

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ALMOST MENTIONED IN WALDEN:

THE REVEREND JAMES BURRILL CURTIS



The Curtis brothers were among those who helped Henry Thoreau raise the frame of his shanty at Walden Pond. It seems there are not surviving portraits of James Burrill Curtis, who by all accounts was even more of a heartthrob than his younger brother [George William Curtis](#) (above).

**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

BURRILL CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



WALDEN: At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity, I set up the frame of my house. No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day. I began to occupy my house on the 4th of July, as soon as it was boarded and roofed, for the boards were carefully feather-edged and lapped, so that it was perfectly impervious to rain; but before boarding I laid the foundation of a chimney at one end, bringing two cartloads of stones up the hill from the pond in my arms. I built the chimney after my hoeing in the fall, before a fire became necessary for warmth, doing my cooking in the mean while out of doors on the ground, early in the morning; which mode I still think is in some respects more convenient and agreeable than the usual one. When it stormed before my bread was baked, I fixed a few boards over the fire, and sat under them to watch my loaf, and passed some pleasant hours in that way. In those days, when my hands were much employed, I read but little, but the least scraps of paper which lay on the ground, my holder, or tablecloth, afforded me as much entertainment, in fact answered the same purpose as the Iliad.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

BRONSON ALCOTT

ELLERY CHANNING

WALDO EMERSON

EDMUND HOSMER

EDMUND HOSMER, JR.

JOHN HOSMER

ANDREW HOSMER

JAMES BURRILL CURTIS

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

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THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

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WALDEN: Several times, when a visitor chanced to stay into the evening, and it proved a dark night, I was obliged to conduct him to the cart-path in the rear of the house, and then point out to him the direction he was to pursue, and in keeping which he was to be guided rather by his feet than his eyes. One very dark night I directed thus on their way two young men who had been fishing in the pond. They lived about a mile off through the woods, and were quite used to the route. A day or two after one of them told me that they wandered about the greater part of the night, close by their own premises, and did not get home till toward morning, by which time, as there had been several heavy showers in the mean while, and the leaves were very wet, they were drenched to their skins. I have heard of many going astray even in the village streets, when the darkness was so thick that you could cut it with a knife, as the saying is. Some who live in the outskirts, having come to town a-shopping in their wagons, have been obliged to put up for the night; and gentlemen and ladies making a call have gone half a mile out of their way, feeling the sidewalk only with their feet, and not knowing when they turned. It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

JAMES BURRILL CURTIS
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

BURRILL CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1796

February 23, Tuesday: George Curtis was born in Worcester, Massachusetts to David Curtis and Susannah Stone Curtis. In [Providence, Rhode Island](#) he would be the father to two children, [James Burrill Curtis](#) and [George William Curtis](#), who in their young adulthood would be helping [Henry Thoreau](#) to raise the ridgepole of his shanty on Walden Pond.



WALDEN: At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity, I set up the frame of my house. No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day.

PEOPLE OF WALDEN

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- ELLERY CHANNING
- WALDO EMERSON
- EDMUND HOSMER
- EDMUND HOSMER, JR.
- JOHN HOSMER
- ANDREW HOSMER
- JAMES BURRILL CURTIS
- GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

The “acquaintances” who participated in this rustic “raising”¹ ceremony on the Walden Pond shore were:

- Bronson Alcott
- Ellery Channing
- [Waldo Emerson](#)
- Edmund Hosmer
- Edmund Hosmer’s three sons Edmund Hosmer, Jr., John Hosmer, and Andrew Hosmer
- the brothers [James Burrill Curtis](#) and [George William Curtis](#)

1. “No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I.” I would maintain that WALDEN is chock-full of references to the gallows, references that nowadays we don’t “get” simply because we no longer live in the sort of culture, in which public execution is an unchallenged holiday convention. For instance, I would maintain that this particular paragraph, apparently so innocent, includes an implicit reference to being [hanged](#). While the raisers of a house frame are the friends and neighbors who push with poles and pull with ropes as a frame is being lifted from its temporary horizontal position to its permanent vertical position, the raisers of a person may by extension be the outraged citizens who are pulling on the rope that elevates a criminal by the neck toward the extending horizontal branch of a tree. This is not the sort of gallows humor which would have gone unnoticed in the first half of the 19th Century, not in America it wouldn’t. This is an implicit reference to [Thoreau](#)’s Huguenot ancestors of honored memory, who rather than tugging together upon the indecent public end of that hanging rope, in *la belle France*, had sometimes found themselves tugging alone upon the noose at the decent end.



GALLOWS HUMOR



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

BURRILL CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1798

October 26, Friday: Mary Elizabeth Burrill was born in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to James Burrill and Sally Arnold Burrill. She would give birth in Providence to two children, James [Burrill Curtis](#) and [George William Curtis](#), who in their young adulthood would be helping [Henry Thoreau](#) to raise the ridgepole of his shanty on Walden Pond.



[WALDEN](#): At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity, I set up the frame of my house. No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day.

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2. “No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I.” I would maintain that [WALDEN](#) is chock-full of references to the gallows, references that nowadays we don’t “get” simply because we no longer live in the sort of culture, in which public execution is an unchallenged holiday convention. For instance, I would maintain that this particular paragraph, apparently so innocent, includes an implicit reference to being [hanged](#). While the raisers of a house frame are the friends and neighbors who push with poles and pull with ropes as a frame is being lifted from its temporary horizontal position to its permanent vertical position, the raisers of a person may by extension be the outraged citizens who are pulling on the rope that elevates a criminal by the neck toward the extending horizontal branch of a tree. This is not the sort of gallows humor which would have gone unnoticed in the first half of the 19th Century, not in America it wouldn’t. This is an implicit reference to [Henry Thoreau](#)’s Huguenot ancestors of honored memory, who rather than tugging together upon the indecent public end of that hanging rope, in *la belle France*, had sometimes found themselves tugging alone upon the noose at the decent end. [But there is more on this topic at:](#)



GALLOWS HUMOR



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1821



March 6, Tuesday: [George Curtis](#), a banker and businessman, got married with the very, very pregnant [Mary Elizabeth Burrill](#) in [Providence, Rhode Island](#).

A small force under Alexander Ypsilanti, a Greek officer in the Russian army, crossed the Moldavian frontier with the intention of liberating Greece from Turkish control.



US District Judge William Davies decided that Portugal was to receive 142 of the remaining Africans of the [negrero Antelope](#), Spain was to receive 63 — and 7 were to be freed.

INTERNATIONAL SLAVE TRADE

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April 22, Easter Sunday: [James Burrill Curtis](#) was born in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to the newlywed couple George Curtis and Mary Elizabeth Burrill Curtis.



In response to unrest in his Romanian lands and a massacre of Turks by Greeks in the Morea, the Ottoman sultan ordered that the Ecumenical Patriarch Gregorios be hanged in front of his palace in Constantinople. The Archbishops of Adrianople, Thessalonika, and Tirmovo were also hanged. There would follow widespread massacres of Christians by Turks in Thessaly, Macedonia, and Anatolia.

In the Karntnertortheater of Vienna, Franz Schubert's male vocal quartet "Die Nachtigall" to words of Unger was performed for the initial time.

King Joao of Portugal appointed Dom Pedro as his regent in Brazil.

Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

1st day 22 of 4 M / Our Meetings were well attended. In the Morning D Buffum just lifted the latch for Sarah Tucker who followed in a very pertinent & well Authorised testimony at two different Standings – In The Afternoon She was again concerned in a short but lively testimony - Henry Gould & John T Nichols set the evng with us.

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

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PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT



February 24, Tuesday: [George William Curtis](#) was born in [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to George Curtis and Mary Elizabeth Burrill Curtis.



Lord Amherst, the British governor general of India, declared war on Burma.

The Convention of 1824 Amending the Treaty of August 1797, and March 26, 1799 with Tunis.

READ THE FULL TEXT



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

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1826



July 23, Sunday: Mary Elizabeth Burrill Curtis, wife of George Curtis and mother of [James Burrill Curtis](#) and [George William Curtis](#), died.

Friend [Stephen Wanton Gould](#) wrote in his journal:

1st day 23rd of 7 M / In the forenoon Jonathon & Hannah Dennis bore short testimonies – In the Afternoon Susanna Bateman said a little, & both were Dull Meetings to me –

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

**LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT’S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN’S STORIES.
LIFE ISN’T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.**



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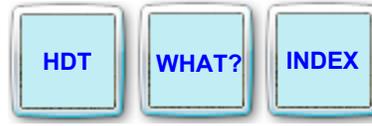
1830



Left without a mother in the home, [George William Curtis](#) and his brother [James Burrill Curtis](#) were packed off to the C.W. Greene boarding school in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts (until in 1834 their father would remarry, and so they could be brought back home in 1835).

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1834

 April 3, Thursday: [Robert Schumann](#)'s periodical Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift fur Musik began publication.

At the Westminster Congregational Church in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), [George William Curtis](#)'s and [James Burrill Curtis](#)'s father George Curtis remarried with Julia Bowen Bridgham, a daughter of Samuel W. Bridgham of Providence. The Reverend Frederick A. Farley presided at this ceremony.

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT



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1835



[George William Curtis](#) and [James Burrill Curtis](#) were brought back home to [Providence, Rhode Island](#) from the boarding school in Massachusetts, at which the brothers had been for five or six years consigned. There in Providence, George would be finishing his schooling (until 1839).

THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1836

 [James Burrill Curtis](#) became a “special student” at [Brown University](#). He would continue to study at this school until 1840 but would leave without a degree.

There were at this point 158 [Quakers](#) in [Providence](#).

RHODE ISLAND

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.



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1842

May 5, Thursday: [Frederick Douglass](#) spoke in Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

The dashing Curtis brothers arrived at [Brook Farm](#). “Now we’re going to have two young Greek gods among us.” [George William Curtis](#) would spend the summers of this and the following year there. [James Burrill Curtis](#) would be elected secretary of the community and would serve in that capacity from January through May 1843, residing in the Eyrie, but by August 1843 would have “withdrawn from the Association.” He would travel first to New-York, then to Providence, then to Concord, then to Rome to join with his brother [George William Curtis](#) in a tour of the Continent.

WHAT I’M WRITING IS TRUE BUT NEVER MIND
YOU CAN ALWAYS LIE TO YOURSELF



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1844

Summer: [James Burrill Curtis](#) spent the season (he would spend the summer of the following year as well) studying and farming in [Concord](#). In this period he would form friendships with [Waldo Emerson](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), and [Henry Thoreau](#).

The [Brook Farmers](#), newly captivated by the reassurances of [Fourierism](#), began construction of their central building, the “Phalanstery,” at the middle of their farm in front of their Eyrie. The plan was to relocate all public spaces such as parlors, reading rooms, reception rooms, dining rooms capable of seating more than 300, a kitchen with bakery, and the general assembly hall to this building. The building was to have, along its front, a porch with 7 doors leading to accommodations for 7 of the larger families. In addition there were to be single rooms in the attic.





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August 1, Thursday: At the Festival de l'Industrie in Paris, [Hector Berlioz](#) led 1,000 performers in the premiere of his Hymne à la France for chorus and orchestra to words of Barbier. By intermission, the conductor had developed cold sweats. He was induced to change clothes, and drink some punch. He was then attended by a former teacher, Dr. Amussat, who diagnosed [typhoid fever](#), bled the composer, and prescribed a vacation.

[Frederick Douglass](#), whose location and activities have been a mystery to us during the last half of June and all of the month of July, resurfaced in order to return to [Concord](#) and speak during the annual fair of the Anti-



Slavery Society of Middlesex County celebrating the 1st of August liberation of the slaves of the British West Indies, with [Waldo Emerson](#), William A. White,³ the Reverend Samuel Joseph May, [Moses Grandy](#), and Headmaster Cyrus Pierce of the normal school in Lexington.⁴

[Emerson](#) had agreed to deliver an address on the "[Emancipation in the ... Indies...](#)" [Henry Thoreau](#) would soon persuade James Munroe & Company of Boston to issue Emerson's address in the form of a pamphlet, and see it through the press of Thurston, Torry, and Company at 31 Devonshire Street in Boston.

[EMANCIPATION DAY](#)
[THE LIST OF LECTURES](#)

3. This White was the white abolitionist who had in the previous year been traveling with [Frederick Douglass](#) as he lectured in Indiana. Would he be related to the Massachusetts abolitionist who is credited with being one of the four known presently known and recognized local conductors in the Underground Railroad, William S. White?

[UNDERGROUND RAILROAD](#)

4. The John W. Blasingame volume I of THE FREDERICK DOUGLASS PAPERS does not mention the presence of [Thoreau](#) — but then I notice even Sojourner Truth is not significant enough to have received a mention anywhere in the index to this volume).



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This abolitionist group had been refused permission to hold their meeting in any of the local churches, but [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) had invited them to use the grounds of the Old Manse. However, it was rainy, so at the last minute Thoreau got permission to use the auditorium of in Concord's courthouse. The audience at the lecture was small, and consisted mostly of visitors from outside Concord, and evidently those attending found the topic a difficult one for the Concord resident Frederic May Holland, in the first full-length biography of this American figure [Frederick Douglass](#),⁵ has stated that when these attendees had assembled afterward for a collation,⁶



they said to each other, "Can you eat? I cannot." Douglass was among the listeners that morning, and also among the speakers in the afternoon.

We may note that the mulatto speaker was present on this occasion only because he had been scheduled to take part in a mass rally in Hingham MA, with the Reverends John Pierpont and James Freeman Clarke, and that rally had been postponed for one day on account of the rain. After [Thoreau](#)'s death Emerson would make a minute in his journal which would deal with the events of this day:

I have never recorded a fact which perhaps ought to have gone into my sketch of "Thoreau," that, on the 1 August, 1844, when I read my Discourse on Emancipation, in the Town Hall, in Concord, and the selectmen would not direct the sexton to ring the meeting-house bell, Henry went himself, & rung the bell at the appointed hour.



It was the bell in the Unitarian church of Concord which Thoreau had rung. Evidently he was intercepted by the church authorities, for Holland stated that Thoreau had gotten off only "two or three unauthorized strokes" of the bell. In reading up on the subject of the emancipation, which had happened on this date ten years before, in 1834, Emerson had made "the most painful comparisons" with the present situation for the free blacks of New England. He had noted, for instance, that if any free black man of New England should take service aboard a ship, and should enter the harbor of [Charleston](#), or Savannah GA, or New Orleans, he would be imprisoned ashore for "so long as the vessel remained in port, with the stringent addition, that if the shipmaster fails to pay the costs of this official arrest and the board in jail, these citizens are to be sold for slaves, to pay that expense."

5. Frederic May Holland. FREDERICK DOUGLASS: THE COLORED ORATOR, original edition 1891, revised edition prepared by the author in 1895 and reprinted by Haskell House Publishers of New York in 1969. In typical Concordian style, to the point that the author appears unwilling to use [Thoreau](#)'s full name, the politics of this treatment is to minimize Thoreauvian attitudes. We are dealing here with a town that even today spreads invidious stories among its high school students, which have been passed on by several of them directly to me, that Thoreau was a local sneak thief, taking pies off of windowsills. If hypocrisy were gold, Fort Knox would be on Concord common.

6. The mulatto speaker [Frederick Douglass](#) would of course not have been able to be present while these white people of his audience were thus eating and drinking.



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On this day (or perhaps at the meeting at the Unitarian church on June 12th , or perhaps on both occasions) [Emerson](#) found that he was so impressed by the mulatto visitor whom he identified as “Douglas” with one “s,” that he wondered whether perhaps he should attribute this person’s obvious excellence to purity of his bloodlines (pure although purely Negroid, which would lead his analysis of his admiration in the direction of the Jungian trope “the genius of this race, to be honored for itself”) or whether perhaps he should consider this person’s obvious excellence to be the result of an admixture of improving European blood (which would apparently have led his analysis of his admiration in the direction of a quite different set of tropes, presumably that white bloodlines are superior to black bloodlines and that this speaker was superior to other blacks evidently due to having a greater share of this superior white ancestry).

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When at last in a race a new principle appears, an idea, that conserves it. Ideas only save races. If the black man is feeble & not important to the existing races, not on a par with the best race, the black man must serve & be sold & exterminated. But if the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new & coming civilization, for the sake of that element no wrong nor strength nor circumstance can hurt him, he will survive & play his part. So now it seems to me that the arrival of such men as Toussaint Louverture if he is pure blood, or of Douglas [[Frederick Douglass](#)] if he is pure blood, outweighs all the English & American humanity. The Antislavery of the whole world is but dust in the balance, a poor squeamishness & nervousness; the might & the right is here. Here is the Anti-Slave. Here is Man; & if you have man, black or white is an insignificance. Why at night all men are black. The intellect, that is miraculous, who has it has the talisman, his skin & bones are transparent, he is a statue of the living God, him I must love & serve & perpetually seek & desire & dream on: and who has it not is superfluous. But a compassion for that which is not & cannot be useful & lovely, is degrading & maudlin, this towing along as by ropes that which cannot go itself. Let us not be our own dupes; all the songs & newspapers & subscriptions of money & vituperation of those who do not agree with us will avail nothing against eternal fact. I say to you, you must save yourself, black or white, man or woman. Other help is none. I esteem the occasion of this jubilee to be that proud discovery that the black race can begin to contend with the white; that in the great anthem of the world which we call history, a piece of many parts & vast compass, after playing a long time a very low & subdued accompaniment they perceive the time arrived when they can strike in with force & effect & take a master's part in the music. The civilization of the world has arrived at that pitch that their moral quality is becoming indispensable, & the genius of this race is to be honoured for itself. For this they have been preserved in sandy deserts [sic], in rice swamps, in kitchens & shoeshops so long. Now let them emerge clothed & in their own form. I esteem this jubilee & the fifty years' movement which has preceded it to be the announcement of that fact & our anti-slavery societies, boastful as we are, only the shadow & witness to that fact. The negro has saved himself, and the white man very patronisingly says, I have saved you. If the negro is a fool all the white men in the world cannot save him thought they should die.... He who does his own work frees a slave. He who does not his own work, is a slaveholder. Whilst we sit here talking & smiling, some person is out there in field & shop & kitchen doing what we need, without talk or smiles.... The planter does not want slaves: give him money: give him a machine that will provide him with as much money as the slaves yield, & he will thankfully let them go: he does not love whips, or usurping overseers, or sulky swarthy giants creeping round his house & barns by night with lucifer matches in their hands & knives in their pockets. No; only he wants his luxury, & he will pay even this price for it.

[Thoreau](#) also heard [Frederick Douglass](#), but it is not known that this encounter with the impressive mulatto orator sent any equivalent racist concerns going in Thoreau's gourd at that time — probably not, as Thoreau

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was never so concerned with issues of relative ascendancy as was the higher-caste Emerson. We can be utterly confident, for instance, that no literary researcher will ever be able to uncover, in any pile of unprocessed remarks in Thoreau's handwriting, any remark even remotely similar to the following blazing amazing one which is in Emerson's handwriting: Quite to the contrary! Because Thoreau's spirit was so utterly different



I think it cannot be maintained by any candid person that the African race have ever occupied or do promise ever to occupy any very high place in the human family. Their present condition is the strongest proof that they cannot. The Irish cannot; the American Indian cannot; the Chinese cannot. Before the energy of the Caucasian race all the other races have quailed and done obeisance.



ALFRED ROSENBERG WALDO EMERSON



from the blind prejudice displayed above, what we might confidently expect to uncover in any new pile of unprocessed remarks in Thoreau's handwriting would be more remarks similar to this lovely one anent the

7. I do drip with sarcasm, don't I? Well, when I come across stuff like this, I can't help myself, a demon takes over my keyboard and the screen echo comes across this way even if what I am typing is the alpha string "Hail Mary full of grace." The point is that if Thoreau had ever been guilty of writing something like this phrase from Emerson's miscellaneous notebooks, we would long ago have burned every existing copy of WALDEN and none of us in this generation would ever have heard of the guy. And that would be only right. Emerson, however, is invulnerable, is teflon, nothing ever sticks to him. Or, perhaps, it is the Emerson scholars who are invulnerable, or heedless or something. That quote I attributed to Emerson, repeated below, needn't be characterized as a piece of Emersoniana at all! It could be characterized, instead, as Emerson in the 19th Century merely -somehow- "channeling" the Geist of Alfred Rosenberg (the philosopher of the Nazis in our 20th Century).



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Irish interlopers in Walden Wood:

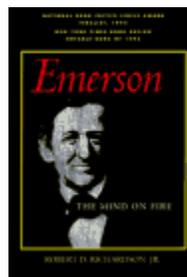
Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins and pigs and children revelling in the genial Concord dirt, and I should still find my Walden wood and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.

Note that historical revisionism has rendered [Frederick Douglass](#)'s arrival in Concord that summer utterly transparent,⁸ with all the stir and ferment of that annual fair of the Anti-Slavery Society of Middlesex County being nicely explained away as nicely white Concordians interacting with other nicely white Concordians, and [Emerson](#)'s journal entry above has been attributed to mere musings made earlier –spontaneously, *à propos de* nothing– during the spring or earlier summer of this year, rather than to the unthinkable: an actual relevant encounter with a mulatto relevant interloper in nice polite white Concord.

It has been revisionist scholarship subsequent to that point which has almost totally erased Douglass from the Concord scene, with all the stir and ferment of that Anti-Slavery Fair coming to be nicely explained away in more recent history books as merely a few of the nice white Concordians having an argument of some sort with a few other of the nice white Concordians. This almost total erasure has made it possible for Emerson scholars to attribute his lengthy “if he is pure blood” journal musing (exhibited nearby as a full separate page) about Douglass to irrelevant jottings done within the half-year timeframe rather than to the unthinkable: a specifically locatable and quite actual encounter with a black relevant interloper in nice polite white Concord. But here is the event as fantasized by a historian of this tradition⁹ — who, inheriting a tradition which has so conveniently forgotten the black speaker, proceeds to fantasize Emerson as having been being deeply impressed by the **abstract idea** of the abilities of Douglass the black man when that man, actually, was sitting before him staring him full in the face as he orated:

8. “That transparent black man over there can’t be seen and therefore hasn’t come to be heard by us, and therefore we’re not not polite in not not listening to him.”

9. Robert D. Richardson, Jr. EMERSON: THE MIND ON FIRE. Berkeley CA: U of California P, 1994



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Emerson had been asked to speak on the tenth anniversary of the British emancipation of all slaves in the British West Indies; the sponsor was the Women's Anti-Slavery Association, to which both Lidian and Cynthia Thoreau belonged. Because abolition was a controversial subject on which the people of Concord were divided, none of the local churches would open their doors to them. The event was scheduled for the courthouse. Henry Thoreau went from door to door urging Concord residents to attend. When the sexton of the First Parish Church refused to ring the bell to announce the meeting, Henry rushed to the church and rang the bell himself.

The speech itself was a departure from Emerson's usual style in three ways. It is mainly a long chronological narrative, it is full of the oratorical devices the young Emerson had learned from Everett, and it is intended as agitprop, like Antony's speech over the body of Caesar. Emerson intended to arouse, to inflame, to move his audience to action: "If any cannot speak, or cannot hear the words of freedom, let him go hence, - I had almost said, creep into your grave, the Universe has no need of you." He recounted the horrors of slavery, "pregnant women set in the treadmill for refusing to work," "men's necks flayed with cowhide, and hot rum poured on, superinduced with brine or pickle, rubbed in with a cornhusk, in the scorching heat of the sun." He told of "a planter throwing his negro into a copper of boiling cane-juice." He adds heavy irony to the horrors: "The sugar they raised was excellent. Nobody tasted blood in it." Emerson continued for page after page, giving the history of slavery and the history of efforts to stop it, culminating in the act of Parliament of August 1, 1834, by which "slavery shall be and is hereby utterly and forever abolished and declared unlawful throughout the British colonies, plantations and possession abroad." The reason for celebrating this British act was, of course, to shame the Americans who had no such act on their books.

Emerson was very much alive to the economic argument against slavery by which British manufacturers were encouraged to regard the West Indian blacks as so many potential customers. But he was also aware of the insidious psychology of slavery, and he commented on "the love of power, the voluptuousness of holding a human being in his absolute control." For those who feared emancipation might unleash a terrible retribution and bring massive civil disorder, Emerson stressed the mild and orderly transition to freedom that occurred in the West Indies. Then, at last, he turned from the British to the Americans, who were now seen to be lagging woefully behind the times. At this point Emerson turns from his warm historical survey to the present moment and to a tone of plain anger. He was personally shocked and outraged by reports of northern blacks arrested on the docks of Massachusetts ships lying in southern ports.

I have learned that a citizen of [Nantucket Island](#), walking in New Orleans, found a freeborn citizen of Nantucket, a man, too, of great personal worth, and, as it happened, very dear to him, as having saved his own life, working chained in the streets of that city, kidnapped by such a process as this.

[Waldo Emerson](#) was outraged that Massachusetts seemed to be able



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to do nothing to help its citizens, and he said so in blunt, provocative language: "If such a damnable outrage can be committed on the person of a citizen with impunity, let the Governor break the broad seal of the state; he bears the sword in vain." The congressional delegation from Massachusetts felt that unilateral action by Massachusetts or by the North would endanger the Union. Emerson's reply was, "The Union is already at an end when the first citizen of Massachusetts is thus outraged."

The solution was not to be sought in further compromise and political juggling. America must follow England's lead and free the slaves. And if Emerson had been able in his private life until now to accept some of the condescending and muddy racism that undercut the urgency of abolition by declaring the blacks an inferior race, he now explicitly broke with that rationale. He declared to his audience that "the negro race is, more than any other, susceptible of rapid civilization." He also saw that abolition was not simply something conceded by white people, which was the view of [Thomas Clarkson](#)'s book [which one of the three?]. "I add," said Emerson, "that in part it is the earning of the blacks." He was deeply impressed by the abilities of Toussaint Louverture and of [Frederick Douglass](#). His private journal comments are just as strong as his public language. Referring specifically to his own conviction of the sufficiency of the individual, he said, "Here is the Anti-Slave. Here is Man; and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance. Why, at night all men are black." It was also in his journal that he said, "The negro has saved himself, and the white man very patronizingly says I have saved you." To his Concord audience Emerson said, "The black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization." And he ended the speech not with a graceful appeal to history or good will but with a stiff and polarizing insistence that "there have been moments, I said, when men might be forgiven who doubted. Those moments are past."

The speech delighted the friends of abolition in the North. [Thoreau](#) helped with arrangements to publish the address. Soon the Quaker poet [John Greenleaf Whittier](#) was writing to solicit Emerson's further help at an antislavery convention. A letter from [William Lloyd Garrison](#) a few years later suggests what Emerson's conversion meant to the cause: "You exercise a strong influence over many minds in this country which are not yet sufficiently committed to the side of the slave.... You are not afraid publicly and pointedly to testify against the enslavement of three million of our countrymen." Emerson was solidly committed to abolition both personally and publicly from now on. His speeches on the subject would, if gathered together, fill a good-sized volume. He appeared on many platforms, but he was not now or ever comfortable as an activist, an advocate. As in the matter of the Cherokee removal, he would speak because he must, because no one else would, because he had convictions, because he believed in action. But it was just not congenial work.

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The above act of historical revisionism by Robert D. Richardson, Jr. reminds us of nothing so much as of the alteration of Chinese photographs subsequent to the 1971 fall from grace of Lin Biao, the government official who had suggested the idea of “Mao’s Little Red Book,” from favor in Beijing. For many years the Chinese Communist Party would go to great expense to remove the presence of that inconvenient yellow man from every historic official photograph it could get its hands on (below is a copy from the 1960s that they simply couldn’t get their hands on, one that still shows Lin Biao standing beside Mao Tse-tung, holding up his little red book).



毛主席和他的亲密战友林彪同志检阅文化革命大军

Robert Richardson has altered the history of this significant 1844 Concord meeting in much the same manner, by entirely erasing that inconvenient black man. This doesn’t just happen in totalitarian countries! We’re so good here at self-censorship, that we don’t have any need for official censorship — we can get the job done all by ourselves.

Why did this history need to be so altered? Because if you listen to the Emerson oration, not with white ears



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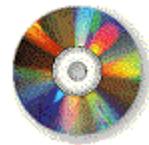
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but with black ears, it sounds very different. To white ears Emerson has seemed to have been benignly embracing the cause of anti-slavery. To black ears it is obvious that Emerson is acting as an *agent provocateur*, and attempting to goad Douglass, in his audience, to initiate the sort of servile insurrection that will get him killed — and the white backlash from which will solve America's race problem once and for all, by removing all the black pawns from the American game.

How are we to understand Emerson? Although the man had advocated total emancipation of the American slaves after fair compensation to their owners, when someone brought him a petition to add his name to, calling for a national convention to get the ball rolling in support of total emancipation of slaves with fair compensation to the owners — precisely what he had advocated — he refused to take the pen in his hand.



"There is only one way to accept America and that is in hate; one must be close to one's land, passionately close in some way or other, and the only way to be close to America is to hate it; it is the only way to love America."



— Lionel Trilling



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Early in his life [George William Curtis](#) had spent two years at the Brook Farm community and school. then, in order to continue their association with [Emerson](#), George and his older brother [James Burrill Curtis](#) had gone to live on a farm a mile north of Concord. The brothers worked for Captain Nathan Barrett and had a cottage adjoining his farmhouse, atop Punkatasset Hill. After spending part of a day with [Hawthorne](#), George noted in his diary that the writer's actual life was harmonious with the picture-perfect antique repose of his house, redeemed into the present by his and Mrs. Hawthorne's infant and the wife's tenderness and respect for her husband. His note in his diary in regard to Mr. Emerson's address before the Antislavery Friends on this day August 1st, commemorating the 10th anniversary of emancipation in the British West Indies, was merely to

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the effect that the address had been very commanding despite being nearly two hours long.



So Waldo began by pointing out that, actually, the institution of human slavery was in the best interest of no-one, for wage-labor is more efficient and far safer:

WE are met to exchange congratulations on the anniversary of an event singular in the history of civilization; a day of reason; of the clear light; of that which makes us better



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than a flock of birds and beasts: a day, which gave the immense fortification of a fact, – of gross history, – to ethical abstractions. It was the settlement, as far as a great Empire was concerned, of a question on which almost every leading citizen in it had taken care to record his vote; one which for many years absorbed the attention of the best and most eminent of mankind.... If there be any man who thinks the ruin of a race of men a small matter, compared with the last decoration and completions of his own comfort, – who would not so much as part with his ice-cream, to save them from rapine and manacles, I think, I must not hesitate to satisfy that man, that also his cream and vanilla are safer and cheaper, by placing the negro nation on a fair footing, than by robbing them. If the Virginian piques himself on the picturesque luxury of his vassalage, on the heavy Ethiopian manners of his house-servants, their silent obedience, their hue of bronze, their turbaned heads, and would not exchange them for the more intelligent but precarious hired-service of whites, I shall not refuse to show him, that when their free-papers are made out, it will still be their interest to remain on his estate, and that the oldest planters of Jamaica are convinced, that it is cheaper to pay wages, than to own the slave.

Simultaneous with [Emerson](#) and [Douglass](#) delivering these noteworthy speeches in Concord, in Pennsylvania Emerson's friend, the Reverend William Henry Furness, was also taking the dangerous step of announcing himself as being in opposition to human slavery.

By way of radical contrast with Robert D. Richardson, Jr.'s putrid 1994 nobody-here-but-us-white-men account (reprinted above), here is how a more recent, much more reliable, and racially inclusive source, Gregory P. Lampe¹⁰ has analyzed this Concord meeting (the material appears on pages 236-9, and has been lightly edited to make it slightly less convoluted, and for conformity with the punctuation and spelling conventions of this Kouroo database):

[Frederick Douglass](#)'s activities from mid-June to the end of July are difficult to determine. Neither the Liberator nor the National Anti-Slavery Standard advertised any of his lectures or documented his participation in any antislavery meetings during this period. According to Blassingame, ed. DOUGLASS PAPERS, SERIES ONE, 1:xciii, on June 28th Douglass attended the Essex County Anti-Slavery Society meeting in Methuen, Massachusetts. However, Douglass's name does not appear in the minutes of the meeting, published in the Liberator of July 12th, and it is probable that he was not in attendance. Douglass was invited to attend an antislavery meeting in Nashua, New Hampshire from July 26th to 29th, but there is no indication of his presence in the accounts of the proceedings published in the Liberator of September 27th. Douglass had also been invited to be the chief speaker at the August 1st celebration in [Providence, Rhode Island](#), but he did not attend, an outcome that greatly

10. Gregory P. Lampe. FREDERICK DOUGLASS: FREEDOM'S VOICE, 1818-1845. East Lansing MI: Michigan State UP, 1998



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disappointed the organizers and left many of Providence's blacks "much grieved" (Liberator of August 16th). On August 17th, Douglass wrote to the Liberator that he "deeply regretted" missing the meeting at Providence and explained his absence (Liberator of August 31st). On Thursday, August 1st, Douglass returned to Concord to participate in the commemoration of the anniversary of the emancipation of 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies. Despite a rain storm and troubles with securing a meeting place, reported a correspondent to the Liberator, the occasion was one "of deep and thrilling interest." The meeting, initially scheduled for out-of-doors, convened at eleven o'clock in the Court House. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the featured speaker of the celebration, addressed the "large and spirited meeting" for more than two and a half hours, during which time "the whole audience gave the most undivided attention." In the afternoon, Douglass was one of five speakers to appear before the meeting (Liberator of July 12th; National Anti-Slavery Standard of July 18th; Liberator of August 9th; National Anti-Slavery Standard of August 15th). The others speakers were William A. White, Samuel Joseph May, Moses Grandy, and Cyrus Pierce (National Anti-Slavery Standard of August 15th). Although there is no full text of Douglass' speech, we do have a sketch of it by Laura Hosmer, a member of the committee of arrangements for the celebration. Because this is the sole account of Douglass's address, it is worth printing in full. From it, we gain a sense both of Douglass's message and the power of his delivery. According to Hosmer's report in the National Anti-Slavery Standard, Frederick Douglass

had spoken with the deep feeling which a man of his strong mind, who had felt all the dread horrors of Slavery, must have on such an occasion; he rejoiced with a joy that was truly unspeakable, over the resurrection of so many thousands from that living grave in which they had lain buried for so many long, dreary years; he told of the unutterable joy which must have been felt by those poor bondsmen, when they received the boon of liberty—a joy which, he said, could only be conceived of by those who had, like himself, suffered as they had suffered—a joy which might be felt, but never could be told; and, said he, I *rejoice* with them, I rejoice with them, I REJOICE with them." As he uttered these words, his every look and gesture showed how utterly inadequate language was to express the intensity of his feeling; his whole frame quivered with emotion, as he stood silent for a moment. "But," said he, "while I rejoice with them, my thoughts *will* revert to my own country, and to the millions who are here suffering miseries from which *they* are now delivered." He then depicted the state of things in our country, in language which I cannot remember to repeat, and with a power which I cannot imitate. When he had done speaking, the house was silent as if there were not a living being in it.

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As Hosmer's account testifies, Douglass's address made a powerful impression on the audience. The correspondent to the Liberator may have had Douglass's speech in mind when he wrote, "We have been strengthened, we have been refreshed, and all I doubt not who participated with us on that day, will look back upon it as one of the bright spots on their anti-slavery course." Certainly, Douglass's masterful address had been one of the day's "bright spots" (Liberator of August 9th and of August 23rd).

In the oration [Emerson](#) referenced an unprovenanced tale, that "the Great Spirit, in the beginning, offered the black man, whom he loved better than the buckra or white, his choice of two boxes, a big and a little one. The black man was greedy, and chose the largest. 'The buckra box was full up with pen, paper, and whip, and the negro box with hoe and bill; and hoe and bill for negro to this day.'" For information, since fortunately we aren't as close to this material as once we were — here are images of a hoe plate, used primarily for chopping weeds from cultivated fields, and of a billhook, used primarily for chopping brush from uncultivated fields:



If [Frederick Douglass](#) was unacquainted with this unprovenanced tale of Emerson's, he would surely have been acquainted with the use of the tools it mentioned. Imagine how he must have chuckled at this point in the Sage of Concord's oration!

Imagine how the black man reacted, when Emerson characterized nice polite negroes and how they would nicely, politely hold themselves back in order to let the white man "go ahead," and would modestly remind one another not to be pushy, never to dare to irritate The Man — "social position is not to be gained by pushing."

Imagine how the black man reacted, when the white man pointed up the fact that the genius of the Saxon race, his own race, was friendly to liberty; that the enterprise, the very muscular vigor of his nation, was inconsistent with slavery — that the salient difference between the white race and the black race, which had resulted in the white race enslaving the black race rather than vice versa, was that the white race would never permit itself to be enslaved.



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Imagine how the black man reacted, when the white man predicted that if the black man continued to be feeble, and not important to the existing races, not on a parity with the best race, then the black man was fated to continue to serve — and was fated to “be exterminated.”

Imagine how the black man reacted, when the white man suggested that only if the black man carried in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, would he be able to “survive and play his part.”

Imagine how the black man reacted, when the white man described the occasion of this annual celebration of the emancipation of the negroes of the British West Indies as reminding us all, that after playing for such a long time such a very low and subdued accompaniment, in the future “the black race can contend with the white [and] can strike in with effect, and take a master’s part in the music.”

Imagine how the black man reacted, when the white man spoke of “the arrival in the world of such men as Toussaint, and the Haytian heroes, or of the leaders of their race in Barbadoes and Jamaica,” and how important this was for the future success of the black race!

What a mixed message the black man received on that day! Here’s the message, in loud black letters:

**IF YOU DON’T GET PUSHY YOU’LL GET EXTERMINATED
— BUT GET PUSHY AND YOU’LL GET EXTERMINATED.**

This was the shadow side of the coin which the white American worshiped:



“It is difficult to describe the rapacity with which the American rushes forward to receive the immense booty which fortune proffers to him. He is goaded onward by a passion more intense than love of life. Before him lies a boundless continent, and he urges onward as if time pressed, and he was afraid of finding no room for his exertions.”



— Alexis de Tocqueville

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1845

Early May: [Henry Thoreau](#) hired a horse and pulled stumps in [Waldo Emerson](#)'s 11-acre plot, for firewood as well as to clear it, and then plowed 2¹/₂ acres to plant in *Phaseolus vulgaris* var. *humilis* common small navy pea bush white beans.¹¹ This clearing of the exhausted farmland beyond the Concord Alms House and Poor Farm, which had been timbered some time before and had lain fallow for some seventeen years partly restoring its fertility, was Thoreau's deal with Emerson by which he would be allowed to build a cabin for his occupancy in Emerson's woodlot where it touched on [Walden Pond](#). Thoreau then bought the shanty of a departing family



of impoverished Irish immigrants, the James Collinses who were moving on at the completion of work on the railway, standing near the new tracks, for its materials, tore it apart, and hauled the recovered boards some rods

11. Brad Dean has calculated that to plant seven miles of rows, each row fifteen rods in length, spaced three feet apart, the dimensions of the beanfield would have been 247.5 by 447 feet or 110,632.5 square feet, and that this amounts to 2.534 acres or slightly over one hectare.

These are beans that ripen prior to harvest and are threshed dry from the pods. Only the ripe seeds reach market. Four main types are grown as follows: (1) the Pea or Navy which Henry was growing; (2) Medium type, which includes Pinto, Great Northern, Sutter, Pink Bayo, and Small Red or Mexican Red; (3) Kidney; and (4) Marrow. Seeds vary in size from about 1/3-inch long in Thoreau's pea or navy bean to 3/4-inch in the Kidney. All these plants are of bush type. They are usually cut or pulled when most pods are ripe, and then vines and pods are allowed to dry before threshing. This is a bean thought to have originated in Central America from southern Mexico to Guatemala and Honduras. Evidence of the common bean has been found in two widely separated places. Large seeded common beans were found at Callejon de Hualylas in Peru, and small seeded common beans were found in the Tehuacan Valley in Mexico, with both finds carbon-dating as earlier than 5,000 BCE. This crop is associated with the maize and squash culture which predominated in pre-Columbian tropical America. In our post-Columbian era this bean has come to be grown in all areas of the world.

However, that's only the literal bean, not the metaphorical or literary bean, and once upon a time in Europe, there had been a form of commercial counting in use very much like the abacus of the East, in which beans were used. In those days to "know how many beans make up five" was to be commercially numerate. –Sort of like today knowing how to count one's change. It might be suggested therefore that Thoreau's determination to know beans was a play upon this archaic usage in which not knowing one's beans amounted to innumeracy, and in addition a play upon the common accusation "You don't know beans about xxxxx!" It might also be suggested that this is scatological humor similar to Shakespeare's — the following is from his "Comedy of Errors":

A man may break a word with you sir; and words are but wind;
Ay, and break it in your face, so he break it not behind.

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along the hilltop and down to [Walden Pond](#) on a hand-cart of some sort, to dry in the sun:



A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley

[TIMELINE OF WALDEN](#)

[THE BEANFIELD](#)



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WALDEN: At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity, I set up the frame of my house. No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day. I began to occupy my house on the 4th of July, as soon as it was boarded and roofed, for the boards were carefully feather-edged and lapped, so that it was perfectly impervious to rain; but before boarding I laid the foundation of a chimney at one end, bringing two cartloads of stones up the hill from the pond in my arms. I built the chimney after my hoeing in the fall, before a fire became necessary for warmth, doing my cooking in the mean while out of doors on the ground, early in the morning; which mode I still think is in some respects more convenient and agreeable than the usual one. When it stormed before my bread was baked, I fixed a few boards over the fire, and sat under them to watch my loaf, and passed some pleasant hours in that way. In those days, when my hands were much employed, I read but little, but the least scraps of paper which lay on the ground, my holder, or tablecloth, afforded me as much entertainment, in fact answered the same purpose as the Iliad.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN



BRONSON ALCOTT

ELLERY CHANNING

WALDO EMERSON

EDMUND HOSMER

EDMUND HOSMER, JR.

JOHN HOSMER

ANDREW HOSMER

JAMES BURRILL CURTIS

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

The “acquaintances” who participated in this rustic “raising”¹² ceremony on the [Walden Pond](#) shore were:

- [Bronson Alcott](#)
- [Ellery Channing](#)
- [Waldo Emerson](#)
- [Edmund Hosmer](#)
- [Hosmer](#)’s three sons Edmund Hosmer, Jr., John Hosmer, and Andrew Hosmer

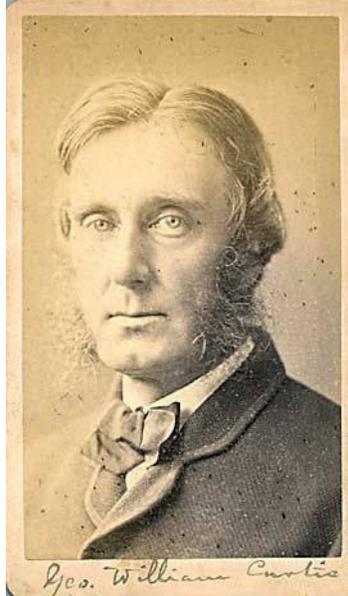
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- the brothers [George William Curtis](#) and [James Burrill Curtis](#)



[Emerson](#) of course resided in the Coolidge mansion just on the other side of the poorhouse farm (Gleason F7) and was the owner of the woodlot in which this shanty was being erected, and would be the owner of that shanty, and the Curtis brothers, having come from Brook Farm to Ponkawtasset Hill (Gleason D7) a year earlier, and the Alcotts, having only recently returned to [Concord](#) from their Fruitlands near Harvard, Massachusetts to reside near the [Edmund Hosmer](#) home on a road leading toward Lincoln (Gleason G9/66), were of course quite conveniently situated to come over to the pond for this neighborly little ceremony.


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12. “No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I.” I would maintain that [WALDEN](#) is chock-full of references to the gallows, references that nowadays we don’t “get” simply because we no longer live in the sort of culture, in which public execution is an unchallenged holiday convention. For instance, I would maintain that this particular paragraph, apparently so innocent, includes an implicit reference to being [hanged](#). While the raisers of a house frame are the friends and neighbors who push with poles and pull with ropes as a frame is being lifted from its temporary horizontal position to its permanent vertical position, the raisers of a person may by extension be the outraged citizens who are pulling on the rope that elevates a criminal by the neck toward the extending horizontal branch of a tree. This is not the sort of gallows humor which would have gone unnoticed in the first half of the 19th Century, not in America it wouldn’t. This is an implicit reference to [Thoreau’s Huguenot](#) ancestors of honored memory, who rather than tugging together upon the indecent public end of that hanging rope, in *la belle France*, had sometimes found themselves tugging alone upon the noose at the decent end. [But there is more on this topic at:](#)

[GALLOWS HUMOR](#)



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Horse cultivator and boy three hours, ...1 00
 Horse and cart to get crop,0 75

In all,\$14 72¹/₂

My income was, (patrem familias vendacem, non emacem esse oportet,) from

Nine bushels and twelve quarts of beans sold,\$16 94
 Five “ large potatoes,2 50
 Nine “ small “2 25
 Grass,1 00
 Stalks,0 75

In all,\$23 44

Leaving a pecuniary profit, as I have elsewhere said, of \$8 71¹/₂.

This is the result of my experience in raising beans. Plant the common small white bush bean about the first of June, in rows three feet by eighteen inches apart, being careful to select fresh round and unmixed seed. First look out for worms, and supply vacancies by planting anew. Then look out for woodchucks, if it is an exposed place, for they will nibble off the earliest tender leaves almost clean as they go; and again, when the young tendrils make their appearance, they have notice of it, and will shear them off with both buds and young pods, sitting erect like a squirrel. but above all harvest as early as possible, if you would escape frosts and have a fair and saleable crop; you may save much loss by this means.

This further experience also I gained. I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops. Alas! I said this to myself; but now another summer is gone, and another, and another, and I am obliged to say to you, Reader, that the seeds which I planted, if indeed they were the seeds of those virtues, were wormeaten or had lost their vitality, and so did not come up. Commonly men will only be brave as their fathers were brave, or timid. This generation is very sure to plant corn and beans each new year precisely as the Indians did centuries ago and taught the first settlers to do, as if there were a fate in it. I saw an old man the other day, to my astonishment, making the holes with a hoe for the seventieth time at least, and not for himself to lie down in! But why should not the New Englander try new adventures, and not lay so much stress on his grain, his potato and grass crop, and his orchards? -raise other crops than these? Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men? We should really be fed and cheered if when we met a man we were sure to see that some of the qualities which I have named, which we all prize more than those other productions, but which are for the most part broadcast and floating in the air, had taken root and grown in him. Here comes such a subtle and ineffable quality, for instance, as truth or justice, though the slightest amount or new variety of it, along the road. Our ambassadors should be instructed to send home such seeds as these, and Congress help to distribute them over all the land. We should never stand upon ceremony with sincerity.

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We should never cheat and insult and banish one another by our meanness, if there were present the kernel of worth and friendliness. We should not meet thus in haste. Most men I do not meet at all, for they seem not to have time; they are busy about their beans. We would not deal with a man thus plodding ever, leaning on a hoe or a spade as a staff between his work, not as a mushroom, but partially risen out of the earth, something more than erect, like swallows alighted and walking on the ground.-

“And as he spake, his wings would now and then
Spread, as he meant to fly, then close again,”

so that we should suspect that we might be conversing with an angel. Bread may not always nourish us; but it always does us good, it even takes stiffness out of our joints, and makes us supple and buoyant, when we knew not what ailed us, to recognize any generosity in man or Nature, to share any unmixed and heroic joy.

Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry was once a sacred art; but it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely. We have no festival, nor procession, nor ceremony, not excepting our Cattle-shows and so called Thanksgivings, by which the farmer expresses a sense of the sacredness of his calling, or is reminded of its sacred origin. It is the premium and the feast which tempt him. He sacrifices not to Ceres and the Terrestrial Jove, but to the infernal Plutus rather. By avarice and selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free, of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives.

He knows Nature but as a robber. Cato says that the profits of agriculture are particularly pious or just, (*maximeque pius quæstus*,) and according to Varro the old Romans “called the same earth Mother and Ceres, and thought that they who cultivated it led a pious and useful life, and that they alone were left of the race of King Saturn.”

We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction. They all reflect and absorb his rays alike, and the former make but a small part of the glorious picture which he beholds in his daily course. In his view the earth is all equally cultivated like a garden. Therefore we should receive the benefit of his light and heat with a corresponding trust and magnanimity. What though I value the seed of these beans, and harvest that in the fall of the year? This broad field which I have looked at so long looks not to me as the principal cultivator, but away from me to influences more genial to it, which water and make it green. These beans have results which are not harvested by me. Do they not grow for woodchucks partly? The ear of wheat, (in Latin *spica*,” obsoletely *specæ*, from *spe*, hope,) should not be the only hope of the husbandman; its kernel or grain (*granum*, from *gerendo*, bearing,) is not all that it bears. How, then, can our harvest fail? Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds? It matters little comparatively whether the fields fill the farmer’s barns. The true husbandman will cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifest no concern whether the woods will bear chestnuts this year or not, and finish his labor with every day, relinquishing all claim to the produce of his fields, and sacrificing in his mind not only his first but his last fruits also.

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WALDEN: It was a singular experience that long acquaintance which I cultivated with beans, what with planting, and hoeing, and harvesting, and threshing, and picking over, and selling them, -the last was the hardest of all,- I might add eating, for I did taste. I was determined to know beans. When they were growing, I used to hoe from five o'clock in the morning till noon, and commonly spent the rest of the day about other affairs. Consider the intimate and curious acquaintance one makes with various kinds of weeds, -it will bear some iteration in the account, for there was no little iteration in the labor,- disturbing their delicate organizations so ruthlessly, and making such invidious distinctions with his hoe, levelling whole ranks of one species, and sedulously cultivating another. That's Roman wormwood, -that's pigweed, -that's sorrel, -that's piper-grass, -have at him, chop him up, turn his roots upward to the sun, don't let him have a fibre in the shade, if you do he'll turn himself t'other side up and be as green as a leek in two days. A long war, not with cranes, but with weeds, those Trojans who had sun and rain and dews on their side. Daily the beans saw me come to their rescue armed with a hoe, and thin the ranks of their enemies, filling up the trenches with weedy dead.

Many a lusty crest-waving Hector, that towered a whole foot above his crowding comrades, fell before my weapon and rolled in the dust.

Those summer days which some of my contemporaries devoted to the fine arts in Boston or Rome, and others to contemplation in India, and others to trade in London or New York, I thus, with the other farmers of New England, devoted to husbandry. Not that I wanted beans to eat, for I am by nature a Pythagorean, so as far as beans are concerned, whether they mean porridge or voting, and exchanged them for rice; but, perchance, as some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day. It was on the whole a rare amusement, which, continued too long, might have become a dissipation. Though I gave them no manure, and did not hoe them all once, I hoed them unusually well as far as I went, and was paid for it in the end, "there being in truth," as Evelyn says, "no compost or latation whatsoever comparable to this continual motion, repastination, and turning of the mould with the spade." "The earth," he adds elsewhere, "especially if fresh, has a certain magnetism in it, by which it attracts the salt, power, or virtue (call it either) which gives it life, and is the logic of all the labor and stir we keep about it, to sustain us; all dungings and other sordid temperings being but the vicars succedaneous to this improvement." Moreover, this being one of those "worn-out and exhausted lay fields which enjoy their sabbath," had perchance, as Sir Kenelm Digby thinks likely, attracted "vital spirits" from the air. I harvested twelve bushels of beans.

But to be more particular; for it is complained that Mr. Colman has reported chiefly the expensive experiments of gentlemen farmers; my outgoes were,-

For a hoe,	\$0 54
Ploughing, harrowing, and furrowing, ...	7 50, Too much.
Beans for seed,	3 12 ¹ / ₂
Potatoes "	1 33
Peas "	0 40
Turnip seed,	0 06
White line for crow fence,	0 02

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A Sunday in early September: Joseph Hosmer, Jr. related, long afterward, that “Early in September, 1845, (can it be so long,) on his [[Henry Thoreau](#)’s] invitation I spent a Sunday at his lake side retreat, as pure and delightful as with my mother. The building was not then finished, the chimney had no beginning — the sides were not battened, or the walls plastered.

[EMERSON’S SHANTY](#)[TIMELINE OF WALDEN](#)

A 19th-Century Irish shanty in the Merrimack Valley

It stood in the open field, some thirty rods from the lake, and the "Devil's Bar," and in full view of it.... The entrance to the cellar was thro' a trap door in the center of the room. The king-post was an entire tree, extending from the bottom of the cellar to the ridge-pole, upon which we descended, as the sailors do into the hold of a vessel.... The cooking apparatus was primitive and consisted of a hole made in the earth and inlaid with stones, upon which the fire was made, after the manner at the sea-shore, when they have a clam-bake. When sufficiently hot remove the smoking embers and place on the fish, frog, etc. Our bill of fare included roasted horn pout, corn, beans, bread, salt, etc. Our viands were nature's own, "sparkling and bright." ... The beans had been previously cooked. The meal for our bread was mixed with lake water only, and when prepared it was spread upon the surface of a thin stone used for the purpose and baked, - (as illustrated.) ... When the bread had been sufficiently baked the stone was removed, then the fish placed over the hot stones and roasted - some in wet paper and some without- and when seasoned with salt, were delicious.

[George William Curtis](#) and [James Burrill Curtis](#) were brothers who lived for a time on the Hosmer farm on



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Lincoln Road. They had helped [Henry Thoreau](#) build his shanty on Walden Pond and Thomas Blanding suggests that they are likely candidates for the following tale from “The Village” in [WALDEN](#):

[WALDEN](#): Several times, when a visitor chanced to stay into the evening, and it proved a dark night, I was obliged to conduct him to the cart-path in the rear of the house, and then point out to him the direction he was to pursue, and in keeping which he was to be guided rather by his feet than his eyes. One very dark night I directed thus on their way two young men who had been fishing in the pond. They lived about a mile off through the woods, and were quite used to the route. A day or two after one of them told me that they wandered about the greater part of the night, close by their own premises, and did not get home till toward morning, by which time, as there had been several heavy showers in the mean while, and the leaves were very wet, they were drenched to their skins. I have heard of many going astray even in the village streets, when the darkness was so thick that you could cut it with a knife, as the saying is. Some who live in the outskirts, having come to town a-shopping in their wagons, have been obliged to put up for the night; and gentlemen and ladies making a call have gone half a mile out of their way, feeling the sidewalk only with their feet, and not knowing when they turned. It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

JAMES BURRILL CURTIS
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

Since [George William Curtis](#) has related a similar incident, it seems likely that he was the companion mentioned in “The Ponds”:

[WALDEN](#): In warm evenings I frequently sat in the boat playing the flute, and saw the perch, which I seemed to have charmed, hovering around me, and the moon travelling over the ribbed bottom, which was strewn with the wrecks of the forest. Formerly I had come to this pond adventurously, from time to time, in dark summer nights, with a companion, and making a fire close to the water’s edge, which we thought attracted the fishes, we caught pouts with a bunch of worms strung on a thread; and when we had done, far in the night, threw the burning brands high into the air like skyrockets, which, coming down into the pond, were quenched with a loud hissing, and we were suddenly groping in total darkness. Through this, whistling a tune, we took our way to the haunts of men again. But now I had made my home by the shore.

However, Thoreau’s friend [George](#) would later remember this as having happened, not at the pond, but on the Concord River.



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During a heavy thundershower either of the spring or of the fall ([Thoreau](#) does not specify which),

WALDEN: In one heavy thunder shower the lightning struck a large pitch-pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking-stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago.



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1846

December: [James Burrill Curtis](#) joined his brother [George William Curtis](#) to spend the winter in [Rome](#) and they continued for an extended tour of the Continent, including Leghorn, Pisa, and Florence. Burrill would go on into Africa and the Near East while James would continue his explorations in Italy.

[Ellery Channing](#) elected to sin a 2d time against the muse of poetry — on terms that he was to receive 70% of the retail on each volume sold, once the full cost of publication had been recovered.

The first sin had been:

POEMS (1843)

This time the volume was arranged by James Munroe and Company and printed by Thurston, Torrey and Company at 81 Devonshire Street in Boston.

POEMS (SECOND SERIES)

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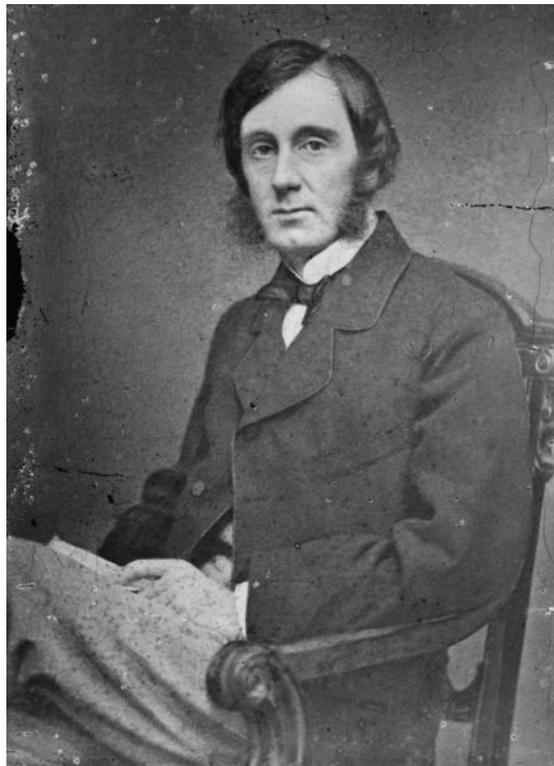
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1849

Summer: The Alcott family was living in the very large and luxurious home of their benefactor, Mrs. James Savage, at 1 Temple Place in Boston, and, with space and quiet and privacy, Bronson Alcott was reading Emanuel Swedenborg, Jakob Böhme, and [Lorenz Oken](#), and beginning his self-absorbed work on TABLETS.

Abby Hutchinson became so ill that it was feared she could not survive. This medical condition would improve, but very slowly.

[George William Curtis](#) completed his travels in Europe, Egypt, and Palestine and returned from Europe to America, while [James Burrill Curtis](#) remained in Paris.





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1850

August : George William Curtis had during his four years of world travel been acting as correspondent for the Courier and Inquirer in New-York, and had kept a journal. He returned from England to join the New-York Tribune, to which he had also contributed some letters from Europe.



[T]he most popular writer of the fifties was another transplanted New Englander, George William Curtis, a highly ornamental young man who might have been a hero of N.P[arker] Willis if he had not happened to sit at Emerson's feet. Born in Providence, he had gone to school in the suburbs of Boston and moved to New York with his family when he was fifteen, - his father had become the president of a well-known bank there; and his later association with the Concord Transcendentalists set the key of his career as an orator and writer. He had spent two years at Brook Farm, where his special task was to trim the lamps, while he studied the chemistry of agriculture, music and German, and many later accounts of the farm, and the Transcendental Club as well, were based on the essays that Curtis wrote about them. He was at home in New York for a while in 1844, after he left the farm, reading Goethe; then, boarding in Concord with his brother Burrill at the house of one of the village worthies, he had passed his mornings working as a farm hand. The brothers sold their own vegetables too, while they read in the afternoons in their rowboat on the river. Curtis was one of the little party who, on a summer's day, helped to raise Thoreau's hut at Walden. As for the Transcendental Club, it lacked the fluent social note, and Curtis was amused when the erect philosophers serenely ate their russet apples and solemnly disappeared into the night. But Emerson had touched his spirit for good and all. He had seen the sage not only in Concord but lecturing in country meeting-houses where the neighbourhood stamped in on winter nights, chattering to the door in hood and muffler or buried under buffalo-ropes in wagons and sleighs. In the dim light of the lamps the boys clumped round the stove in cowhide boots until they were enthralled into silence by the musical spell. The incessant spray of Emerson's fancies, glittering like a night of stars, expanded and exalted the susceptible Curtis's mind.

WALDO EMERSON
BURRILL CURTIS



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BURRILL CURTIS

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1851

By this point [John Andrew](#), who had been born in Hull, England in 1815, was residing in [Boston](#), although he was exhibiting a wood engraving at the Annual Fair of America Institute in New-York.¹³

[James Burrill Curtis](#) briefly returned from Europe to America and then voyaged to England, where he would remain.

[George William Curtis](#) was hired as music critic and editorial writer for the New-York [Tribune](#). In this year his initial book NILE NOTES OF A "HOWADJI"; OR, THE AMERICAN IN EGYPT and his initial public lecture.

TRAVEL IS SO BROADENING

13. [Andrew](#) had sons named George T. Andrew and John Andrew who also did wood engraving. The son named John Andrew who did wood engraving was a different person from the Boston attorney and governor John Albion Andrew (it is possible, I presume, that this son became the John Andrew of John Andrew and Son of Cambridge, a firm specializing in photography and engraving supplies).



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1858

[James Burrill Curtis](#) received the AB degree from [Cambridge University](#).

At this point the Reverend [Richard Chenevix Trench](#), dean of Westminster, left off being also professor of divinity in [King's College of Cambridge University](#).



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1861

[James Burrill Curtis](#) received the AM degree from [Cambridge University](#) (he would settle as Anglican chaplain of St. Catharine's College, Cambridge and get married with Lady Mary Tytler, who would die soon after her marriage without producing any children).

In England, people were feeling fundamentally ambivalent about both sides of the Civil War that was beginning in the United States of America. In general, Americans were considered uncouth and found to be annoying, and with this fighting going on, they seemed even more uncouth, and were rendering themselves even more annoying than usual:

A Plague on Both Your Houses?

Duncan Andrew Campbell. ENGLISH PUBLIC OPINION AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR. Royal Historical Society Series. Woodbridge and Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2003
Reviewed for H-CivWar by Jay Sexton, Modern History Faculty, Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford.

Britain remained a neutral party throughout the American Civil War, yet, when it comes to public opinion during the conflict, historians have generally divided British observers into either pro-Union or pro-Confederate camps. In his study of English public opinion during the conflict, Duncan Andrew Campbell seeks to demonstrate that this bifurcation has distorted the reality of an English populace that, on the whole, remained skeptical of both sides.

This argument is best presented in the first chapter, the strength of the book. Surveying the London press in the opening phase of the war, Campbell finds little affection for either side. In large part, this was an extension of pre-war diplomatic disputes and cultural tensions, which, Campbell rightly points out, have often been overlooked by historians who generally have concentrated exclusively on the war years. Differences arising from American expansionism, the right of search on the high seas, and monitoring of the illegal international slave trade, to name but a few, gave Englishmen ample reason to be distrustful of both sides.

Furthermore, the initial policies of both the North and the South did little to curry favor in England. The Morrill Tariff, vacillation on emancipation and the aggressive diplomatic tone of Northern statesmen alienated Englishmen from the Union's cause. Conversely, the South's diplomatic strategy of withholding cotton from Europe and, as Campbell particularly emphasizes, Confederate leaders' outspoken defense of slavery, overshadowed their foreign policy advantages of free-trade and self-determination. As one English observer put it in 1861, "We cannot be very zealous for the North; for we do not like her ambition; we are irritated by her insolence; we are aggrieved by her tariffs; but we still have much feeling of kinship and



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esteem. We cannot be at all zealous for the South; for though she is friendly and free-trading, she is fanatically slave, and Slavery is the object of our rooted detestation" (p. 48).

Historians, Campbell points out, have often confused opposition to one side with support for the other, leading to a flawed understanding of British sympathies. A useful set of appendices delineates how more Members of Parliament and Lords publicly endorsed neutrality (or were skeptical of both sides) than consistently advocated the cause of either the North or the South. Similarly, Campbell draws attention to the methodological problems in gauging popular attitudes from the press and public meetings, which uncritical historians have often accepted as barometers of English public opinion.

These are all important points that should lead historians to reflect upon conventional wisdom. The book, however, is not without its faults. Campbell couches his argument in opposition to the "traditional" interpretation of British sympathies during the war—the already discredited view that class affiliation and political ideology rigidly determined British views on the conflict. The working class and political radicals, according to this interpretation, uniformly supported the Union, whilst the aristocracy and business interests, seeking to stifle democratisation in Britain, backed the Confederacy.

This view, articulated by contemporaries such as John Bright and reasserted by E. D. Adams in his 1925 classic *GREAT BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR* has come under attack from historians in the last fifty years.¹⁴ Those scholars who do pick up on some of the themes of the traditional view—namely R.J.M. Blackett—do so with such greater nuance and qualification that they cannot be classified as advocates of the "traditional" interpretation as espoused by Bright and Adams. It is unnecessary, in other words, for Campbell to devote so much of his time and space to dismantling an interpretation that, with the possible exception of Philip Foner's slim 1981 work, has not found much scholarly traction in the last half century.¹⁵ Furthermore, the style and tone in which Campbell engages in historiographical discussions is one which this reviewer found unnecessarily and counterproductively aggressive, particularly as many such discussions regarded only minor points of emphasis.

Campbell's focus on demolishing an already-demolished interpretation is perhaps the product of not engaging with recent scholarship. Indeed, Charles Hubbard's 1998 synthesis on Confederate diplomacy, Alfred Grant's 2000 book on the British press and, most crucially, R. J. M. Blackett's 2001 *DIVIDED HEARTS: BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR*, are all absent from Campbell's historiographical discussions (as well as bibliography).¹⁶ These works no doubt came out late in the day for a book published in

14. E. D. Adams, *GREAT BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925); and John Bright, *SPEECHES OF JOHN BRIGHT, M.P., ON THE AMERICAN QUESTION* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1865).

15. Philip Foner, *BRITISH LABOR AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981).

16. Charles Hubbard, *THE BURDEN OF CONFEDERATE DIPLOMACY* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Alfred Grant, *THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND THE BRITISH PRESS* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2000); and R. J. M. Blackett, *DIVIDED HEARTS: BRITAIN AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).



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2003, but their absence detracts from the book—particularly given its historiographical focus.

This is not just a matter of bolstering footnotes. Campbell's discussion of the British partisans of the Union and Confederacy, in particular, suffers from the absence of engagement with recent scholarship—namely Blackett's *DIVIDED HEARTS*. Campbell minimizes the extent of English public engagement in the war, relying largely on London newspaper accounts and dated secondary literature to make the point that pro-Confederate organizations such as the Southern Independence Association were "paltry" and "unimpressive," whilst supporters of the North abandoned their efforts in "no-go" areas such as Sheffield and Lancashire after mid-1863 (pp. 184, 218, 224).

The recent work of Blackett suggests otherwise. Drawing from over 125 local newspapers, Blackett has chronicled, in great detail, the activities of partisans of the North and South in Britain, providing rich detail to support his view that "no other agitation in the period ... engaged public interest so extensively as did the debate over the war in America" (p. 168). Furthermore, Blackett sociologically examines membership lists of pro-Union and pro-Confederate organizations and finds that certain trends are discernible. Dissenters, radicals and trade union leaders disproportionately supported the North, whilst the Confederacy found its strongest support amongst the aristocracy, ministers of the Church of England and the merchant community of Liverpool. Blackett is careful to note, however, that all classes of Britons were to some extent divided on the American issue and calls attention to the several exceptions to these trends, thus avoiding the pitfall of rigid class and ideological determinism that marks the traditional view. Nonetheless, this is, in short, a revised and nuanced variation of the traditional view—one that is based on extensive research and analysis. If Campbell seeks to challenge an interpretation, he needs to begin here.

That being said, Campbell's overall argument that public opinion remained largely suspicious of both sides and that historians need to be careful about how they categorize the partisans of the two sides is still of value. As his close reading of the London press suggests, longstanding controversies and the specific policies of the Union and the Confederacy gave ample reasons for English observers to be alienated from both sides. It appears that this thesis might work best at the level of elite policy-makers. Rarely ones to be swayed by passions, Russell, Palmerston and other leading British statesmen viewed the Civil War in a detached and pragmatic manner. Though they recognized the virtues of the causes of both sides and the international opportunities presented by the conflict, they were more compelled to stay at arm's length from both the Union and Confederacy and to maintain a policy of neutrality. Russell's flirtings with intervention in the autumn of 1862 should be viewed as an attempt to mitigate the adverse consequences of the conflict in Britain, not as outright support for the



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Confederacy. Furthermore, Campbell's discussions of Parliament's overall skepticism of both sides—with the exception, of course, of a handful of Brights and Roebucks—further accounts for the free hand given to the Palmerston cabinet in the formation of British policy. The more popular the attitudes explored, in other words, the more important the attitudes of a few elites become to understanding British policy during the American Civil War.

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1895

January 15, Tuesday: [James Burrill Curtis](#) died at Folkstone on the coast of England.

“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: December 27, 2014



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

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