper conception of education, Degerando has this to say:

Intellectual progress does not consist essentially in the extent of acquired knowledge; but in the harmonious development of the intellectual powers. Intellectual progress is one of the means of increasing knowledge; but it especially contributes to our attaining our knowledge complete, classified, and regulated in wise proportions; and secures against the danger of superficial attainment, which is worse than ignorance.¹⁰

6. M. Le Baron Degerando, Concerning Moral Perfection, or Self-Education, translated by Elizabeth Peabody, p. 3. Hereafter referred to as Degerando.

7. Degerando, pp. 29-30.

8. Degerando, p. 112.

9. Degerando, p. 122.

10. Degerando, p. 166.

In thus striking out against the superficiality of rote learning which he observed going on about him, Degerando was echoing the discontent which liberal educators felt over the Lancastrian methods employed in many schools. Mere memory lessons, he declares, are not real education at all.

All education is but a succession of exercises, rightly conceived and wisely graduated. The great object of education is to make us acquire, with good habits; more extensive capacities; great errors have been committed in school education; and very serious mistakes may be made for the same reason in self-education.¹¹

The essential difference between the two kinds of education [is this]: the one, founded only upon the outward repetition of the same processes, ... renders us incapable of inventing or bringing to perfection...; the other, going back to motives and principles, teaches us to do better...and to think better...The former is but the tradition of pedantry; the latter, the art of wisdom: one makes automata, and trains animals; the other, animating and enlightening, forms men.¹²

Degerando obviously was doubtful about the value of much of the formal schooling available in his day. Perhaps it was this very inadequacy of formal education that led Degerando and others to lay so much emphasis on self-education; but even where formal education succeeded, it did not relieve the individual, in the scheme of Degerando, of the necessity for continued intellectual effort.

But if, by a happy chance, school education should have given us the most appropriate preparation, we must yet do for ourselves what no instructor can do for us, we must

11. Degerando, p. 199.

12. Degerando, p. 202.

add to it our own labor, and make up beforehand a plan of conduct. By doing this well, we may even supply the defects of imperfect education.¹³

In 1838 came William Ellery Channing's essay entitled Self-Culture, which may be regarded as the characteristic expression of the fully developed American philosophical version of the doctrine advanced by Degerando. Channing and the Transcendentalists in an even more intense way declared that the ground of man's culture lay not in his calling or station but in his very nature. Because this essay is so important in the history of New England's self-culture movement and because it is no longer widely known except among professional scholars, I feel it will be worthwhile to summarize here, in Channing's own words, the main points of his thesis. The following excerpts are quoted selectively from Channing's Works, volumes I & II (Boston, 1871), pages 349-411:

In this country the mass of the people are distinguished by possessing the means of improvement, of self-culture, possessed nowhere else. Lectures have their use. They stir up many, who, but for such outward appeals, might have slumbered to the end of life. But let it be remembered that little is to be gained simply by coming to this place once a week, and giving up the mind for an hour to be wrought upon by a teacher. (Channing was speaking to one of the many young Workman's:

13. Degerando, p. 313.

Associations then popular in New England). Unless what we hear is made a part of ourselves by conscientious reflection, very little permanent good is received.

Self-culture is something possible. It is not a dream. It has foundations in our nature. There are two powers of the human soul which make self-culture possible, the self-searching and the self-forming power. (Recall at this point the two powers, Love of Excellence and Self-Government, which Degerando postulated.)

I am first to unfold the idea of self-culture. Growth, expansion is the end. Nothing admits culture, but that which has a principle of life, capable of being expanded. He, therefore, who does what he can to unfold all his powers and capacities, especially his nobler ones, so as to become a well proportioned, virtuous, excellent, happy being, practices self-culture. (The self-culture movement thus appears to have its roots in Unitarianism's view of human nature,)

First, self-culture is Moral. No part of self-knowledge is more important than to discern clearly these two great principles, the self-seeking and the disinterested; and the most important part of self-culture is to depress the former and to exalt the latter, or to enthrone the sense of duty within us. (Degerando had said the same thing in virtually the same words.)

In the next place, self-culture is Religious. We have sight and other senses to discern, and limbs and

various faculties to secure and appropriate the material creation. And we have, too, a power, which cannot stop at what we see and handle, at what exists within the bounds of space and time, which seeks for the Infinite, Uncreated Cause, which cannot rest till it ascend to the Eternal, All-comprehending Mind. To develop this is eminently to educate ourselves.

Again. Self-culture is Intellectual. When we speak to men of improving themselves, the first thought which occurs to them is, that they must cultivate their understanding, and get knowledge and skill. By education, men mean almost exclusively intellectual training. Now I reverence as much as any man the intellect; but let us never exalt it above the moral principle. One thing above all is needful, and that is, the Disinterestedness which is the very soul of virtue. The moral and religious principles of the soul, generously cultivated, fertilize the intellect. Intellectual culture consists, not chiefly, as many are apt to think, in accumulating information.

Again. Self-culture is Social, or one of its great offices is to unfold and purify the affections, which spring up instinctively in the human breast, which bind together husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister; which bind a man to friends and neighbors, to his country, and to the suffering who fall under his eye, wherever they belong.

Again. Self-Culture is Practical, or it proposes as one of its chief ends to fit us for action. Two branches of self-culture which have been almost wholly overlooked in the education of the people, and which ought not to be so slighted, [are] the sense or perception of Beauty...and the power of Utterance. (Having expanded on the five-fold idea of self-culture, Channing then proceeds to the means by which the self-culture just described may be promoted. It should be noted that the five divisions of the idea of self-culture, that is, moral, religious, intellectual, social and practical, which Channing sets forth in his essay correspond exactly to the outline followed by Degerando, the only difference being that Channing considers them in inverse order. It would seem almost certain, therefore, that Channing used Degerando's book as an outline for his own essay.)

First, the great means of self-culture, that which includes all the rest, is to fasten on this culture as our Great End, to determine deliberately and solemnly that we will make the most of the powers which God has given us.

I come now to another important measure of self-culture, and this is, intercourse with superior minds. It is chiefly through books that we enjoy intercourse with superior minds, and these invaluable means of communication are in the reach of all. To make this means of culture effectual, a man must select good books.

Another important means of self-culture, is to free

ourselves from the power of human opinion and example, except as far as this is sanctioned by our own deliberate judgement. You ought, indeed, patiently and conscientiously to strengthen your reason by other men's intelligence, but you must not prostrate it before them.

Another means of self-culture may be found by every man in his Condition or Occupation, be it what it may. Labor is a school of benevolence as well as justice. He ought to think of the benefit of those he works for, as well as of his own; and in doing so, in desiring amidst his sweat and toil to serve others as well as himself, he is exercising and growing in benevolence. This is an important means of self-culture. In this way the idea of Perfection takes root in the mind and spreads far beyond a man's trade.

Hardships are not to be sought for. They come fast enough of themselves, and we are in more danger of sinking under, than of needing them. But when God sends them, they are noble means of self-culture, and as such, let us meet and bear them cheerfully.

I have time to consider one more means of self-culture. We find it in our Free Government, in our Political relations and duties. A republic is a powerful means of educating the multitude, It is the people's university. He is called by his participation in the national sovereignty to cherish public spirit, a regard to the general weal. A Man who purposes to discharge faithfully these

obligations is carrying on a generous self-culture.

(Channing then cautions against party spirit as hostile to moral self-improvement, proposes the use of public lands for the purpose of educational institutions, and then passes on to the third main division of his essay.)

But to come nearer to the point. Are labor and self-culture irreconcilable to each other? It is Mind, after all, which does the work of the world, so that the more there is of mind, the more work will be accomplished.. Make men intelligent and they become inventive. Self-culture multiplies and increases their pleasures. It creates new capacities of enjoyment. It saves their leisure from being what it too often is, dull and wearisome. It saves them from rushing for excitement to indulgences destructive to body and soul.

It is monstrous, it approaches impiety, to suppose that God has placed insuperable barriers to the expansion of the free, illimitable soul. You have many and great deficiencies to be remedied; and the remedy lies, not in the ballot-box, not in the exercise of your political powers, but in the faithful education of yourselves and your children. Resolve on self-culture. Make yourselves worthy of your free institutions, and strengthen and perpetuate them by your intelligence and your virtues.

Here, it seems to me, is a clear statement by one in

the very midst of the self-culture movement of what I have tried to demonstrate heretofore: that the movement was an outgrowth of the anti-Calvinistic view of man and God and that it was viewed as a panacea for social amelioration.

Much the same thesis is developed by Channing in his "On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes," two lectures delivered before The Mechanic Apprentices' Library Association of Boston and published February 11, 1840.¹⁴ It will not be necessary, therefore, to quote from these essays; they should be noted simply as added evidence of Channing's intense interest in the subject of self-culture. The same applies to his essay "Remarks on Associations"¹⁵ and to a number of his sermons.

The doctrines advanced by Channing and Degerando inspired the daily routine of many of their contemporaries, among them Elihu Burritt, who devoted himself to learning some thirty languages while working over a blacksmith's forge. Channing's ideas re-echoed in dozens of periodicals and innumerable lectures. The idea of self-culture was, indeed, in the air.

Burritt, the perfect example of self-culture, was born in 1810 in New Britain, Connecticut, and enjoyed little in the way of formal schooling before entering the

14. Essays English and American, The Harvard Classics, XXVIII, 319-80.

15. William Ellery Channing, Works, I-II, 281-332.

blacksmith's trade. His journals and letters, published by Merle Curti, give a clear example of the rigid routine Burritt set for himself by combining work and study. One sample, which will serve to illustrate the whole, is from his journal of May, 1843:

The storm increased almost to a tempest this morning; read Arabic and translated from the German until noon; worked upon my hoes till tea time, and then resumed my translation which I worked upon till 10.¹⁶

Self-culture was the theme of Burritt's first lecture when he later took to the platform. In his address "Application and Genius," which he delivered some sixty times in one season, he advanced the theory that genius is made, not inherited, and that strong motives, a persistent will, and unflagging devotion and application are the chief factors in intellectual achievement.¹⁷

Parallel to the career of Burritt was that of Robert Collyer, an English blacksmith who came to America in 1850 and through a program of self-education became a distinguished Unitarian minister and friend of the underprivileged.¹⁸

If Degerando and Channing laid the groundwork for the nineteenth-century "philosophy" of self-culture, being among the first to attempt to formulate the then prevalent ideas into a system of principles and tenets, it was

16. Merle Curti, The Learned Blacksmith, p. 19. Hereafter referred to as Blacksmith.

17. Blacksmith, pp. 5-6.

18. John Haynes Holmes, The Life and Letters of Robert Collyer 1823-1912.

the Transcendentalists who to a greater degree and in a multitude of more or less related ways carried the ideal forward throughout New England. John Byron Wilson in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation entitled Activities of the New England Transcendentalists in the Dissemination of Culture observes:

Culture of self and culture of others became virtually the whole business of life for the Transcendentalists. It involved the unfolding of all one's powers, the process of becoming manlike, the aim of achieving the beautiful and the good in human character.¹⁹

Few in numbers, the Transcendentalists were very able and concentrated in or about Boston. An informal club, known originally among its members as the Symposium or Hedge's Club, the group united such of the interested intellectuals as Emerson, George Ripley, Margaret Fuller, James Freeman Clarke, George Bancroft and others. Soon the club acquired popularly the name of Transcendentalist, and in 1838 it brought out an ambitious fourteen-volume shelf entitled Specimens of Foreign and Standard Literature, which, it was hoped, might serve a number of those who were bent upon a program of self-education..

Culture became almost a watchword for the Transcendentalists. They laid down broad programs of culture raised to the level of philosophical idealism, employing book. actions, intuition, environmental forces, and

19. John Bryon Wilson, Activities of the New England Transcendentalists in the Dissemination of Culture, p.14. Hereafter referred to as Wilson.

physical and sensuous aspects of man's nature. The Transcendentalists did not stop at the mere advocating of plain living and high thinking. With them, thought produced action and action, thought. While they agreed largely as to the ends, however, they did not always agree as to means. Thoreau went to Walden and Alcott to Fruitlands. Emerson preferred the confines of his own study at Concord, while George Ripley, believing that culture of self and of others could go on simultaneously, established Brook Farm on the principle of mutual instruction advocated by Pestalozzi and William Russell, one of Pestalozzi's American exponents.

Of all the strategies and campaigns worked out by the Transcendentalists for the dissemination of culture, perhaps the dominant note was sounded by Emerson. "We are in a world for culture," he said.²⁰ And again in another place Emerson remarks that culture is "the chief end of man."²¹ The important point about all of Emerson's pronouncements was that he exalted man to the highest degree of attainment, emphasizing that he was born with a spark of the divine instead of in sin.

Emerson in many of his early sermons and later essays is, like Channing, alive to the idea of self-culture; and beyond a doubt he contributed his share toward influ-

20. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fugitive Slave Law," The Works of Emerson, Riverside edition, XI, 236.

21. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, ed., The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, IV, 376.

encing his hearers and readers toward that goal. One of his first pronouncements on the subject was the sermon "Self-Culture" first delivered on September 5, 1830, in which he says:

It is in the spirit of that master whose principles of life he is expounding that the apostle Paul enjoins us to present ourselves living sacrifices. The duty to which we are called is nothing less than an unceasing effort at self-culture, or, in the words of the apostle, a patient continuance in well doing.²²

That the self can be improved and that its improvement is a natural desire of human beings is a thought characteristic of the young Emerson's views of human nature.. He devotes other sermons to the development of the self-culture theme, including "Self-Direction and Self-Command," (October 12, 1828); "Self-Knowledge and Self-Mastery," (November 23, 1828); "Man Is Improvable," (August 20, 1829); "The Power of the Soul," (February 28, 1830); "Spiritual Improvement Unlimitable," (July 25, 1830), and "Self-Improvement," (February 12, 1832).

Several close parallels to Channing's thought can be observed in some of Emerson's later essays pertaining to our subject. I have condensed the ideas into a continuous sequence, using, as in the case of the Channing essay, the author's own words without indicating the deletions. First from the essay "Culture" we hear.

22. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, ed., Young Emerson Speaks, p. 101.

Emerson say:

"Whilst all the world is in pursuit of power, and of wealth as a means of power, culture corrects the theory of success. We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education. What we call our root-and-branch reforms, of slavery, war, gambling, intemperance, is only medicating the symptoms. We must begin higher up, namely in Education. We only vary the phrase, not the doctrine, when we say culture opens the sense of beauty. A man is a beggar who only lives to the useful, and however he may serve as a pin or a rivet in the social machine, he cannot be said to have arrived at self-possession. And if one shall read the future of the race hinted in the organic effort of nature to mount and meliorate, and the corresponding impulse to the Better in human beings, we shall dare to affirm that there is nothing he will not overcome and convert, until at last culture shall absorb the chaos and gehenna."²³

Drawing upon the new evolutionary hypotheses then in the air, Emerson thus apparently sees the desire for self-improvement as a law of nature.

Next, in the essay "Natural History of Intellect" Emerson is heard declaring:

"The intellect builds the universe and is the key

²³. Complete Works, VI, 131-166. Hereafter referred to as Emerson, Works.

to all it contains. Why should we be the dupes of our senses, the victims of our own works, and always inferior to ourselves? We do not yet trust the unknown powers of thought. The whole world is nothing but an exhibition of the powers of this principle, which distributes men."²⁴

And finally, from the essay "Progress of Culture":

"Culture implies all which gives the mind possession of its own powers. Culture alters the political status of an individual. It is too plain that a cultivated laborer is worth many untaught laborers; that a scientific engineer, with instruments and steam, is worth many hundred men, many thousands. Brothers, I draw new hope from the atmosphere we breathe today, from the healthy sentiment of the American people, and from the avowed aims and tendencies of the educated class. I read the promise of better times and of greater men."²⁵

Another member of the small but influential Transcendentalist group who was no less devoted than Emerson to the cultural ideal was Sarah Margaret Fuller. Early in life she had become preoccupied with the idea of self-culture, and eventually she evolved it into a doctrine which James Freeman Clarke saw as the very root and spring of her life. Something of the stern regimen Mar-

24. Emerson, Works, XII, 3-110.

25. Emerson, Works, VIII, 207-34.

garet Fuller set for herself can be seen in a letter to a former teacher in which she describes her course of self-culture:

I rise a little before five, walk an hour, and then practice on the piano until seven, when we breakfast. Next I read French--Sismondi's Literature of the South of Europe--till eight, then two or three lectures in Brown's philosophy. About half-past nine I go to Mr. Perkins' school and study Greek until twelve, when, the school being dismissed, I recite, go home, and practice again until dinner, at two. Sometimes, if the conversation is very agreeable, I lounge for half an hour over the dessert, though rarely so lavish of time. Then when I can, I read two hours in Italian, but I am often interrupted. At six I walk or take a drive. Before going to bed I play or sing for half an hour or so, to make all sleepy, and about eleven, retire to write awhile in my journal, exercises on what I have read, or a series of characteristics which I am filling up according to advice. Thus, you see, I am learning Greek, and making acquaintance with metaphysics, and French and Italian literature.²⁶

Margaret Fuller as a leading feminist was above all interested in abstract rights, and it was to this program of Goethean self-culture that she looked for a solution rather than to Fourieristic organization.²⁷ She rejects Fourier's program of reform--the removal of harmful institutions from man or vice versa--²⁸ and approves of

26. Quoted by Mason Wade, Margaret Fuller: Whetstone of Genius, pp. 13-14.

27. This contradicts Wade, p. 131, where he declares the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley group had already settled the question of abstract rights of women, Fuller's discussion turning of the Fourieristic idea of "Attractive industry."

28. Margaret Fuller, Woman in the Nineteenth Century and Kindred Papers..., edited by Arthur B. Fuller with introduction by Horace Greeley, p. 76.

such plans as that of Maria Edgeworth in her Practical Education, namely, "the development of a clear judgment, habits of liberal study, a capacity for friendship, and a hatred of falsehood, all these attitudes and ideals to be nourished in a domestic environment, preferably the home."²⁹

Margaret Fuller's devotion to self-culture, it must be noted, was not without its pitfalls. James Freeman Clarke, for one, was distressed by the contempt which Miss Fuller's preoccupation sometimes caused her to display for the vulgar herd who lacked high aspirations. But perhaps no one better understood the shortcomings of her extremist viewpoint than another of her contemporaries, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. Miss Peabody recognized that Margaret Fuller "partook too largely of a current fault of the time, a too conscious attempt at individual self-culture versus the culture of that which is alike in all men."³⁰ Miss Peabody was warning of the danger of "ego-theism" to which she feared extreme individuality might lead.

As for her own philosophy in the matter of self-culture, Miss Peabody succeeded perhaps as well as any of the Transcendentalist in reaching a desirable synthesis of widely disparate views. Commenting on the integration of all Miss Peabody's interests around a dynamic concept

29. Fuller, pp. 130-31.

30. Queenie Bilbo, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, p. 167.

of culture, John Byron Wilson has this to say:

Recognizing the moral element [in individual culture] to be paramount, she did not allow it to nullify the aesthetic as did Ripley and Parker. She preserved a golden mean between Thoreau's withdrawal from society; and she avoided the selfish self-culture advocated by Margaret Fuller as well as Parker's "canine appetite for knowledge," always continuing her various philanthropies and her attempts to diffuse culture and to improve educational systems. Perhaps of all the members of the Hedge Club only Miss Peabody achieved a synthesis of what seem to some critics to be irreconcilable elements in Transcendentalism--past and present, society and solitude, moral and aesthetic, self-culture and culture of others.³¹

To what extent Miss Peabody's views influenced or were influenced by Bronson Alcott one can only guess; in all probability during their association at Temple School there was a mutual exchange of ideas on the subject of culture. At any rate, in her writing about those days, Miss Peabody prefers to remain in the background, giving Alcott credit for the innovations at the school. Thus it is that through the pen of one devotee to the high cultural ideal we begin to glimpse the views of another. Miss Peabody comments on Alcott's conversations with the children at Temple School, Boston, during the period when she was assistant teacher there and was more familiar with Alcott's teaching procedures and ideals than anyone else. Alcott, she says, believed that "contemplation of spirit is the first principle of human

³¹. Wilson, pp. 324-25.

culture, the foundation of self-education."³²

Alcott's concept of culture was founded on the Platonic idea that all abstract truth exists in the soul of man; and the aim of the teacher, he declared, was not to impart knowledge from without but to educe both truth and knowledge from the mind. As Alcott himself wrote in Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction:

...infant instruction when adapted to the human being, is founded on the great principle, that every infant is already in possession of the faculties and apparatus required for his education, and, that by a law of his constitution he uses these to a great extent himself; that the office of instruction is chiefly to facilitate this process, and to accompany the child in his progress rather than to drive or even to lead him.³³

Alcott presented this thesis as a basis for his entire program of culture. His Platonic concept is also, it should be observed, a philosophical basis for the entire self-culture movement, the idea being that if all abstract truths are inherent in the mind, it is possible for all to cultivate themselves, whether infants or adults.

When enrollment at Temple School dwindled to fewer than twelve pupils in 1838, Alcott began holding public "conversations" in Boston. The "conversation" was, he

³². Peabody, p. 245.

³³. A. Bronson Alcott, Principles and Methods of Infant Instruction, p. 27. Italics are Alcott's.

believed, "the best method of human culture."³⁴ These were continued there and at Lynn, Massachusetts, until 1840. In 1838 Alcott's topic was "The Theory and Practice of Self-Culture," perhaps suggested by Emerson's lecture series on "Culture" in the same year.

Still another of the nineteenth-century intellectuals who lent his authority to the cause of self-culture was Theodore Parker, the advocate of "plain living and high thinking." In an essay entitled "Safeguards of Society" Parker seems in complete accord with his Transcendental contemporaries regarding man's potentialities.

What is man here on earth to accomplish? He is to unfold and perfect himself, as far as possible, in body and spirit; to attain the full measure of his corporeal and spiritual powers, his intellectual, moral, affectional, and religious powers; to develop the individual into a complete man.³⁵

Parker conceives of society as an instrument to achieve just two things: first, to defend itself and prevent men from hurting one another; second, "to furnish opportunities for the mass, as such, to develop itself; and the individual, as such, to develop himself, individually and socially and exercise all his faculties in his own way."³⁶

34. Amos Bronson Alcott, The Journals of Bronson Alcott, selected and edited by Odell Shepard, p. 104.

35. Theodore Parker, Speeches, Addresses and Occasional Sermons, III, 297. Hereafter referred to as Parker.

36. Parker, p. 300.

Parker is more explicit about the necessity for self-culture in an address entitled "Public Education of the People" delivered at a teachers' institute meeting in Syracuse, New York, October 4, 1849.

After the grown men of any country have provided for their physical comforts, their most important business is to educate themselves still further, and to train up the rising generation to their own level...The highest use of material wealth is its educational function.³⁷

In this same essay Parker declares that the public education of men is influenced by four powers, corresponding to four modes of national activity. He lists these as (1) political action of the people, represented by the State; (2) the industrial action of the people, represented by Business; (3) ecclesiastical action of the people, represented by the Church; and (4) literary action, represented by the Press.

What is commonly and technically called education--the development and instruction of the faculties of children, is only preparatory...The schoolmaster's business is to give the child such development of his faculties...that he can secure the influence of these four educational forces...and so continue his education.³⁸

After discoursing on the positive educational values of Politics, Business, and the Church, Parker pauses to note the important part the infant mass publishing industry was playing in the self-culture movement:

The press furnishes us with books exceedingly

37. Parker, II, 154.

38. Parker, II, 156-57.

cheap. We manufacture literature cheaper than any nation except the Chinese. Even the best books, the works of the great masters of thought, are within the reach of an industrious farmer or mechanic, if half a dozen families combine for that purpose. The educational power of a few good books scattered throughout a community is well known.³⁹

Yet with all his recognition of the self-culture possibilities in man's environment, Parker is not unmindful of the shortcomings which arise from a too steadfast reliance on man-made institutions.

So, notwithstanding the good influence of these four modes of national activity in educating the grown men of America, they yet do not afford the highest teaching which the people require, to realize individually the idea of a man, and jointly that of a democracy. The State does not teach perfect justice; the Church does not teach that, or love of truth. Business does not teach perfect morality, and the average literature which falls into the hands of the million, teaches men to respect public opinion more than the word of God, which transcends that. Thus these four teach only the excellence already organized or incorporated in the laws, the theology, the customs, and the books of the land. I cannot but think these four teachers are less deficient here than in other lands, and have excellences of their own, but the faults mentioned are inseparable from such institutions. An institution in an organized thought; of course, no institution can represent a truth which is too new or too high for the existing organizations, yet that is the truth which it is desirable to teach.⁴⁰

The implication is clear. Self-culture--true self-culture in the spiritual and moral as well as the intel-

39. Parker, II, 160.

40. Parker, II, 176.

lectual sense--was for Parker and other leading thinkers of his day a never ending quest, a lofty ideal constantly to be striven for yet perpetually just beyond reach. To Parker the rise of the lyceums, lecture courses, library association, and cheap colleges in New England and elsewhere only expressed the want which other institutions for learning could not satisfy; but these, too, tended to become institutionalized and so fell short of the ideal.

Somewhat akin to Parker by virtue of his adherence to Transcendental beliefs was a New York clergyman, Caleb Henry, whose work entitled Social Welfare and Human Progress (New York, 1861) has relevance for our study. Henry classes as "civilization" the complete development of material resources of the nation while the spiritual elements of national well-being he calls "culture."⁴¹ National well-being means to him the proper blending of civilization and culture, the latter dominating the former. "Intellectual elevation" and "virtuous energy" in the people are the bases upon which to build, declares Henry. Nor is this to be done by cultivating science, and art and letters in the university. The reform, he believes, must reach down into our "popular education." Young minds must be given resources for future "self-culture and Self-guidance."⁴²

⁴¹. Cited by Ronald Vale Wells, Three Christian Transcendentalists, p. 87. Hereafter referred to as Wells.

⁴². Wells, p. 87.

Frederic Henry Hedge, another New England minister, clearly stated in one of his sermons printed in Boston in a volume dated 1891 the ideal of combining work and self-cultural pursuits:

The false system of education which separates the intellectual from the manual labor must be replaced by a system which will embrace the whole man in its scope and aim with the result that it shall be equally rare to be unskilled in some mechanical art and to have a barren mind.⁴³

Writing in The Dial on another occasion, Hedge summed up in a sentence the belief which was shared by an important segment of his thinking contemporaries:

The work of life, so far as the individual is concerned, and that to which the scholar is particularly called, is self-culture--the perfect unfolding of our individual nature.⁴⁴

I have already mentioned George Ripley's interest in the self-culture ideal in connection with his approving view of Degerando's work. In another review (of J. L. S. Vincent's Vues sur le Protestantisme in France)⁴⁵ Ripley makes clear his own beliefs concerning the moral and philosophical bases of the movement. He declares men to be free moral agents and therefore entitled "to the greatest development and to the free employment of all their faculties, physical, intellectual, and moral,

43. Quoted by Wells, p. 141.

44. F. H. Hedge, "The Art of Life--The Scholar's Calling," The Dial, I (October, 1840), 176.

45. Christian Examiner, X (May, 1831), 273-96. Hereafter referred to as Examiner.

in order to ameliorate their own personal condition and that of society in general."⁴⁶ Clearly Ripley saw the widespread dissemination of learning as a necessary instrument in the program of social reform. In this he was in accord with most of his contemporaries; where he differed from many of his fellow Transcendentalists, particularly Emerson and Miss Fuller, was in his beliefs with regard to the means by which man was to cultivate himself. Whereas to Emerson and Miss Fuller self-culture was a highly personal matter to be carried on in the sanctity of one's own study, Ripley believed that culture of self and culture of others could go on simultaneously and so embarked on the short-lived Brook Farm experiment. In the next chapter I shall consider Brook Farm again along with other utopian experiments as one kind of activity with which men hoped to implement the writing of moralists and philosophers and bring the self-culture movement forth into a working reality.

The writing of two feminists would serve to indicate how the self-culture movement became involved in the crusade for women's rights as well as for broader programs of reform. Catherine Beecher's criterion for the education of women as expressed in Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education, a brief tract of 1829, was the same humanistic ideal of well-rounded development that characterized the views of Degerando,

⁴⁶. Examiner, p. 279.

Channing, Pestalozzi, Mann, Goethe, and the Transcendentalists.

A well-balanced mind is the greatest and best preparative for her varied and complicated duties. Woman, in her sphere of usefulness, has an almost equal need of all the several faculties.⁴⁷

Emma Hart Willard also emphasizes the humanistic ideal in Plan for Improving Female Education:

Education should seek to bring its subjects to the perfection of their moral intellectual, and physical nature: in order that they may be of greatest possible use to themselves and others; or, to use a different expression, that they may be the means of the greatest possible happiness of which they are capable, both as to what they enjoy and what they communicate.⁴⁸

Recognizing the limited opportunities then available for women's formal education, Miss Willard and other feminists advocated a program of self-culture to bridge the gap. Feminism thus strove as much for cultural equality for women as for political and economic equality.

Finally, we must list one other important work pertaining to our subject, namely, James Freeman Clarke's Self-Culture: Physical, Intellectual, Moral and Spiritual, a series of sermons which was published in Boston by Ticknor & Co. in 1880. In one place Clarke poses the ideal in the light of religious obligation:

47. Tract reprinted in Willystine Goodsell, ed., Pioneers of Women's Education in the United States, p. 159. Hereafter referred to as Goodsell.

48. Goodsell, p. 54.

God has placed us here to grow, just as He placed the trees and flowers....The duty of self-culture is clearly taught in the parables of the talents and of the pounds.⁴⁹

One of the biographers of Clarke, Edward Everett Hale, said of the book in 1892, "Self-Culture, which embodies not only his theories, but a great deal of the practical experience of his life, has found, probably for that reason, a very general welcome. Up to this present time it has passed through fifteen editions. Perhaps this book may be considered one of his best contributions to the cause of education."⁵⁰

Clarke, who lived from 1810 to 1888, had early shown a central interest in education. He began teaching soon after leaving college, and at Louisville became the superintendent of schools in 1839. He later settled in Jamaica Plain and for many years was chosen upon the school committee until that community was absorbed by the city of Boston. In 1863 Clarke was appointed by Governor Andrew of Massachusetts to the State Board of Education, and four years later he became a professor in the Harvard Divinity School, serving subsequently as an overseer of Harvard.⁵¹

Another critic of Clarke, John Wesley Thomas, comments that Self-Culture, "his one purely philosophical

49. p. 31. Hereafter referred to as Self-Culture.

50. James Freeman Clarke: Autobiography, Diary and Correspondence, p. 305. Hereafter referred to as Clarke.

51. Clarke, pp. 292-93.

work," was second only to his Ten Great Religions in popularity.⁵² Van Wyck Brooks calls the book, which groups together the thought and ideas of Clarke's early Transcendentalism, "a characteristic expression of the West Street circle,"⁵³ though it was published forty years after the circle disintegrated. Clarke takes up in separate chapters the factors which influence man's development, that is, friendship, education, social life, reading, intuition, nature, etc. His purpose is not to present an abstract system of philosophy but to give a practical guide for the philosophically uninitiated in their personal development. In the chapter on "Reading" he says:

Read much but do not read many things...Select the great teachers of the race, the great masters, and read them. Read Bacon, Milton, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Schiller, Goethe, and Lessing. Do not read about these authors in magazines, but read the authors themselves.⁵⁴

Clarke was not a great literary figure, but he did exert a powerful influence on his age--as writer, editor, Lyceum speaker, reformer, clergyman, and disseminator of German culture. Thus, through his theological works, says Thomas, he reached an audience "largely unaffected by Margaret Fuller, Emerson, Hedge, Ripley

52. James Freeman Clarke: Apostle of German Culture in America, p. 167. Hereafter referred to as Thomas.

53. Van Wyck Brooks, The Flowering of New England, p. 296.

54. Self-Culture, p. 318.

and others whose writings were primarily literary."⁵⁵

It should now appear that Emerson in his study, Parker, Clarke and others in their pulpits, Ripley and Alcott in their Utopian communities, Fuller at her editorial desk, and Thoreau at Walden were all seeking the same goal by different paths. Each of them wished to make actual what was potential in his own nature, and at the same time each desired to point the way to his fellow man how he could secure complete self-realization.

John Byron Wilson says of the Transcendentalists' efforts to disseminate culture:

This was Christian humanism, a fusion of the Hebraic and the Hellenistic, in the sense that their well-rounded man, their "natural" man, was also a moral man.⁵⁶

Transcendentalism, then, began as a spiritual protest and ended as an effort to reconstruct society on the basis of ideal laws and practical duties. And, as we have seen, a belief in the efficacy of self-culture figured importantly in their thinking.

55. Thomas, p. 135.

56. Wilson, p. 361.

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SELF-CULTURE MOVEMENT

Out of the pattern of developments which is the theme of this study one more central fact emerges-- a fact often overlooked by the self-styled realists who would disparage the dreamers and visionaries for their alleged disassociation from worldly affairs. That fact is that idealism is capable of producing solid, practical results when it is related to needs as instinctive as peace and social stability. To romanticism's newly acquired social outlook, education possessed a reality sometimes more apparent to the idealists than to the realists themselves. It represented the major alternative to force in overcoming the injustices of society. And in the light of this reality movements were created for the widespread dissemination of learning among the masses.

The conception of idealistic thinkers that popular education is a powerful instrument for the relief of poverty and social inequality was deeply ingrained during the romantic era. Its impetus, in fact, has never been exhausted even to the present day, as is evidenced by the large volume of current articles which view education as a panacea for everything from the establishment of world peace to the solution of the juvenile delinquency problem. But one may well ask at this point what men of good will in the nineteenth century actually

did by way of implementing their beliefs. How did the visionaries relieve their distress at social suffering other than through endless discussions and writing? How did they recognize the fact that in education, as in law, it is more important to invent a concrete remedy than to proclaim a forceless right? The answer lies in the manifold practical activities in the form of learned societies, museums, libraries, lyceums, etc., which were created as weapons of social action and which were to a great extent motivated by the dynamic of melioristic purpose.

Now, all of the activities just mentioned relate to the self-culture theme in precisely the same way as the movements of a symphony relate to the total work. In a symphony each movement, as an expression of its own set of specific ideas, has a kind of autonomous existence while contributing to the whole; yet it derives a part of its strength from its relation to the other movements in the unfolding of the composer's grand idea. Thus, in the case of the various romantic movements for the dissemination of culture, each was in a way an independent entity contributing to the total pattern; but at the same time each was reinforced by the already existing cultural ideal. Many of the great movements of the time I view as outgrowths of a greater force: the mass desire for the means of self-improvement. In return each in its own way stimulated a fresh demand and attracted new

adherents to the cult.

Thus to arouse and satisfy the intellectual curiosity of a weary, worry-ridden mass of men and women was not easy. It is doubtful whether the machinery of formal education, even if it had been adequate, could have been entrusted with the task. Of necessity, the media had to be, at least at their outset, more or less informal in nature.

We cannot conclude from this, however, that the various movements succeeded entirely in imparting a high degree of culture to the masses, even though they attracted many who were eager for and content with what they got. Numerous critics arose on all sides to lament the superficiality of much that passed for self-culture. An anonymous writer in 1844 was one of these critics:

We complain, and with justice, of the universal diffusion of slight and superficial knowledge--the neglect of philosophy, the reign of empiricism in every branch of science, the absence of all aesthetical culture, the dearth of originality.¹

Later in the same essay, the writer warns of a tendency which soon appeared in several of the mass education movements--a tendency to become institutionalized at the middle-class level:

We are convinced that the highest order of minds must be produced by this process of free internal development, yet there remains a vast middle class who are not capable of sufficient independent action to carry them through such a process....There are others whose reasoning faculty is too sluggish to delight in combining and in-

1. Littell's Living Age, I (1844), 298.

ferring...or whose curiosity is not robust enough to endure the fatigue of much toil in search of sustenance. For such as these, it is necessary to clear away the difficulties which afford wholesome exercise for stronger minds....It is not that much will come of such training; but the faculties which would never struggle into life if left to themselves, may be nurtured, not into vigor, but at least into existence. What we protest against is the tyranny of prejudging the case, and subjecting all alike to a regimen fit only for the infirm.²

Philip Hone, whose diary gives us perhaps the best extant picture of New York life in the 1830's and 40's, also observed the defect of cafeteria-style culture. In a rather testy entry for January 14, 1841, he writes:

There is one striking difference between the people of Europe and those of our own country, which arises perhaps from the nature of our political institutions, and the newness of everything around us, which affords greater freedom of action and a larger scope of imagination. The difference I allude to consists in the larger proportion of men in the old countries who know each of them some one thing better than any one else, in science, mechanics, or philosophy; whilst they are comparatively ignorant of everything else;... We, on the contrary, know a little of everything and nothing to perfection. Everybody here of decent education writes tolerably well, speaks with fluency, has a calculating head, and skillful hands; but his knowledge from being more diversified is more superficial. An American blacksmith would think meanly of himself if he could not argue a point of law with the village lawyer.³

Not only was much of the endeavor in the field of self-culture criticized; at about the same time the

2. Ibid., p. 300.

3. Allan Nevins, ed., The Diary of Philip Hone 1828-1851, pp. 516-17. Hereafter referred to as Hone Diary.

entire basis for the endeavor, the movement itself, was subjected to a harsh second look. No one put the case more bluntly than Orestes Brownson.

Universal education we shall not be thought likely to depreciate; but we confess that we are unable to see in it that sovereign remedy for the evils of the social state as it is which some of our friends do, or say they do. We have little faith in the power of education to elevate a people compelled to labor from twelve to sixteen hours a day and to experience for no mean portion of the time a paucity of even the necessities of life, let alone its comforts.⁴

The great work of the age, Brownson agrees, is to raise up the laborer and establish social democracy. But how?

Reformers in general answer this question, or what they deem its equivalent, in a manner which we cannot but regard as very unsatisfactory. They would have all men wise, good, and happy; but in order to make them so, they tell us that we want not external changes, but internal. And therefore, instead of declaiming against society and seeking to disturb existing social arrangements, we should confine ourselves to the individual reason and conscience, seek merely to lead the individual to repentance and to reformation of life, make the individual a practical, a truly religious man; and all evils will either disappear, or be sanctified to the spiritual growth of the soul.

For our part, we yield to none in our reverence for science and religion; but we confess that we look not for regeneration of the race from priests and pedagogues.... They would change the consequents without changing the antecedents, secure to men the rewards of holiness, while they continue their allegiance to the devil.⁵

4. Orestes Augustus Brownson, "The Laboring Classes," a review of Thos. Carlyle's Chartism in Boston Quarterly Review (1840), reprinted in Blau, pp. 301-319. Hereafter referred to as Blau.

5. Blau, p. 310.

In so stating, Brownson allied himself with such reformers as Ripley, Robert Owen and others whose collective communities he must have viewed as attempts to change the consequents by changing the antecedents. As for the kind of self-culture recommended by Channing, however, Brownson could only admit its importance for the individual; as for its being a solution to the evils in the existing social structure he remained skeptical.

Self-culture is a good thing, but it cannot abolish inequality nor restore men to their rights. As a means of quickening moral and intellectual energy, exalting the sentiments, and preparing the laborer to contend manfully for his rights, we admit its importance and insist as strenuously as anyone on making it as universal as possible; but as constituting in itself a remedy for the vices of the social state, we have no faith in it. As a means it is well, as the end it is nothing.

The truth is the evil we have pointed out is not merely individual in its character. It is not, in the case of any single individual, of any one man's procuring, nor can the efforts of any one man, directed solely to his own moral and religious perfection, do aught to remove it. What is purely individual in its nature, efforts of individuals to perfect themselves may remove. But the evil we speak of is inherent in all our social arrangements, and cannot be cured without radical change of those arrangements.⁶

Partly owing to the momentum which it had gained by 1840, however, and partly owing to the strength of the converse argument that social arrangements, being of human origin, cannot be changed for the better without first improving the humans who make them, the self-

6. Blau, pp. 310-11.

culture movement managed to survive the barbs of critics such as Brownson and continued for another twenty years as the focal point for considerable reform activity.

One of the first recommendations of educational reformers interested in implementing the ideal was that America create a library system for public schools; and accompanying this was a movement for a system of public tax-supported libraries which would open to all the ready means of self-culture.

The proprietary library system of an earlier day had virtually broken down in periods of economic stress. The eighteenth-century Juntos, as we have noted, bought books for a little circulating library; and in 1807 the Boston Anthanaeum was incorporated and maintained by private subscription. But now in the high tide of romanticism, thanks to the popularity of the philosophy of diffusion of knowledge and also to important changes in the apprenticeship system, new Mechanics' Institutes began to appear; and William Wood in 1820 established the first Apprentices' Library in Boston. Before long many cities boasted similar institutions, and frequently, as Merle Curti observes, they sponsored lectures, debates, and discussions, and in some cases, evening classes.⁷ In addition to the Mechanics' Libraries, Mercantile Libraries sponsored by clerks and merchants made their

7. Curti, p. 364.

appearance in the 1820's and soon spread to every trade center.⁸

But these traditional concepts of mutual association and private responsibility did not hold the field exclusively. In 1817 Dr. Jesse Torrey of New York urged in a striking brochure the idea of a public library supported by government money. The first important steps taken in this direction were in New York in 1838 when the district school libraries were encouraged with public funds. By 1850 more than 12,000 such libraries in New York and New England stored some one and one-half million books.⁹ These failed to meet the need, but they at least helped to prepare the way for the idea of public responsibility for libraries.

Meanwhile, here and there in New England towns, local government assumed its obligation. In 1827 Castine, Maine, acquired the shares of the Social Library, one of those typical proprietary institutions, and turned it over to the public. Six years later Peterborough, New Hampshire, voted to use state money for a free town library, and in 1846 Orange, Massachusetts, established a town library.¹⁰ In 1848 the Massachusetts legislature permitted Boston to use public funds for the support of the projected Boston Public Library, the first important institution to establish a pattern for the library system

8. Curti, p. 364.

9. Curti, p. 364.

10. Curti, p. 365.

as we know it today. New Hampshire enacted the first state-wide law enabling any town to establish a tax-supported library and soon Massachusetts and Maine followed suit. Curti notes that between the years 1825 and 1850 some 550 libraries of all sorts were established--more than twice the number founded in the preceding quarter of a century.¹¹ The fact may remain, as James Truslow Adams points out, that as late as 1870 "no American public library had attained 200,000 volumes, although there were more than twenty of that size scattered over the countries of Europe."¹² The rapid growth of the library movement in the thirties and forties, if not spectacular, was at least encouraging.

Something of the current ideal of self-culture and the contribution which it was felt libraries would make to that end is seen in the Report of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library in 1852. In that document Edward Everett, George Ticknor, Sampson Reed, and Nathaniel Shurtleff were of the opinion that

...the public makes no provision whatever, by which the hundreds of young persons annually educated, as far as the elements of learning are concerned, at the public expense, can carry on their education and bring it to practical results by private study...¹³

After arguing the need for the proposed library as an

11. Curti, p. 265.

12. Frontiers, p. 87.

13. Quoted by Commager, p. 573.

adjunct to public school education, the four trustees continue:

Nowhere are the intimations of this demand more decisive than in our own city, nor, it is believed, is there any city of equal size in the world, where added means for general popular instruction and self-culture...will be so promptly seized upon and so effectually used, as they will be here.¹⁴

The same soil that produced the Mechanics' Institutes, Mercantile Libraries, and the public library movement produced the lyceum system of popular lectures. Originated 1826 by Josiah Holbrook, who brought together thirty farmers and mechanics of Millbury, Massachusetts, to form the first local lyceum, the idea immediately won favor in New England.¹⁵ Within a few months of the organization of the Millbury branch, fifteen villages had responded; and by the end of the second year there were more than one hundred town lyceums.¹⁶

According to Holbrook's plan, there were to be state and national lyceums as well as town lyceums.. The national organizations were to be composed of delegates from the state lyceums, and the state lyceums were to be composed of delegates from the country and town institutions. In 1831 state lyceums were founded in New York, Massachusetts, and Maine; and the first of these called a convention the same year to organize the

14. Commager, p. 575.

15. David Mead, Yankee Eloquence in the Middle West, p. 15. Hereafter referred to as Mead.

16. Henry Barnard, "The American Lyceum," Barnard's American Journal of Education, XLV (1864), 545.

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National American Lyceum.¹⁷ Regular conventions were held annually thereafter until 1839 when the organization went out of existence.

The professed aim of the national lyceum system was "the advancement of education--especially in common schools--and the general diffusion of knowledge."¹⁸ The annual membership fee was two dollars for adults and one dollar for subscribers under eighteen years of age; life memberships cost twenty dollars.¹⁹ Groups as well as individuals appear to have been encouraged to affiliate with the national organization. One historian of the movement notes that in Boston alone five groups, including the Boston Lyceum, The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the Mercantile Library Association, the Mechanics' Association, and the Historical Society, joined with the American Lyceum.²⁰

The lyceum program was an ambitious one, reaching into many fields. As early as 1829 the movement declared its multiple purposes: "to improve the mind and social intercourse by study of worthwhile subjects, to use old library facilities and create new ones, to encourage and assist academies, to raise the character of public schools,

17. Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "Lyceum," The Encyclopedia Americana, XVII (1951), 733. Hereafter referred to as Bestor.

18. Tyler, p. 262.

19. Mead, p. 15.

20. Anna L. Curtis, "A Brief History of the Lyceum," Who's Who in the Lyceum, edited by A. Augustus Wright, p. 23. Hereafter referred to as Curtis.

to compile materials for local histories, and to make agricultural and geological surveys."²¹ Lyceums also attempted to advance the establishment of museums and seminaries.²²

Addressing itself to the attainment of these several ends, the lyceum succeeded remarkably during its first decade. To the improvement of public schools the lyceum contributed a great deal until 1837 when, upon the establishment of the Massachusetts Board of Education under Horace Mann, the initiative passed to that and similar bodies. Libraries and museums, also stimulated by the lyceum, tended after a time to develop as independent organizations, so that by 1840 the purposes of the lyceum had narrowed considerably to the sponsorship of regular lectures and discussion; nevertheless, the movement remained for the succeeding twenty or thirty years an effective instrument of adult education, a sort of universal self-and-community-improvement association.

Always strongest in New England, there were in 1839 in Massachusetts alone 137 lyceums with a total average attendance of nearly 33,000.²³ Such statistics probably prompted James Truslow Adams to remark, "Few educational experiments have come more directly from the grass roots of city sidewalks than did the Lyceum."²⁴

21. Tyler, p. 262.

22. Mead, p. 15.

23. Tyler, p. 262.

24. Frontiers, p. 148.

An idea of the attraction which the popular lecture held for the average citizen and of the kind of fare it served him can be obtained in Philip Hone's diary, which abounds in references to this sort of thing. His entry for January 7, 1829, is representative:

After leaving Judge Betts' lecture (on commercial law at the Mercantile Library) I went to Masonic Hall to witness one of a nature widely different. I found the large room crowded to excess to hear Miss Frances Wright lecture on knowledge and other matters. This female Tom Paine is one of the disciples of the celebrated Robert Owen of Lanark. Her doctrines are similar to those of Paine, Godwin, and other modern philosophers who would unsettle the foundations of civil society, and subvert our fundamental principles of morality if people were fools enough to believe them. I found the room so full that I remained but a short time.²⁵

Later that same month Hone noted again concerning Miss Wright that she had commenced a "course of lectures at Park Theater, and I am sorry to learn that it was well attended."²⁶ On November 29, 1837, after attending a dinner honoring John Bell of Tennessee, a "convert" from Jacksonian democracy and later secretary of war under President Harrison, Hone writes that about 220 persons sat down at 7:30 and stayed all night to hear speeches by assembled dignitaries. "The great gun of the evening...was Daniel Webster. He rose at two o'clock in the morning, intending in consequence of its being, as he said, tomorrow, to be brief; but his auditors insisted upon his going on..." Hone records that Webster kept on

25. Hone Diary, pp. 9-10.

26. Hone Diary, p. 10.

"in a strain of universal and unwearying eloquence until four o'clock."

One hundred and fifty persons, most of them men of sober, steady habits, fathers of families, remained immovable in their seats, with no indications of fatigue or inattention, until he finished at an hour when "night was almost at odds with the morning ...". What a wonderful gift is this public speaking, and what gourmands we Americans are when we get hold of a dish of popular oratory!²⁷

In another characteristic entry in 1840 Hone observed that

Lectures are all the vogue, and the theaters are flat on their backs....Whilst the theaters are thus deserted, the Tabernacle, spacious as it is, is filled every night to hear the lyceum lecture...²⁸

Hone's primary objection to both the number and the quality of lyceum programs seems to have been that they kept people away from legitimate stage productions, which he felt deserved more attention. He voices this opinion again in another entry:

The people will be amused; they must have some way of passing their evenings besides poking the fire and playing with the children. The theater does not seem to be exactly the right thing....It has to encounter a host of competitors, ready to administer to the vitiated public taste....Regular courses have commenced at the Mercantile Library Association, the Mechanics' Institute, the Lyceum, and the Historical Society, at all of which some of the ablest and most distinguished men of this and other states have agreed to contribute their learning and eloquence. Jared Sparks, for the Historical Society, is engaged in a

27. Hone Diary, pp. 288-89.

28. Hone Diary, pp. 515-16.

course of eight lectures on the "Events of the American Revolution," to which crowds so numerous are attracted that the chapel of the new University cannot hold them, and they have to adjourn to the Tabernacle.... Concerts, vocal and instrumental, are also well attended...and ladies' recitations come in for a good share of public patronage. This is all right; it is more rational than the expensive parties for which New York was formerly celebrated, where friendly intercourse was stifled in a crowd of oyster-eating parasites, modest merit put to the blush by reckless extravagance, and good fellowship voted vulgar by parvenu pretension. But I cannot help thinking that the theater, well conducted, should come in for a better share of support.²⁹

In places where there was no theater, however, the Lyceum helped to fill the need for diversion. In Concord alone, for example, between 1829 and 1870 the Lyceum sponsored 784 lectures, 105 debates and 14 concerts.³⁰ And despite outbursts at the "vitiated public taste," the Lyceum did serve admirably as a liberalizing influence in our intellectual history.

Lyceums as cultural agents were encouraged by prominent thinkers and educators in both the East and West. One William Russell publicized the Lyceum as a practical mode of raising the literacy level of a great number of voters and potential office-holders. He pointed out in 1829 that the Lyceum was not restricted to a class or a sex, as were the mechanics' institutes.³¹

29. Hone Diary, pp. 572-73.

30. Curtis, p. 24.

31. William Russell, "American Lyceum or the Society for the Improvement of Schools," American Journal of Education, IV (1829), 41.

Thomas S. Grinké declared:

The Lyceum system is particularly a republican institution--the people's system--and serves admirably to confer precisely that degree and kind of knowledge which is so valuable to the people of this country, which, without making them profound scholars, will enlarge their minds so that they can comprehend the value of learning and enable them to discover, in some measure, their own ignorance...³²

Emerson believed that "lyceums--so that people will let you say what you think--are as good a pulpit as any other,"³³ and Parker referred to the movement as "the new schoolhouse."³⁴ Alcott wrote that the lyceum was "...our purest organ of intellectual entertainment for New England and the Western cities."³⁵

Thoreau and Margaret Fuller, however, did not share this enthusiasm, remaining unconvinced that the lyceum was the best means of adult education. Miss Fuller wrote in her essay "Entertainments of the Past Winter":

[Lyceum lectures are] the short way taken by a business people to find out what there is to be known, but to know in such ways cannot be hoped, unless the suggestions thus received are followed up by private study, thought, conversation.³⁶

Thoreau, although he long served as secretary for his local lyceum, grew disappointed in popular lectures to

32. Thomas S. Grinké, "Lyceums," American Annals of Education, V (1835), 197.

33. Quoted by Mead, p. 17.

34. John Weiss, Theodore Parker, II, 478.

35. A. Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Estimate of His Character and Genius, pp. 10-11.

36. Margaret Fuller, Dial, III (July, 1842), 49.

the point where he was compelled to write in his Journals:

...an audience will draw out of a lecture, or enable a lecturer to read, only such part of his lecture as they like.³⁷

The audiences do not want to hear any prophets; they do not wish to be stimulated or instructed, but entertained.³⁸

At one point in Walden Thoreau deplores the condition to which the lyceum had fallen, but at the same time he reflects the still pressing desire of the people for more and better means of self-culture:

We have a comparatively decent system of common schools, schools for infants only, but excepting the half-starved Lyceum in the winter, and the puny beginning of a library suggested by the State, no school for ourselves.³⁹

It was time, he thought, "that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women."⁴⁰ Thoreau then outlined in Walden a program of adult education to be financed and conducted by the villages of New England. Actually, though, he was doing little more than restating the plan which Josiah Holbrook had presented twenty-five years earlier.

It is true that by 1854 when Thoreau wrote Walden lyceums had begun to degenerate into a mere lecture bureau; that they were, as one early leader of the movement said, "no longer the New England conscience bound on a

37. Henry David Thoreau, The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, Walden edition. Bradford Torrey, ed., XVIII, 11. Hereafter referred to as Thoreau Writings.

38. Thoreau, Writings, XVIII, 327.

39. Thoreau, Writings, II, 120.

40. Thoreau, Writings, II, 121.

voyage to convert the world,"⁴¹ but "a starring exhibition approaching very nearly to theatricals." But in an earlier day, lyceums, by stimulating the average man to desire and demand the privileges that had long been advocated by reformers, certainly had served their purpose. Though the gap between the knowledge of the middle class mass of people and that of the upper class remained wide, nevertheless, thanks to the lyceums' contribution to the democratization of learning, the gulf in the 1830's and 1840's was less deep in America than in any other country in the world. As Curti observes:

The common man might still disparage the specialized knowledge of the scholar and the culture of the well-to-do; and the upper class might deplore the anti-intellectualism and prejudices of the masses, but a new era had begun.⁴²

Lyceums thus contributed to the continual process of self-culture to which Americans with active minds devoted so much of their time and energy in this period. Americans had become lecture addicts, listening with unparalleled interest and patience to itinerant scholars, who beginning their careers in the service of the American Lyceum, continued to make annual lecture tours long after the lyceum was no more. Emerson and Thoreau, Holmes and Lowell, Agassiz, Beecher, Wendell Phillips, and Horace Greely were all veterans of the

41. E. P. Powell, quoted by Bestor, p. 734.

42. Curti, p. 367.

lyceum platform, who might justly be called, in the words of Alice Felt Tyler, "the perennial and peripatetic schoolmasters of America."⁴³

Aside from libraries and lyceums the period before the Civil War saw the emergence of many other agencies either directly or indirectly connected with the spread of the self-culture idea. Among these agencies were the various museums, which, in their role as instruments of democratic culture, flourished on American soil from the first years of our national history. "Museums," according to T. R. Adam, "were in the past and perhaps always should be symptoms of a revolutionary state of mind, rebelling against the confinement of scientific and artistic knowledge within the narrow prisons of class and privilege."⁴⁴ The same, of course, is true of any instrument of popular education, the growth of which cannot be divorced from the social turmoils that parallel their birth.

The first American museum is generally credited to the Charlestown Library Society, founded in 1773. Thereafter a considerable number of small museums began to appear, particularly in New England. The Peabody Museum of Natural History founded at Yale in 1802; the Mineralogical Collection of the University Museum at Harvard, begun in 1784; the Dartmouth College collection started

⁴³. Tyler, p. 263.

⁴⁴. T. R. Adam, The Museum and Popular Culture, p. 5. Hereafter referred to as Museum.

around 1783--these and other college museum collections accounted for a fair share of popular education in natural history in post-Revolution days.

The early academies of sciences, particularly those of New York and Philadelphia, were also important landmarks in the diffusion of learning in America. The New York Academy of Sciences, founded about 1815, obtained a legislative charter in 1818 as a lyceum of natural history, and it may be fairly ranked as the spiritual parent of the American Museum of Natural History. The Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia is noted for its participation in revolutionary movements for popular education during the early nineteenth century. William Maclure, the founder of the Academy, and other leaders were all participants in Owen's experiment at New Harmony.

The first half of the nineteenth century also witnessed the growth of many historical societies in the United States. The Massachusetts Historical Society led the way in 1790; and by 1822 the movement was fairly launched with the appearance of the Essex (Massachusetts) Historical Society and similar institutions in New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island.⁴⁵ Their appearance was no accident of chance, for during this period men all over the world were relying on the inspiration of the past to anchor their societies after the storm of the

⁴⁵. Museum, pp. 8-9.

French Revolution. With a veneration for tradition this infant republic attempted to dig its roots into stable intellectual soil, and these bands of historians and antiquarians served a pressing social need.

The movement for dramatic, educational exhibitions likewise found fruitful soil in the young American republic. As a stimulus to science, commerce, and industry, such events as the industrial fairs conducted by the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia since 1824 and the annual fairs of the American Institute of the City of New York, dating from 1828, stand as important landmarks in the social history of the nation. Adam calls them "illustrations of dynamic methods of visual education being applied to the attainment of direct social objectives."⁴⁶

Diffusion of knowledge of a classical sort through popular visual display was arrested toward the middle of the century by the sabbatizing of the museum, though this fact was not to spell the end of museums' social significance. Quite the contrary. It merely led to the creation of a new instrument to meet the demand for instructive pageants of the learning of the times. Thus, the birth of a long succession of World's Fairs at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 but marked a fresh chapter in the development of visual display as an informal medium of popular self-education.

⁴⁶. Museum, p. 11.

Meanwhile, as the library, lyceum, and museum movements moved ahead, still another agency for popularizing learning came to the fore. The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge was founded in Boston in 1829, and seven years later a similarly titled group was formed on a nationwide scale. Modelled on the pattern of the British organization whose guiding spirit was Lord Brougham, these societies republished a great many of the informative British "penny pamphlets" on self-culture. The American Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, by distributing Brougham's Practical Observations on the Education of the People, saw to it that his ideas were widely read in America.⁴⁷

Lord Brougham urged as justification of the movement the following arguments: (1) the diffusion of knowledge would prevent crises in class relationships; (2) education of adults might well lead to new discoveries; (3) education of the masses would reduce expenditures for charity by reducing idleness and crime and improvident marriages; (4) general enlightenment would undermine skepticism, superstition and intolerance.⁴⁸ Here exemplified was the ardent, if somewhat naive, romantic faith in panaceas; and there is no reason to doubt that Americans before mid-nineteenth century, in search of panaceas, embraced Lord Brougham's arguments

⁴⁷. Curti, p. 350.

⁴⁸. Curti, p. 350.

rather generally.

It should be clear by now that several aspects of the self-culture movement were important expressions of the growing power of the common mass of people and of their desire to know and to share in the life of the mind. Leaders within the ranks of the laboring class, democratically minded intellectuals who deprecated the separation of theory and practice, and reformers who believed that truth, if widely disseminated, would set men free--all provided stimulation for the movement.

Business, too, by taking advantage of the rapidly expanding reading market, contributed its share in the movement's progress. Aided by technological improvements which facilitated mass communication, such as new cheap printing processes, the publishing industry expanded remarkably. This was the age of the penny press, the popular magazines devoted to "the diffusion of practical knowledge," and the dime novel. It was an age also which saw the increase of influential secular and non-political magazines like the New England Magazine, founded in 1831, and the Knickerbocker Magazine, founded the next year, both periodicals of reassuring merit. Equally important was the religious press with nearly every denomination publishing periodicals which reached an astonishing proportion of the population.

One of the first evidences of the publishing industry's efforts to capture the expanding reading audience was the literary annual or "gift book" which appeared in 1826 in Philadelphia under the title of Atlantic Souvenir. From 1846 to 1852 alone an average of sixty titles appeared each year in a number of cities. "Galaxy," "Souvenir," "Keepsake"--no matter what the title was, the contents were very much alike in all of them. Usually they were filled with moral and sentimental verses, tales of death and attenuated love, proverbs, and admonitions to virtue. But whatever their defects may have been, the gift books performed at least one valuable service. They gave Hawthorne his first encouragement, and they familiarized the public with such authors as Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Poe, Longfellow, Whittier, Emerson, Holmes, Lamb, Ruskin, Coleridge and many others.⁴⁹

For those who could not afford the gift books, publishers found cheaper disseminators of learning and information; Harper's was quick to see the possibilities for enterprise and so put out a series of Libraries including the Boys' and Girls' Libraries, the Family Library, and the Library of Select Novels. These publications, according to Curti, ran to a total of 615 titles.⁵⁰

49. Curti, p. 345.

50. Curti, p. 346.

New "parlor magazines" also appeared in the 40's and 50's and succeeded in taking a large portion of the reading audience away from the high-brow North American. Among them Godey's Lady's Book was enormously popular in most well-to-do homes, and at the end of the period its popularity began to be shared by Nathaniel P. Willis's Home Journal. There also were such rival periodicals as Graham's, Peterson's, and Parley's Magazines and the Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge.

Somewhat more reassuring if one wished to use periodicals of the mid-nineteenth century as an index to popular culture was the appearance of Harper's New Monthly Magazine and Putnam's Magazine (1853); Atlantic Monthly and Harper's Weekly (1857).

But lurid and sensational periodicals also achieved success. Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper appeared in 1855; and George Wilkes's National Police Gazette, started in 1845, continued to live up to its promise to provide "a most interesting record of horrid murders, outrageous robberies, bold forgeries, astonishing burglaries, hideous rapes, and vulgar seductions."⁵¹

Writer and publisher alike in the fifties seemed to cater to the average reader's craving for hair-raising thrills and riotous fun. Edward Z. C. Judson, who had started the "Ned Buntline" series in the forties,

⁵¹. Walter Davenport, "The Nickel Shockers," Collier's, LXXXI (March 10, 1928), 26ff.

operated on the theory that "trash for the masses" instead of art for the critical few was the secret to literary success. The series appeared serially in several Eastern weeklies.⁵²

In 1860 Erastus F. and Irwin P. Beadle, following their earlier success with the Dime Song Book and Dime Joke Book, launched a large-scale distribution of cheap novels. Filled with second-rate gentility, the Beadle Dime Novels nevertheless sold five million copies in four years. ⁵³

It would appear at this point that a rather large share of the periodicals and other publishing ventures which appeared in the romantic decades did not contribute much to the kind of self-culture that intellectuals and idealistic reformers had in mind. Admittedly, they did not; but they did both exemplify and contribute to the widespread enthusiasm of the masses for some kind--any kind--of edification. Many readers probably felt, at least, that they were partaking in self-improvement by devouring the contents of the latest current periodical.

While the magazine was in the experimental stage and not yet universally accepted, the newspaper arrived daily or weekly almost everywhere and was read from beginning to end. The first really new development in

52. Arthur Cole, The Irrepressible Conflict: 1850-1865, p. 224. Hereafter referred to as Cole.

53. Cole, p. 225.

newspaper publishing in this period was the founding of a low-priced paper maintained by advertising based on large circulation. It was Benjamin H. Day who saw the possibilities of such a venture, and his New York Sun issued in 1833 at one cent a copy paved the way for other similar enterprises.

The Sun made another innovation in seeking to attract readers by the startling character of its news. Its famous moon hoax, detailing the discoveries of the astronomer Herschel, was a sensation. So successful was Day's experiment that others soon emulated him. James Gordon Bennett's Herald, by its collection of news and its brief, snappy editorials, gave an impression of sophistication and cosmopolitanism and rapidly won a wide audience. In 1841 a Vermont printer's boy, Horace Greeley, founded the Tribune to which he gave distinction by his ardent advocacy of or opposition to many of the movements of the day. The influence of these papers extended far beyond New York and changed the character of the whole press of the country. "They made Americans," says one student of the period, "a nation of newspaper readers."⁵⁴

What Americans were reading in their newspapers, of course, was not always compatible with the highest aims of self-culture, any more than was the fare in many of the current magazines. Critics of the press

54. Fish, p. 143.

sprang up in every quarter, though none was more outspoken than the voluble Philip Hone, whose 1828-1851 diary we have mentioned before. In an unusually vitriolic entry titled "Licentiousness of the Press" Hone criticized both a certain New York daily and reader taste generally:

There is a paper published in this city. I am not in the habit of quoting from it, for I consider it a disgrace to the city, nor would I do it now, but to protest against the depraved and vitiated taste of newspaper readers which encourage and give currency to such impious ribaldry, for it is an undeniable fact that this filthy sheet has a wider circulation, not only here but in other cities, than any other. It lives upon lying abuse and libellous personalities, and is sought after with avidity by all whose insignificance preserves them from being made its subjects, or whose cowardice prompts them to purchase exemption from the attacks of the miscreant who conducts it.⁵⁵

Even allowing for the somewhat snobbish and often testy nature of Hone's personality, one may believe that there was ample truth behind his views regarding the state of popular taste in journalism; for there was as yet a wide gulf between reality and the dream of a truly cultivated mass, though this observation, again, is not to deny the fact that Americans everywhere were caught up in the quest for whatever seemed to them to hold promise of some measure of self-education.

The picture was not altogether discouraging, however, for the market for good literature was much larger

⁵⁵. Hone Diary, p. 518.

than it had ever been before. Whereas the preceding generation had ordered quality books from England and France, American publishers such as Harper and Bros., D. Appleton, Lea Bros., J. B. Lippincott, Little Brown, & Co., and Ticknor and Fields were now publishing not only American but foreign works. This was a period in which leading authorities on history, economics, science, and politics were writing to be read, and to a large extent they were read.

Popular taste in music was also commendable. "Music for the millions" was a slogan of the day. Boston acquired a new music hall in the early fifties and opera became a regular part of the social season.⁵⁶

There was also a considerable popular interest in the stage during this period, though the interest may have reflected more a desire for entertainment than an enjoyment of artistic form. Nevertheless, in the forties some fifty stock companies were supported in moderation, and scores of Americans were beginning to be willing to pay prices before unknown in order to see famous European actors who were coming to America to extend their reputations and fill their purses. The plays, according to Fish, were often of the classic type, all such authors from Shakespeare to Bulwer Lytton being represented. Still, melodrama was especially favored, the humor tended to be broad,⁵⁷ and other indications

⁵⁶. Cole, p. 239.

⁵⁷. Fish, p. 145.

pointed to a slow development of an appreciation of dramatic art for its own sake. It is probably true, as Fish observed, that art and science were respected in the abstract by most of the community, while an appreciation of them came almost entirely from the discredited aristocracy which thus found a new field for the activity previously given to politics.⁵⁸

The part philanthropists played in the self-culture movement can only be touched upon here. As if to demonstrate that the riches newly acquired in the fabulous fifties had not corrupted their souls, wealthy individuals more than ever become public benefactors, donating lavishly to humanitarian and cultural endeavors. The endowments of Rensselaer, Bussey, Sheffield, and Lawrence to institutions for scientific training; the gifts of George Peabody to town libraries; the bequests of Joshua Bates and Astor to the libraries of Boston and New York; and the founding of the Lowell Institute for bringing lectures to Boston--these were but a few evidences that art and literature could flourish in America alongside material prosperity.

We turn now to another type of activity with which visionaries in the period under consideration tried to implement the self-culture ideal. This activity took the form of numerous co-operative community experiments where it was hoped that some kind of utopian existence

58. Fish, p. 333.

could be sought out unimpeded by the crass requirements of competitive society. In all, more than forty such communistic projects were attempted on U. S. soil between 1840 and 1850;⁵⁹ but we shall mention here only two of the most notable, namely, Brook Farm and Fruitlands.

The Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education, as it was originally designated by its founder George Ripley in 1841, was an outgrowth of the Transcendentalist movement. For the first two or three years of its existence, before it became allied to Fourierism, it was, in the words of Fish, "the controversial and joyous meeting place of many members of the rising generation where they associated on terms of equality regardless of social origin and of sex."⁶⁰

Many of the leading thinkers of the day were in sympathy with the goals projected by the original Brook Farm. Among them was Orestes Brownson, who ridiculed the Goethean self-culturists because they seemed to him to forget that man is a social being and that isolation is impossible. Writing in Democratic Review, Brownson said:

We never cultivate ourselves by direct efforts at self-culture; we cultivate one another--ourselves only in seeking to cultivate others.⁶¹

59. Fish, p. 189.

60. Fish, p. 253.

61. Orestes Brownson, "Brook Farm," Democratic Review, XI (November, 1842), 482. Hereafter referred to as "Brook Farm."

Another who felt sympathetic to the Brook Farm experiment was Elizabeth Peabody. She argued, like Brownson, that Brook Farm was a Christian and democratic enterprise which was designed to provide many people with opportunities for self-culture by removing the impediments usually present in the social environment. She writes:

The final cause of society is the unfolding of the individual man into every form of perfection, without let or hindrance, according to the inward nature of each. In strict correspondence to this, the ground idea of the little communities, which are the embryo of the Kingdom to come, must be education.⁶²

Indeed, at the outset education was the primary objective of Brook Farm; but when in 1844 it came in contact with Brisbane and the "associationists" and transformed itself into the Brook Farm Phalanx, interest in the educational aspect waned. Brook Farm by 1846 had died a natural death after its alliance with Fourierism, which Brownson had characterized as "too mechanical, counting the individual as nothing, the system as all."⁶³

To Emerson, Brook Farm had always seemed the antithesis of his cherished doctrine of individualism. It seemed little more to him than another rationalistic effort to regiment men into goodness, an attempt to work from without rather than from within in order

62. Elizabeth Peabody, "A Glimpse of Christ's Idea of Society," Dial, II (October, 1841), 227.

63. "Brook Farm," p. 487.

to secure reform. It seemed, in short, an elevation of means above ends. As Emerson remarked in his Journals:⁶⁴

Moreover, to join this body Brook Farm would be to transverse all my long-trumpeted theory, and the instinct which spoke from it, that one man is a counterpoise to a city-- that a man is stronger than a city, that his solitude is more precious and beneficent than the concert of crowds.

Emerson mistook Ripley's aims, for Brook Farm was not in conflict with transcendental individualism. It was instead but a means to the end of individual culture. Ripley had recognized the futility of external arrangements as a route to reform when he said in a review of Edward Palmer's "A Letter to Those Who Think":⁶⁵

The heart must be set right....The social ideas remaining the same, no good would come from the adoption of a new system. You do not destroy the love of gain by dispensing with the tokens of value.

It was simply Ripley's conviction that men had allowed the necessity of making a living to divert them from the chief business of life--self-culture. This idea was also stated by Emerson in his "American Scholar" essay of 1837:

The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his works, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars.⁶⁶

64. Emerson, Journals, V, 474.

65. George Ripley, Dial, I (October, 1840), 254.

66. Emerson, Works, I, 86.

Somewhat akin to Brook Farm, at least in its opposition to Fourierism, was the community known as Fruitlands which Bronson Alcott and a number of associates started in 1843 with the expressed aim of providing an atmosphere favorable to self-culture and free interchange of ideas. Fruitlands was the result of Alcott's visit to Ham, Surrey, England, where he was associated with Henry C. Wright and Charles Lane, both apostles of the English Pestalozzian, James Pierrepont Greaves. Greaves, who had recognized Alcott as a kindred spirit after reading Record of a School and Conversations with Children on the Gospels, invited him to England; but Greaves died in 1842 before Alcott arrived. Alcott returned to the United States in October, 1842, bringing with him Wright, Lane, and Lane's son William. They had projected a "Primitive Home" and had purchased a library with which to equip it. Lane bought 100 acres about two miles from Harvard, Massachusetts, and in June, 1843, he and his son, Wright, the Alcott family, Samuel Bower, Isaac Hecker, Christopher Greene, Samuel Larned, Abraham Everett, Anna Page, Joseph Palmer, and Abraham Wood took possession.⁶⁷

⁶⁷. Detailed accounts of the origins of Fruitlands may be found in the following references: Charles Lane, "James Pierrepont Greaves," Dial, III (January, 1843), 281-296; R. W. Emerson, "English Reformers," Dial, III (October, 1842), 227-241; Frank Sanborn, Bronson Alcott at Alcott House, England, and Fruitlands, New England, 1842-1844, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1908); F. B. Sanborn and William T. Harris, A. Bronson Alcott, His Life and Philosophy, (Boston, 1893).

During the short life of Fruitlands the principal means of instruction was the Transcendental "conversation" which Alcott had used so successfully earlier in his infant school. Though Fruitlands was a radical social experiment, it was conceived, like Brook Farm, as but a means to the end of individual culture. Against critics who viewed it as an attempt to reform man by altering external social arrangements Charles Lane declared the philosophy behind Fruitlands and neatly disposed of Fourierism:

Change the present social order altogether, and introduce forms entirely new; let the organs of exhibition and imbibition for social man be newly created, still man himself, who is the being in the organism, remains unchanged. He is thereby made no better, and it is his bettering which is the one desirable end. Whereas if he were elevated, the organization and form of society would necessarily also be elevated.⁶⁸

On this note we may fittingly close our study of the self-culture movement; for implicit in Lanes's phrasing, it seems to me, is the epitome of what we have been trying to say about the Romantic milieu. Similar pronouncements by other liberal reformers could, of course, be cited; additional evidence of how men a hundred years ago attempted to implement the cultural ideal could be brought to bear, but probably enough has been said already to illustrate the main point, namely, that through the self-culture movement idealism and practical

⁶⁸. Charles Lane, "Social Tendencies," Dial, IV (January, 1844), 188.

common sense were faithfully united as never before or since in our history; that improvement of the individual and amelioration of social conditions were held forth as companion aims toward the building of a new and better America.

EPILOGUE

It would be impossible to convey a complete or wholly adequate impression of the hold which the cult of self-culture had on the life of Romantic New England without going far beyond the intended scope of this study. I have merely tried here, by presenting a synthesis of the more accessible materials, to give an outline of the movement and to point the direction for further study.

But can we not at this point reach some conclusions, however tentative? Can we not, in retrospect, see a pattern of the main hopes which the ideal of self-culture held out to the majority of serious thinkers and from this pattern draw some inferences for the present and future course of our cultural development?

First, I think we may observe the obvious fact that present-day interest in adult education is not a transient fad. It is nothing new, but instead, as we have shown, has always been an essential part of the American democratic process. We have seen how from the earliest days men began to gather for discussion of matters not immediately connected with work and business; how during the romantic decades the concern for individual improvement gathered momentum and became so widespread as to constitute a movement of considerable scope and importance.

We noted that much was made then, as now, of the

necessity for educating the workingman in particular in order to prevent labor uprisings. The idea, of course, was not uniquely American, for Lord Brougham in England had clearly seen the conservative potentialities of popular education. The position of those who proclaimed such a doctrine indicates that the movement for education of the masses was not totally inspired by democratic or idealistic motives. It was, in part, a product of the industrial capitalism rapidly becoming dominant throughout the western world.

We tend to think of our American system of public education as having been founded out of a great zeal for the welfare of the people, but actually this zeal was tempered by concern for the welfare of the employers and by a desire to maintain the political and social status quo. Economic motives were frankly recognized in the days of the movement's birth, though we tend to rationalize and to recognize only the more idealistic motives, which of course, were also operative.

From the workingman's viewpoint, on the other hand, the spread of knowledge was much to be desired. While it would be too much to say that public education was wrung from the privileged classes by American labor, we certainly recognize that labor's contributions toward the desired goal were not unimportant. Workers educated their own class to appreciate the value of widespread enlightenment and contributed to the popularization of

the movement among legislators and the general public by selling the idea that a voting citizen could not discharge his obligations without a minimum of education and leisure time for self-improvement.

We have also noted that among the people of all classes there was almost unanimous agreement that the diffusion of knowledge would promote general prosperity.. Almost all contended that popular education would eliminate or at least ameliorate such social evils as crime, poverty, intemperance, and the more crass practices of capitalism. All agreed, moreover, that enlightenment was necessary to safeguard republican institutions against monarchy, mobocracy, and revolution. Others urged that the free common school would break down the barriers of caste and promote a true democracy of equal opportunity. For the more philosophically and religiously inclined thinkers, self-culture of the moral faculties promised a ready way to salvation and to the creation of a more pious community.

It is correct, then, to conclude regarding the self-culture movement that it was at once a reaction and a positive venture. As a reaction it was the expression of the revolt of the New England mind against Puritan asceticism on the one hand and Yankee materialism on the other. As a positive venture it aimed at raising social, economic, political, religious, and aesthetic standards among the masses.

The self-culture movement concerned itself with every facet of human endeavor and spun Utopian dreams of the life which would open to those who took its preachments to heart. It was, as conceived by a few intellectual leaders, an all-encompassing solution to most of the problems besetting romantic America.

The movement was seized upon with a sense of mission by those who, dissatisfied with the present aspect of things, would have moulded the future of America in accord with the ideal of human perfectibility.

And can we not also conclude that among the Boston intellectuals of this period, particularly among the select group of Transcendentalists who met frequently for purposes of discussion of their solitary studies, there was, as Mason Wade puts it, "an insatiable lust for conversation and self-culture"? I have tried to show that Transcendentalism was reformatory; that it encouraged self-culture in the individual and social reform in the community; that while it had no aesthetics, it was a literary and artistic movement as well as a philosophical and religious one; that, indeed, the Transcendentalists' interest in cultural ideals should no longer be regarded as a mere corollary to their doctrines of individualism but rather as the very focal point of much of their activity.

And finally, let us reiterate an idea suggested at the beginning of this study: the many institutions

and media for disseminating learning in the romantic era were not isolated phenomena but were actually related facets of a single cultural ideal. Opportunities for sharing in the life of the mind presented themselves on both the formal and the informal levels and in many different disguises. But we frankly recognize that, despite a tremendous lot of humbug which has been talked about the public school system, education of a formal sort made a poor showing until after the Civil War. If it was true, as one observer commented, that the American people by 1860 had become "the most generally educated and intelligent people on the earth," it was due mainly not to formal schooling but to the less formal intellectual and cultural influences which surrounded the average citizen and through which a measure of self-culture could be realized. Such opportunities, we have seen, were plentiful indeed.

There remains for us now only to inquire into the fate of the movement. What happened to it after the Civil War? Why, with so much encouragement from intellectuals and with so many opportunities which seemed to promise continued growth, did it tend to fade from the foreground?

Several possible explanations may be offered. In the first place, as already suggested, the self-culture ideal has never really disappeared; but as a movement it has declined partly because its goals have been

quietly absorbed into the total cultural scene and, thus entrenched, need no longer to be continually driven home.

Then, too, we might guess that improved facilities for free public schooling after the Civil War had much to do with the decline of the movement. There was far less need to encourage people to embark on a program of self-culture, using any informal means at hand, when an easier and more direct route seemed to open before them.

But in the final analysis the reasons may be sought in certain inherent weaknesses in the way the movement itself was conceived and carried out. Perhaps the fault lay in the hypocrisy of the public mind which allowed superficiality to pass for real intellectual achievement. The old values created by tradition were being undermined by the mechanistic sciences natural to the adolescence of industrial society; yet popular morality insisted on a surface observance of outmoded standards even while applying the new knowledge to everyday living. This hypocrisy was perhaps best reflected by the millions who boasted of books they had never read simply because the authors were on the traditional list of "musts" for the cultured person.

The self-culture movement marked the growth of a concept of social education, of learning as an instrument of democratic action. But circumstances in the nineteenth century made traditional academic practices

inadequate as guides to the new development. Leaders of the movement recognized that formal methods of schooling, philosophic divisions of subject matter, and professional teaching institutions possessed too narrow a base to satisfy the urgent social need for wider sharing of knowledge. But what they did not recognize, or at least did not do anything about, was the fact that the new instruments that appeared in answer to pressing wants lacked clearcut form and proper co-ordination with one another. To a certain extent the instruments for diffusion of knowledge lacked planned social foundations for their educational programs, and this lack was partly due to the lack of theoretical material on the relationship between the structure of a community and the educational needs outside the formal school system.

Facts and information provided must be capable of being used as a basis for social action. Education linked to a social purpose needs to develop methods and teaching techniques peculiarly its own, for the old rules and narrow disciplines seldom lead to effective social action. They belong to a tradition which views the development of the individual mind as the final end of learning. This tradition, rather than any clear social purpose, seemed to predominate in the self-culture movement and was, I believe, part of its undoing.

After all, when high sounding political and social

aims are stripped from mass education, what remains is the practical problem of how to convey the benefits of learning to large numbers of people earning their living by hard work. It cannot be solved by workers themselves through any of their political or economic groupings. It was not solved completely or very satisfactorily by the cafeteria-style of self-culture which romantic New England undertook with such hope and such vigor. It is essentially a problem of teaching and educational organization. And here, we may conclude, the implications for the present and future state of the humanities are too painfully clear to need further elaboration.

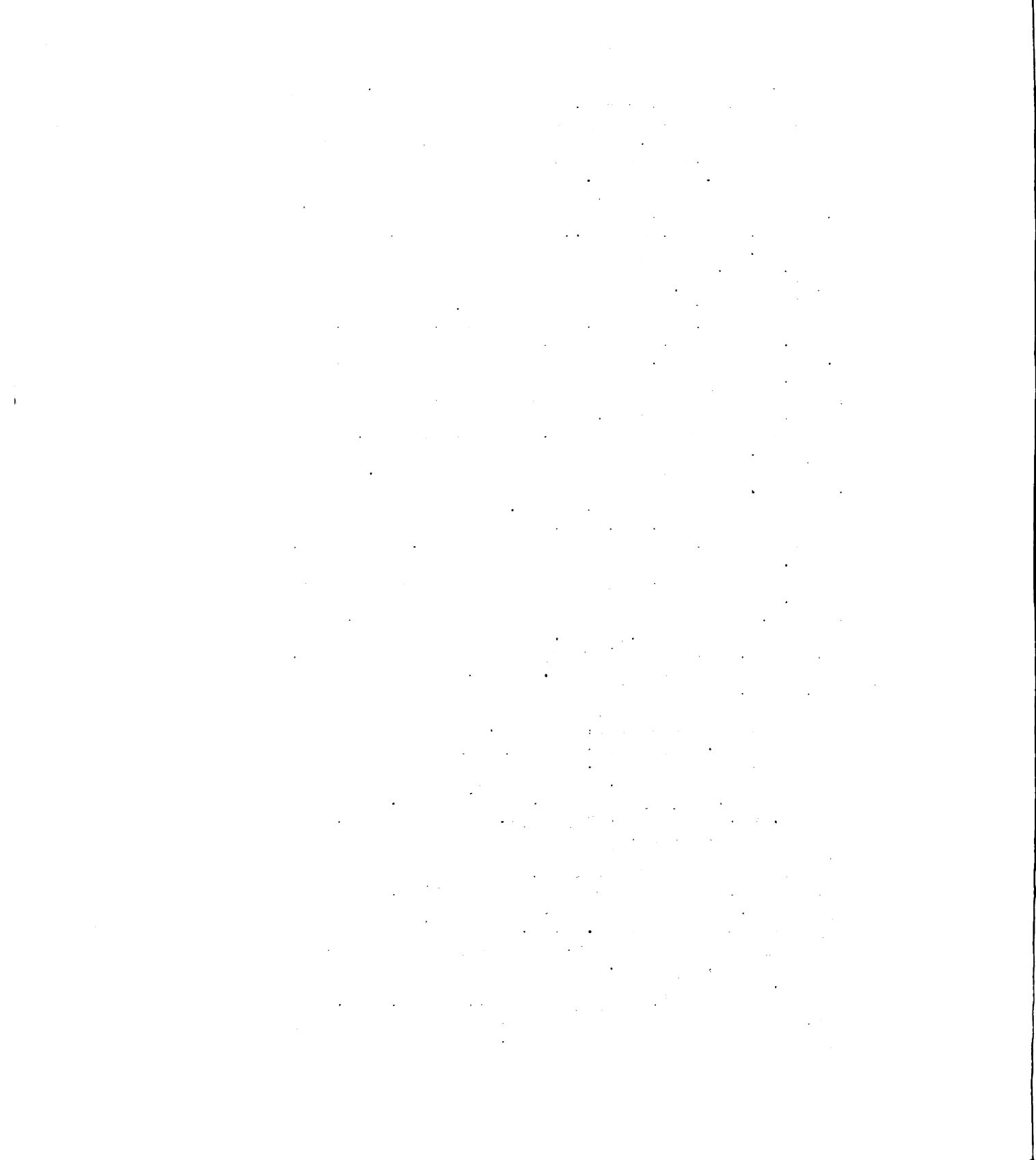
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