

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ALMOST MENTIONED IN WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS



In the margin of a book, next to a sentence by Matthew Arnold "It is comparatively a small matter to express oneself well, if one will be content with not expressing much, with expressing only trite ideas," Herman Melville jotted the initials "G.W.C." meaning George William Curtis. —It would appear that Curtis's triteness was as apparent to Melville then as it is to us now.

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM 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

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED 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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM 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

- 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”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:

GEORGE WILLIAM 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.

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”² ceremony on the Walden Pond shore:

- 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](#)

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1813

 July 30, Friday: In the Peninsular War, the allied soldiers who had stood against the French two days earlier went on the attack, and were able to push the French back at Sorrauren north of Pamplona.

[Friend Daniel Ricketson](#) was born “to a modest competence” so as to never need to work for a living. Born into the [Quaker](#) family of Joseph and Anna Thornton Ricketson and thus considered a “birthright” Friend, he would be educated at Friend’s Academy in [New Bedford](#) and [Henry Thoreau](#) would habitually address him as “Friend Ricketson” even before the point in late adult years at which he would become a “convinced” Friend. He would be a lifelong intimate of [George William Curtis](#). In his adult years he would characterize himself as



“an ordinary looking person”: his hair was sandy brown, his full beard reddish brown, his eyes hazel, and at five foot three inches in height, he was distinctly “altitude impaired.” As if this altitude impairment were not enough of an affliction, his left eye would become “from an injury received in my youth, defective in vision and slightly smaller than my right one.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

As he would appear (or as he would have liked to appear, this portrait being idealized) at the age of 25:





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

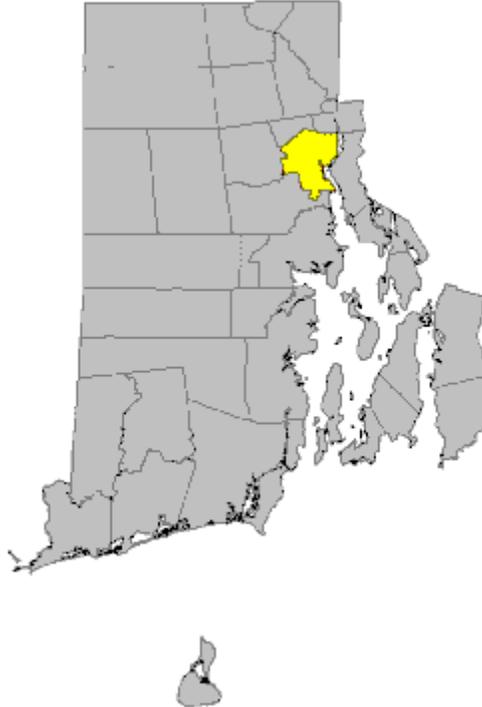
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



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:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1824



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

**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.**



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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).

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1839

The Curtis family relocated from [Providence, Rhode Island](#) to Washington Place on the north side of Manhattan Island, New-York, New York (at this point [George William Curtis](#) began to receive the benefit of private tutoring).

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1840

His father obtained a posting for [George William Curtis](#) as a clerk in a German importing house in Exchange Place, New-York (the youth would turn out to be poorly suited to this and would not remain).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1843

January: [Brook Farm](#) recruited some new members:

Name	Birthplace	Birthdate	Occupation
Amelia Russell	Dunkirk, France	1798	teacher
Lewis Ryckman	New-York	1796	shoemaker
Jane Ryckman	New-York	1799	wife of shoemaker
Mary Brown	?	?	wife of a farmer

In addition, [Isaac Hecker](#) came to stay at this Roxbury community, in the role of a partial boarder who would help out as a baker. His agenda at the time was to learn some Latin and some French while studying theoretical issues. It would be the Brook Farmer [George William Curtis](#) who would come up with very appropriate nickname “Ernest the Seeker.” At the Brook Farm, besides attending the [Reverend George Ripley](#)’s lectures on Kant and Spinoza, Hecker read Goethe, Schlegel and Jean-Paul Richter. The Reverend [Orestes Augustus Brownson](#)’s son Orestes was at that time a student-in-residence at Brook Farm, and occasionally the father would visit and there would be a chance for Hecker to talk with him, but usually Hecker had to walk in to visit Brownson in his home. At the time Brownson’s series of articles on “The Mission of [Jesus](#),” applying his version of the doctrine of communion to Christianity, was appearing in [The Christian World](#). Hecker even accompanied Brownson to and from his Sunday preaching services, discussing theology and Brownson’s proposal for a Christian unity movement — a “Catholicity without the papacy.” Earnest the Seeker was attempting to understand the Catholic Tübingen theologian Johann-Adam Mohler’s *SYMBOLIK*. News and rumors about the Tractarians of the Oxford Movement in England were a hot topic.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.





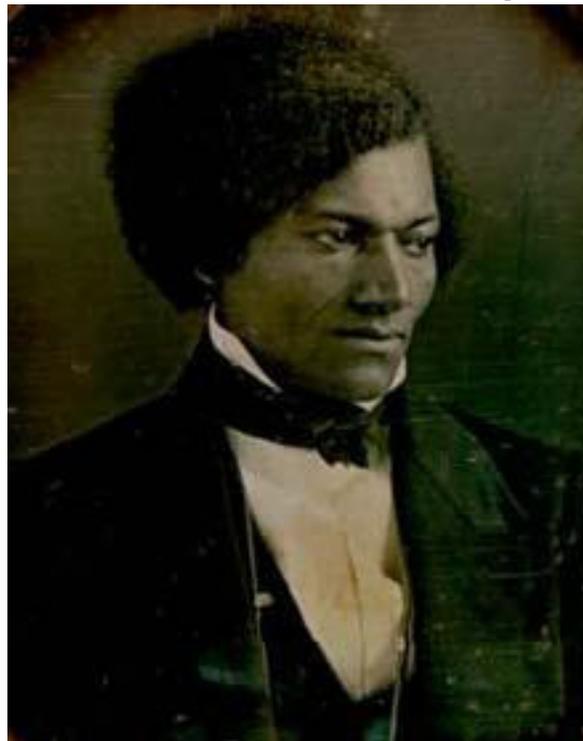
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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).

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

orator sent any equivalent racist concerns going in Thoreau's gourd at that time — probably not, as Thoreau 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!⁷ 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).



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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Irish interlopers in Walden Wood:

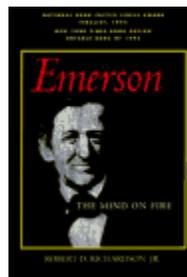
Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins and pigs and children revelling in the genial Concord dirt, and I should still find my Walden wood and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.

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





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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 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

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

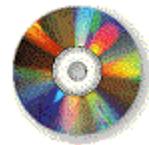
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1845

It was during this year that Minot Pratt left [Brook Farm](#) in disagreement with these Fourierist doctrines then prevalent, and went to [George William Curtis](#)'s farm in [Concord](#). It was during this year that [Waldo Emerson](#) wrote in his journal that "[Henry Thoreau](#) said that the [Fourierists](#) had a sense of duty which led them to devote themselves to their second best."

One of the debates of the 18th Century was what human nature might be, under its crust of civilization, under the varnish of culture and manners. [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#) had an answer. [Thomas Jefferson](#) had an answer. One of the most intriguing answers was that of [Charles Fourier](#), who was born in Besançon two years before the Shakers arrived in New York. He grew up to write twelve sturdy volumes designing a New Harmony for mankind, an experiment in radical sociology that began to run parallel to that of the Shakers. [Fourierism](#) ([Horace Greeley](#) founded the New-York [Tribune](#) to promote Fourier's ideas) was Shakerism for intellectuals. [Brook Farm](#) was Fourierist, and such place-names as Phalanx, New Jersey, and New Harmony, Indiana, attest to the movement's history. Except for one detail, Fourier and Mother Ann Lee were of the same mind; they both saw that humankind must return to the tribe or extended family and that it was to exist on a farm. Everyone lived in one enormous dormitory. Everyone shared all work; everyone agreed, although with constant revisions and refinements, to a disciplined way of life that would be most harmonious for them, and lead to the greatest happiness. But when, of an evening, the Shakers danced or had "a union" (a conversational party), Fourier's Harmonians had an orgy of eating, dancing, and sexual high jinks, all planned by a Philosopher of the Passions. There is a strange sense in which the Shakers' total abstinence from the flesh and Fourier's total indulgence serve the same purpose. Each creates a psychological medium in which frictionless cooperation reaches a maximum possibility. It is also wonderfully telling that the modern world has no place for either.

WALDEN: In short, I am convinced, both by faith and experience that to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely; as the pursuits of the simpler nations are still the sports of the more artificial. It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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 Hualaylas 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.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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](#)



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM 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

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

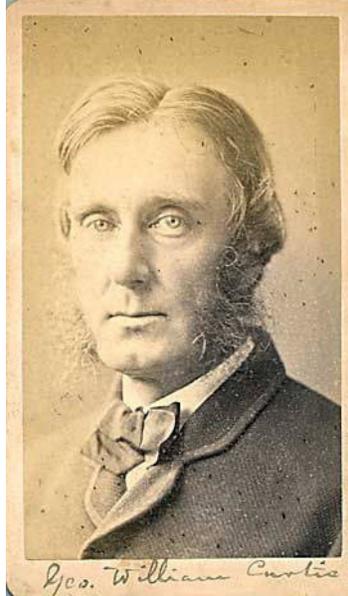
[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

- 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.


[Index to the Text](#)[Index to the Subtext](#)

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](#)



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Summer: [James Burrill Curtis](#) spent the summer of this year (as in the previous year) studying and farming at [Concord](#). He had made friends with [Waldo Emerson](#), [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), and [Henry Thoreau](#).

Toward the end of this summer, it would appear, [Ellery Channing](#) would be sleeping not in his own rental cottage on Punkatasset Hill but under Henry's cot in [Thoreau's \(Emerson's\) shanty](#) at [Walden Pond](#).¹³

WALDEN: I took a poet to board for a fortnight about those times, which caused me to be put to it for room. He brought his own knife, though I had two, and we used to scour them by thrusting them into the earth. He shared with me the labors of cooking. I was pleased to see my work rising so square and solid by degrees, and reflected, that, if it proceeded slowly, it was calculated to endure a long time. The chimney is to some extent an independent structure, standing on the ground and rising through the house to the heavens; even after the house is burned it still stands sometimes, and its importance and independence are apparent. This was toward the end of summer. It was now November.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

ELLERY CHANNING



The furniture of the shanty, some of which [Thoreau](#) made himself, consisted of:

- bed

13. Thoreau's shanty measured but 10' x 15'. Is that big enough for two people? In 1620, when the English settlers constructed their initial post-and-beam homes at Plymouth, these family dwellings commonly consisted of one room with a loft, and commonly measured 12' x 14'. In 1770, when Thomas Jefferson began the 13-year building project of his mansion at Monticello, he first had his slaves construct a 14' x 15' brick building in which he would live while supervising the construction. During his 5-year stay in the house, he had his slaves prepare a 2nd floor bedroom and then brought his new bride to live there. After the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 the US Army built 5,610 tiny redwood and fir "Relief Houses" as homes for nearly 20,000 refugees. The refugee shacks, as they came to be known, were available in three sizes, the most common being 10' x 14'. (By late 1908, most of the refugees had been relocated and the shacks were being carted by horse to locations around the city and converted into rental cottages, garages, storage spaces, and shops.)



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.

HDT

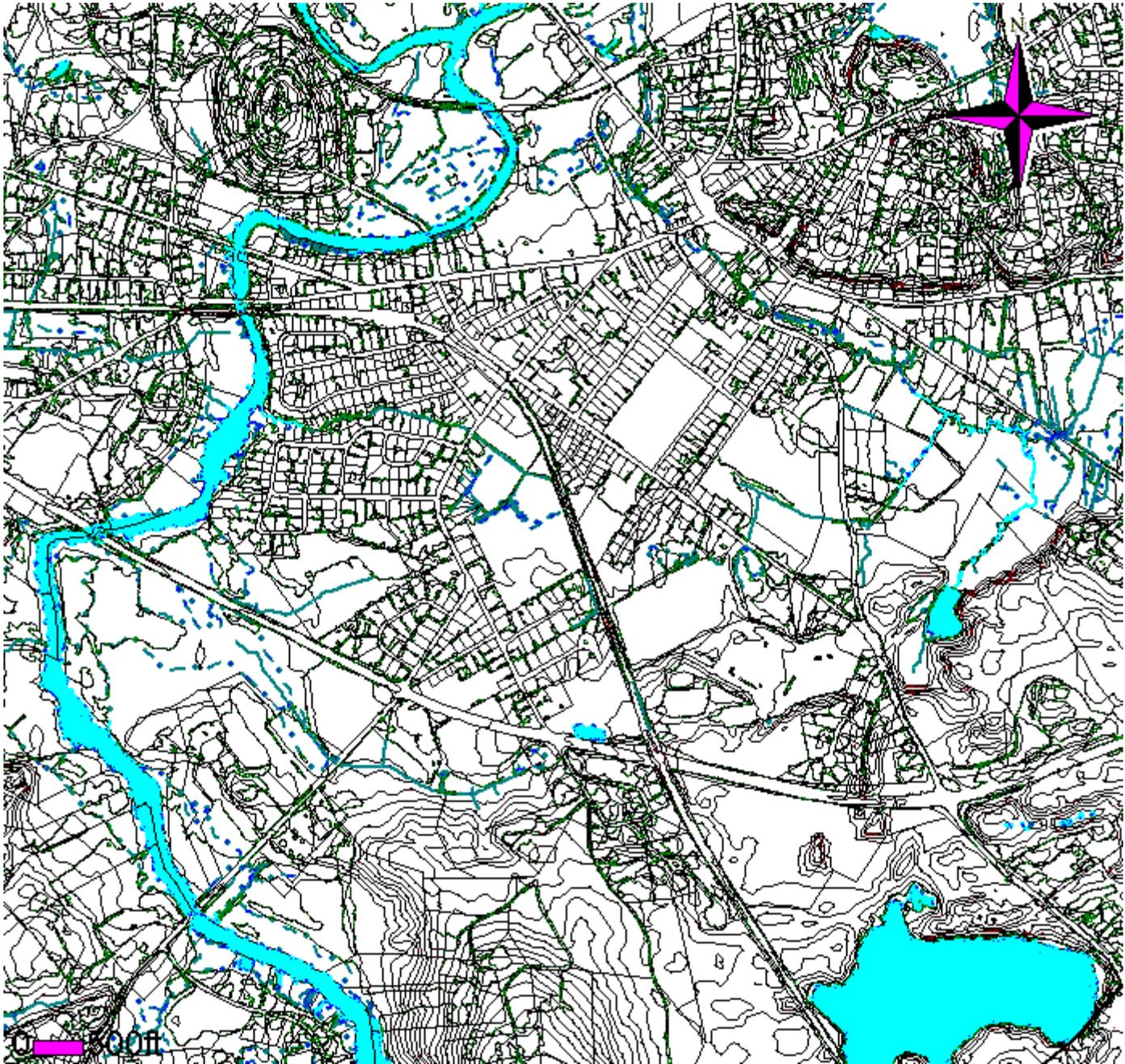
WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

- 3-legged table
- desk
- three chairs
- looking-glass three inches in diameter
- pair of tongs and andirons
- kettle
- skillet
- frying-pan
- dipper
- wash-bowl
- two knives and forks
- three plates
- one cup
- one spoon
- jug for oil
- jug for molasses
- japanned lamp

TIMELINE OF WALDEN

Dwight MacKerron has made an attempt to reformat some of the mentions in [WALDEN](#), as poetry:

When I return to my house I find
that visitors have been there and left
their cards,
a bunch of flowers,
a wreath of evergreen,
a name in pencil on a yellow walnut leaf or a chip.

They who come rarely to the woods
take some little piece of the forest
into their hands
to play with by the way.

One has peeled a willow wand,
woven it into a ring,
and dropped it on my table.
I could always tell
if visitors had called
in my absence,
either by the bended twigs or grass,
or the print of their shoes,
some slight trace left,
as a flower dropped,
or a bunch of grass plucked
and thrown away,
even as far off as the railroad.

Here is another such attempt by Dwight to render the prose of [WALDEN](#) into poetry:

Evening Song

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,
strewn with the wrecks of the forest.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Formerly I had come to this pond,
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.

Sometimes, after staying in a village parlor
till the family had all retired,
I have returned to the woods, and,
partly with a view to the next day's dinner,
spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight,
serenaded by owls and foxes,
and hearing, from time to time,
the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand.

Anchored in forty feet of water,
and twenty or thirty rods from the shore,
surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners,
dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight,
and communicating
by a long flaxen line
with mysterious nocturnal fishes
which had their dwelling forty feet below,
or sometimes dragging sixty feet of line
as I drifted in the gentle night breeze,
now and then feeling a slight vibration
along it,
some life prowling about its extremity,
of dull uncertain blundering purpose there,
and slow to make up its mind.
At length you slowly raise,
pulling hand over hand, some horned pout
squeaking and squirming to the upper air.

It was very queer,
especially in dark nights,
when your thoughts had wandered
to vast and cosmogonical themes in other spheres,
to feel this faint jerk,
which came
to interrupt your dreams
and link you to Nature again.

It seemed as if I might next cast my line
upward into the air,
as well as downward into this element
which was scarcely more dense.

...Two fishes
as it were



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

with one hook.

Amy Belding Brown has also constructed a poem out of this material:

Evening Song

Warm evenings when I played my flute
to charm the perch and track the silent moon
past ribbed pond bottoms from my boat,
I recalled other times and old companions,
dark summer nights beside a fire by water's edge.
We believed it drew the fish, and so we caught
fat pouts with worms strung on a thread.
When done, we threw the burning brands
high in the air. Like rockets, they fell into the pond
and hissed out, so we groped again through dark.
Sometimes, after sitting in a parlor in the town
until the family had retired, I went back to woods
and spent the midnight hours fishing,
serenaded by the fox and owl and some bird
creaking in a nearby tree. In moonlight,
thirty rods from shore, I watched perch and shiners
dimple surface with their silver tails
and, with a line, spoke to mystery fish
forty feet below. I drifted, waiting for the tug
of talk, the slight vibration of life prowling
in dull uncertain blundering intent.
At length I raised some horned pout
in squeaking squirm to upper air.
How strange, when my thoughts wandered,
to feel this faint tug back to Nature.
It seemed as if I might the next time
cast my line both upward, to the air,
and down into the element of water,
and therein catch two kinds of fish
with but a single hook.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

July 9, Wednesday: On the night of July 9th, [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) and [Ellery Channing](#) used the *Pond Lily* to help others search for the body of a suicide, a Miss [Martha Emmeline Hunt](#) about 19 years of age who had been superintendent of one of the district schools, with 60 pupils.¹⁴ She had left her bonnet and shoes and

Not far from this spot, lay an old, leaky punt, drawn up on the oozy river-side, and generally half-full of water. It served the angler to go in quest of pickerel, or the sportsman to pick up his wild-ducks. Setting this crazy barque afloat, I seated myself in the stern, with the paddle, while Hollingsworth sat in the bows, with the hooked pole, and Silas Foster amidships, with a hay-rake.

“It puts me in mind of my young days,” remarked Silas, “when I used to steal out of bed to go bobbing for horn-pouts and eels. Heigh-ho! — well! — life and death together make sad work for us all. Then, I was a boy, bobbing for fish; and now I am getting to be an old fellow, and here I be, groping for a dead body! I tell you what, lads, if I thought anything had really happened to Zenobia, I should feel kind o’ sorrowful.”

handkerchief at a spot on the bank of the river some ways below the bridge, a half a mile across a pasture from

14. During his summer vacation in Concord in 1853, the Reverend [Moncure Daniel Conway](#) was boarding with some Misses Hunt at a pleasant cottage on Ponkawtasset Hill and they informed him that they had been Martha’s cousins, and were concerned that [George William Curtis](#), in his [HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS](#), “had suggested that Martha’s suicide was due to the contrast between her transcendental ideals and the coarseness of her home.” Conway continued, in his late-life autobiography, that “They described the family of their cousin as educated people. One of these sisters walked with me to the river and pointed out all the places connected with the tragedy, and some years later another cousin drowned herself there.”

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

her parents' home, early that morning, and to have walked to and fro on the bank for several hours.



This was a sexual opportunity not to be missed, and every male in Concord who had heard of the matter had thronged to the river bank (but apparently [Henry Thoreau](#) was out in his cabin on the pond, behaving himself).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

In the *Pond Lily*, the young man with the long pole



drew her towards the boat, grasped her arm or hand; and I steered the boat to the bank, all the while looking at this dead girl, whose limbs were swaying in the water, close at the boat's side. The fellow evidently had the same sort of feeling in his success as if he had caught a particularly fine fish; though mingled, no doubt, with horror. For my own part, I felt my voice tremble a little, when I spoke, at the shock of the discovery; and at seeing the body come to the surface, dimly in the starlight. When close to the bank, some of the men stepped into the water and drew out the body; and then, by their lanterns, I could see how rigid it was. There was nothing flexible about it; she did not droop over the arms of those who supported her, with her hair hanging down, as a painter would have represented her, but was all as stiff as marble. And it was evident that her wet garments covered limbs perfectly inflexible. They took her out of the water, and deposited her under an oak-tree; and by the time we had got ashore, they were examining her by the light of two or three lanterns.... As soon as she was taken out of the water, the blood began to stream from her nose. Something seemed to have injured her eye, too; perhaps it was the pole, when it first struck the body. The complexion was a dark red, almost purple; the hands were white, with the same rigidity in their clench as in all the rest of the body.... If she could have foreseen, while she stood, at 5 °clock that morning, on the bank of the river, how her maiden corpse would have looked, eighteen hours afterwards, and how coarse men would strive with hand and foot to reduce it to a decent aspect, and all in vain – it would surely have saved her from this deed.

My personal interpretation of what these eager male hookers were up to, on the river that night, is that, when their pole finally hooked the corpse in an eye socket, and it was hauled to the surface, what [Nathaniel](#) got a good look at, and perhaps a feel of, was his ideal of the perfectly passive female body. The realization of this sexual ideal of True Womanhood proved to be much too much for him:

I never saw or imagined a spectacle of such perfect horror.

David Buttrick fainted, but an old carpenter commented that he would as lief handle dead bodies as living ones, and the men gathered around and twisted and stomped on the girl's limbs locked in *rigor mortis* in a prolonged pretense that they were forcing her to assume a proper posture for the dead. The family told the hookers who had just been thus pawing the body that the poor girl had attempted to drown herself before, by walking into the river up to her chin, but that a sister had gotten her to come back out of the water. Hawthorne would use

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

10 paragraphs of his journal of this day in THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, as an account of the recovery of the body of the suicide “Zenobia”¹⁵ who had drowned as an “Arcadian affectation,” omitting the unromantic description of the continuous flow of blood from the nose (a description which I also omitted, above). Hawthorne also changed the grapple wound from the eye socket to the “breast.”¹⁶

Since a “young brother of the deceased, apparently about twelve or fourteen years old” was on the bank watching this, we may presume that the hooking party was being witnessed by Daniel Otis Hunt, who had been born in 1831.

When they got the makeshift bier back to the Hunt farmhouses on Punkatasset Hill, Mrs. Maria Pratt and others laid the body out for its interment.



15. [Margaret Fuller](#) was held by authorities in the 19th Century to have evinced a death wish, for, staring across the gap of raging surf at the dead bodies of her husband and her baby stretched upon the beach, drowned one after the other in the attempt to get to shore, she could not force herself to leap into the ocean, and was still on the ship clutching the mast when it broke up in the waves. And, she had been a school superintendent, **just** like this Concord River suicide Martha Hunt!

16. Were [Margaret](#)'s breasts **that** fascinating, in spite of her twisted spine?



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Here is a puzzle. Where is the body of Martha Emmeline [Hunt](#) buried? Was there a burial service? (If this event had occurred in England, we know from the act of July 4, 1823  what would have needed to have happened to such a corpse: the body of the suicide could be interred in a churchyard or public burial place only if such interment occurred within 24 hours of the coroner's inquest and certificate, took place after 9PM and before midnight, and was bereft of any accompanying Christian religious observance. We know, further, that in the case of an English suicide, any goods and chattels of the deceased would be forfeit to the Crown. We need to research and discover how American law bore on this circumstance, and what happened specifically in Concord.)

Here then is [Hawthorne](#)'s entry in his AMERICAN NOTEBOOKS, as rendered into poetry by Robert Peters:

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

The Drowned Girl

I

We caused the boat to float
once or twice past the spot
where the bonnet was found.
The poles or the rake caught
in bunches of water-weed, which
in the star-light, looked like
garments. All this time
persons on the bank were anxiously
waiting.

II

'What's this?' cried he.
I suppose the same electric shock
went through everybody in the boat.
'Yes, I've got her!'

III

I felt my voice tremble
at the first shock of
seeing the body come
to the surface, dimly
in the star-light.

IV

I could see how rigid
she was. She did not droop
over the arms of those who
supported her, with her hair
hanging down, but was all
stiff, as marble.
They examined her
by the light of two or three lanterns.
Her arms had stiffened
and were bent before her.
She was the very image of death-agony.

V

They deposited her under an oak-tree.
When the men tried to compose her figure,
her arms would return to that same position.
One of the men put his foot upon
her arm, for the purpose of reducing it
by her side; but, in a moment, it rose again.
Blood began to stream from her nose.
Something had injured her eye, too.
Perhaps it was the pole, when it first
struck the body. The complexion
was a dark red, almost purple. The hands
were white, with the same rigidity in
their clench as in all the rest of the body.
Two of the men got water and washed away the
blood from her face. But it flowed and flowed
and continued to flow.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Hawthorne also had a few choice words to say about his rowing companion on this expedition, Ellery:



"What a gump!...On the whole, he is but little better than an idiot. He should have been whipt often and soundly in his boyhood; and as he escaped such wholesome discipline then, it might be well to bestow it now."

– Nathaniel Hawthorne, about Ellery Channing



[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1846

February: Having gotten his wife pregnant again, [Ellery Channing](#) decided not to be a Massachusetts farmer and not to listen to an infant crying, and began to solicit help from his friends because he needed for his personal development as a poet to travel in Europe and inspect masterpieces of art. He manage to raise the sum of \$300.⁰⁰, which he considered to be adequate since he planned to travel steerage class at a cost of \$25.⁰⁰ each way across the Atlantic. [Margaret Fuller](#) commented reasonably on “the unnatural selfishness of a man who, having brought a woman into this situation of suffering peril and care, proposes to leave her without even knowing whether she lives or dies under it,” but Ellery explained to her what “a bugbear in the house” he was “during the first year of a child’s life.”

Charles Lane wrote Bronson Alcott in [Concord](#) telling him of a Valentines Day party in Brooklyn, New York at which the guest list had included such sweethearts as Albert Brisbane, Christopher Pearse Cranch, [George William Curtis](#), William Henry Furness, [Margaret Fuller](#), and [Edgar Allan Poe](#). Fuller had acted as postmistress and the guests had fabricated Valentine cards to post to one another.

At [St. Helena](#), 13 ships were destroyed and the sea wall and wharf damaged by 3 days of heavy rollers.





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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)



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1847

[George William Curtis](#) was touring in [Italy](#), visiting [Naples](#) and then turning north to Florence and Venice.

Fall: [George William Curtis](#) visited Lake Como and went through the Tyrol to Vienna and Berlin.

Back in America, near Boston, [Brook Farm](#) was being officially disbanded:

When the Brook Farmers disbanded, in the autumn of 1847, a number of the brightest spirits settled in New York, where The Tribune, Horace Greeley's paper, welcomed their ideas and gladly made room on its staff for George Ripley, their founder. New York in the middle of the nineteenth century, almost as much perhaps as Boston, bubbled with movements of reform, with the notions of the spiritualists, the phrenologists, the mesmerists and what not, and the Fourierists especially had found a forum there for discussions of "attractional harmony" and "passional hygiene." It was the New Yorker Albert Brisbane who had met the master himself in Paris, where Fourier was working as a clerk with an American firm, and paid him for expounding his system in regular lessons. Then Brisbane in turn converted Greeley and the new ideas had reached Brook Farm, where the members transformed the society into a Fourierist phalanx. The Tribune had played a decisive part in this as in other intellectual matters, for Greeley was unique among editors in his literary flair. Some years before, Margaret Fuller had come to New York to write for him, and among the Brook Farmers on his staff, along with "Archon" Ripley, were George William Curtis and Dana, the founder of The Sun.... The socialistic [William Henry] Channing was a nephew of the great Boston divine who had also preached and lectured in New York, while Henry James [Senior], a Swedenborgian, agreed with the Fourierists too and regarded all passions and attractions as a species of duty. As for the still youthful Brisbane, who had toured Europe with his tutor, studying not only with Fourier but with Hegel in Berlin, he had mastered animal magnetism to the point where he could strike a light merely by rubbing his fingers over the gas-jet. The son of a magnate of upper New York, he had gone abroad at nineteen, with the sense of a certain injustice in his unearned wealth, and he had been everywhere received like a bright young travelling prince in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Constantinople. He had studied philosophy, music and art and learned to speak in Turkish, —the language of Fourier's capital of the future world,—driving over Italy with S.F.B. Morse and Horatio Greenough and sitting at the feet of Victor Cousin also. He met and talked with Goethe, Heine, Balzac, Lamennais and Victor Hugo, reading Fourier for many weeks with Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, whom he had inspired with a passion for the "wonderful plan." He had a strong feeling for craftsmanship, for he had watched the village blacksmith along with the carpenter and the saddler when he was a boy, so that he was prepared for these notions of attractive labor, while he had been struck by the chief Red Jacket, who had visited the village, surrounded by white admirers and remnants of his tribe. In this so-called barbarian he had witnessed aptitudes that impressed him with the powers and capacities of the natural man, and he had long since set out to preach the gospel of social reorganization that Fourier had explained to him in Paris.





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



At Robert Owen's "World Convention," held in New York in 1845, many of the reformers' programmes had found expression, and, since then, currents of affinity had spread from the Unitary Home to the Oneida Community and the Phalanx at Red Bank. The Unitary Home, a group of houses on East 14th Street, with communal parlours and kitchens, was an urban Brook Farm, where temperance reform and woman's rights were leading themes of conversation and John Humphrey Noyes of Oneida was a frequent guest.

FOURIERISM
G.W.F. HEGEL
GEORGE RIPLEY
EAGLESWOOD
UNITARY HOME
VICTOR HUGO
HORACE GREELEY
VICTOR COUSIN
CHARLES A. DANA
ALBERT BRISBANE
ROBERT DALE OWEN
SAMUEL F.B. MORSE
HENRY JAMES, SR.
ONEIDA COMMUNITY
HORATIO GREENOUGH
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS
JOHN HUMPHREY NOYES
WILLIAM HENRY CHANNING
SAGOYEWATHA "RED JACKET"
JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE
ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1848

PRINCIPLES OF ZOÖLOGY: TOUCHING THE STRUCTURE, DEVELOPMENT, DISTRIBUTION AND NATURAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE RACES OF ANIMALS, LIVING AND EXTINCT; WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS. FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES. PT. I. COMPARATIVE PHYSIOLOGY. BY [LOUIS AGASSIZ](#), AND [AUGUSTUS A. GOULD](#) (Boston: Gould, Kendall and Lincoln. 59, Washington Street).¹⁷

PRINCIPLES OF ZOÖLOGY, I

[Dr. Gould](#) became a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

The [Swiss](#) federal constitution. Although [Lucerne](#) had played a major role in the old Swiss confederacy and had been proposed earlier in the 19th Century for the federal capital, [Berne](#) was chosen due to Lucerne's opposition to this new constitution.

[George William Curtis](#) traveled through [Switzerland](#) and Holland.

[Theodore Sedgwick Fay](#) would function as the United States's Chargé d'Affaires during the sittings of the German Parliament at Frankfort. There would occur what was referred to as the "[Neuchâtel](#) Affair," having to

17. Most of the illustrations for this had been prepared by Louis François de Pourtalès (1824-1880), who had followed Professor Agassiz from Switzerland and at this point was joining the US Coast Survey (eventually he would become custodian of Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology).

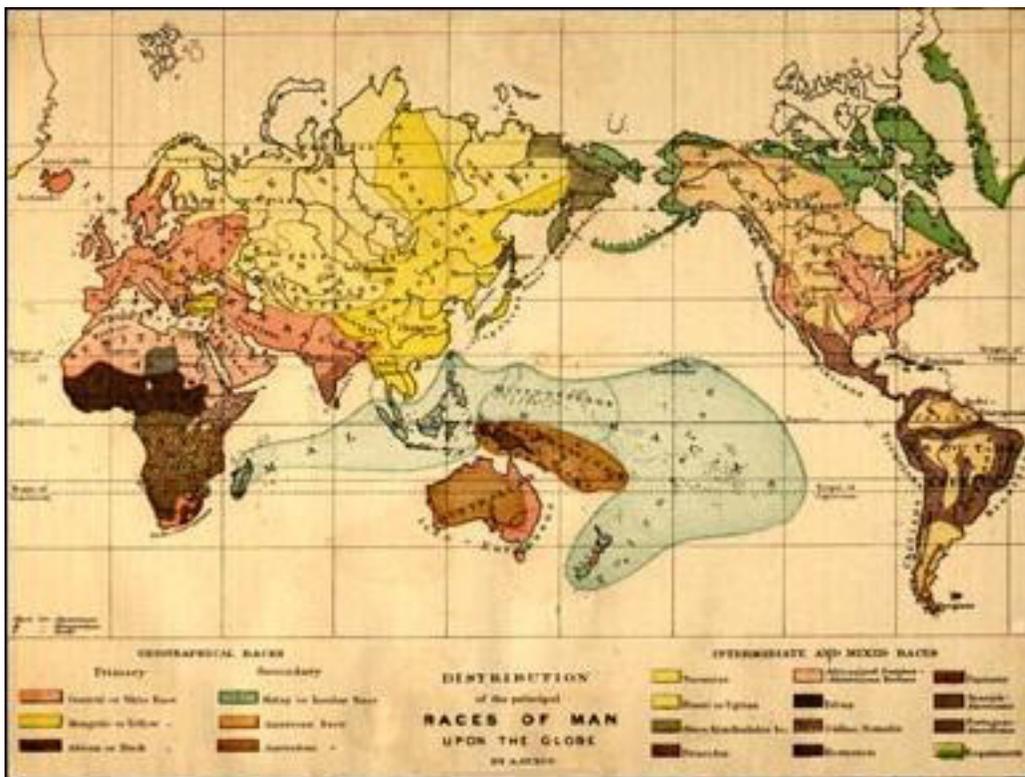
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

do with the peculiar relationship in which the Canton of Neuchâtel had stood in regard to Prussia, since it had in 1707 fallen by inheritance under Prussian control. In this year Prussia gave tacit consent for the canton to ally itself with the Swiss Confederation.

When the [Academy of Neuchâtel](#) closed due to the political unrest of this year's European politics, [Louis Agassiz](#) suggested to [Arnold Henri Guyot](#) that he emigrate to the United States. He gave a series of lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston titled "The Earth and Man" which would in the following year become the basis for a text of the same name.



In front of Nassau Hall at [Princeton University](#) now stands the Guyot boulder, a glacial erratic that would be

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

sent by Guyot's former students at the [Academy of Neuchâtel](#).



THE SCIENCE OF 1848

Fall: [Edgar Allan Poe](#) returned to Lowell, Massachusetts to repeat his lecture on “The Poets and Poetry of America” and to continue his interest in the flirtatious Nancy Richmond, a local wife he had met. For some reason the poet decided this young Nancy’s first name ought to be “Annie,” and in the next year he would write a poem “For Annie.”

[George William Curtis](#) sailed for [Egypt](#).

During this season, and continuing into the winter, [Henry Thoreau](#) was drafted journal entries on reformers, great men, the East, Greece, and Rome that he would eventually use in [A WEEK](#).



After July 30: I find that I conciliate the gods by some sacrament as bathing –or abstemiousness in





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

diet –or rising early –and directly they Smile on me. These are my sacraments.

We fall in love with some good spirits whose bodies we see — how many many good spirits do we fall in love with whose bodies we never see?

The states of the mind answer to the states of the body and every part of the body has its thought– When that part is soundest that thought thrills us

What do the hands think? what the feet–? the loins? –the back? They should all be thoughtful–



After July 30: All men are children and of one family. The same tale sends them (all) to bed, and wakes them in the morning.

Fame forces the barriers of dialect & custom How could any nation of human children do without its Robinson Crusoe & –“Monarch of all I survey”–? It is such an interesting story –as will carry captivity captive.

Oh it is all in the bible, {*MS torn*} it in the Koran– If it is in {*MS torn*}

[The Missionary Wolff](#) says “All the Brahmins I met with had an unlucky habit of affirming that what I said was in the Shastar, and used no further argument.” Christians do the same.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1849

[George William Curtis](#) visited [Egypt](#) and the Holy Land.

The Lurgan, Portadown, and Banbridge [Advertiser and Agricultural Gazette](#) reported that Sir William Symonds had found ancient seeds at Luxor and Francis Fforde of Raughlan, Ireland had succeeded in growing them.

MORE ON THIS URBAN LEGEND

WALDEN: When I ask for a garment of a particular form, my tailoress tells me gravely, "They do not make them so now," not emphasizing the "They" at all, as if she quoted an authority as impersonal as the Fates, and I find it difficult to get made what I want, simply because she cannot believe that I mean what I say, that I am so rash. When I hear this oracular sentence, I am for a moment absorbed in thought, emphasizing to myself each word separately that I may come at the meaning of it, that I may find out by what degree of consanguinity **They** are related to **me**, and what authority they may have in an affair which affects me so nearly; and, finally, I am inclined to answer her with equal mystery, and without any more emphasis on the "they," -"It is true, they did not make them so recently, but they do now." Of what use this measuring of me if she does not measure my character, but only the breadth of my shoulders, as it were a peg to hang the coat on? We worship not the Graces, nor the Parca, but Fashion. She spins and weaves and cuts with full authority. The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same. I sometimes despair of getting any thing quite simple and honest done in this world by the help of men. They would have to be passed through a powerful press first, to squeeze their old notions out of them, so that they would not soon get upon their legs again, and then there would be some one in the company with a maggot in his head, hatched from an egg deposited there nobody knows when, for not even fire kills these things, and you would have lost your labor. Nevertheless, we will not forget that some Egyptian wheat is said to have been handed down to us by a mummy.

EGYPT

MARY MINOT

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

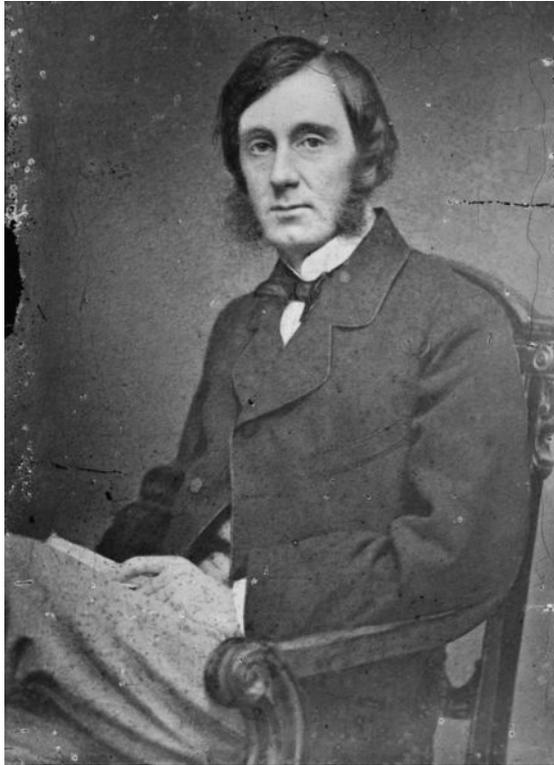
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.¹⁸

[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

18. [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).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1852

The frankfurter was invented by a butcher's guild in Frankfort, [Germany](#).

[George William Curtis](#)'s LOTUS-EATING: A SUMMER BOOK and THE HOWADJI IN SYRIA.

TRA-LA, TRA-LA, ETC.

TRAIPE ALONG WITH ME

Lola Montez went on tour in America with what has been called "early docudrama," a story about her escapades with King Ludwig I of Bavaria, who had referred to her as his *Lolitta*. She would live for a couple of years in roaring Grass Valley, California, heart of gold country.

November 16, Monday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George William Curtis](#).

Concord Nov 16th

1852

Dear Sir,

I send you herewith 100 pages of "Cape Cod." It is not yet half the whole. The remainder of the narrative is more personal, as I reach the scene of my adventures. I am a little in doubt about the extracts from the old ministers. If you prefer to, you may omit from the middle of the 86th page to the end of this parcel; (the rest being respected); or perhaps a smaller type will use it up fast enough.

As for the conditions of sale; if you accept the paper, it is to be mine to reprint, if I think it worth the while, after it has appeared in your journal.

I shall expect to be paid as fast as the paper is printed, and if it is likely to lie on hand long, to receive reasonable warning of it.

I have collected this under several heads for your convenience. The next subject is "The Beach" which I will copy out & forward as soon as you desire it.

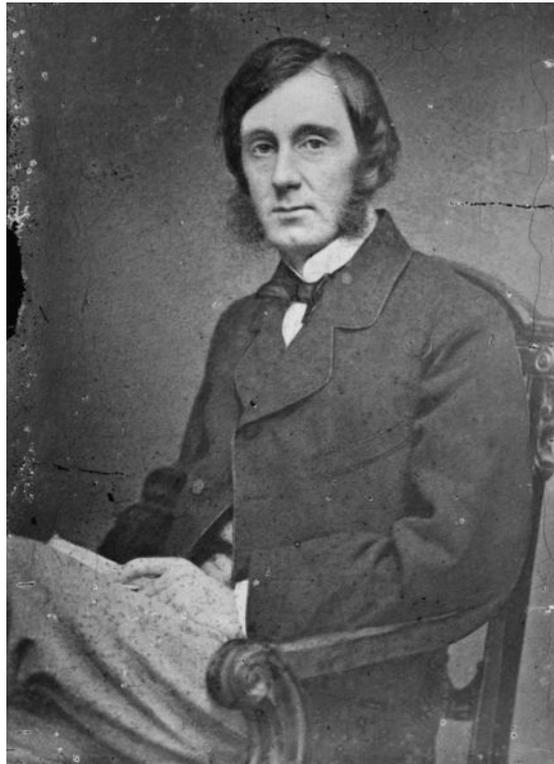
Yrs Henry D. Thoreau.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



Chapters one through four of [CAPE COD](#) were serialized in [Putnam's Monthly Magazine](#), with "The Beach" (Chapter 4) to follow — this 100 pages was "not yet half the whole," with "The Beach" (Chapter 4) to follow.

[TIMELINE OF CAPE COD](#)

Bradley Ray King, who teaches American and African American literatures at the University of Texas in Austin, has attempted to parse Thoreau's agenda in writing [CAPE COD](#) as a reaction against the sort of Whiggish hegemonic imperialistic nationalism of the self-privileging of the descendants of the white English passengers aboard the *Mayflower*, which he had encountered in [Daniel Webster](#)'s fulminations at Plymouth Rock, and in [George Bancroft](#)'s historicizing:



Like his cynical description of the humane house, Thoreau's portrayal of early New England history is critical and iconoclastic. He represents the Pilgrims as ignorant cartographers and unjust land grabbers — far from the paragons of democratic virtue that his contemporary George Bancroft (whom Thoreau explicitly attacks) had recently represented in his widely read HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES FROM THE DISCOVERY OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT (first published in 1834). Bancroft depicted the

BANCROFT'S US, I

Pilgrims as initiating a teleological narrative of democratic



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

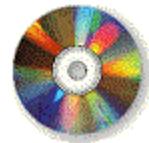
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

progress in the New World. According to HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES, the early English settlers "scattered the seminal principles of republican freedom and national independence," seeds that would grow into Bancroft's beloved Jacksonian democracy (323). The Pilgrims' "germ" finds fruition in the 1840s and 50s, in the expansion of American Christianity and democracy across the "uncivilized" continent. (As President Polk's Secretary of the Navy, Bancroft had advocated in 1835 and 1846 for the invasion of [Mexico](#), which had precipitated the Mexican War.) Thoreau's outrage at the Mexican War, expressed by his famous refusal to pay his poll tax, probably led to his portrayal in [CAPE COD](#) of the Pilgrims and Puritans as imperialistic. He began working on this book in 1849, one year after the U.S. sacked Mexico City and acquired 1.2 million square miles of Mexico's territory, including most of what we now think of as the American West. Given his direct attack on Bancroft, Thoreau's revisionist history should be read as a critique not only of the Pilgrims, but also of the politics of expansionism in Thoreau's own day.... Bancroft writes as blissful inheritor of the Pilgrims' errand for God and democracy, representing both his facts and myths as transcendent truths; and Thoreau writes as disaffected outsider to this narrative, undercutting his facts and myths by emphasizing their instability.... The narrator of [CAPE COD](#) emerges as a historian and cultural critic who exposes the contingency and instability of his own histories and criticisms. While evoking a rhetoric of historical objectivity, he also undercuts this rhetoric by critiquing the very possibility of reliable historical narratives. Thoreau's narrator in [CAPE COD](#) thus avoids the unattractive extremes of absolute optimism or cynicism. Like his portrayal of the charity house, his account of America's forefathers (and their progeny) is harsh and sceptical, yet he remains unwilling to pronounce his critique in absolute terms.



"The critic's joking comment that Bancroft wrote American history as if it were the history of the Kingdom of Heaven, had a trifle of truth in it."

– [Russel Blaine Nye](#)



November 23, Tuesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was written to by [Horace Greeley](#) in New-York.

New-York,

Nov. 23, 1852.

My Dear Thoreau,

I have made no bargain –none whatever– with Putnam, concerning your MS. I have indicated no price to him. I handed over the MS. because I wish it published, and presumed that was in accordance both



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

*with your interest and your wishes.
 And I now say to you that if he will pay you \$3 per printed page,
 I think that will be very well. I have promised to write something for
 him myself, and shall be well satisfied with that price. Your "Cana-
 da" is not so fresh and acceptable as if it had just been written on
 the strength of a last summer's trip, and I hope you will have it print-
 ed in Putnam's Monthly. But I have said nothing to his folks, as to
 price, and will not till I hear from you again.
 Very probably, there was some misapprehension on the part of Geo.
 Curtis. I presume the price now offered you is that paid to writers
 generally for the Monthly.
 As to Sartain, I know his Magazine has broken down, but I guess he
 will pay you. I have not seen but one of your articles printed by him,
 and I think the other may be reclaimed. Please address him at once.
 I have been very busy the past season, and had to let every thing wait
 that could till after Nov. 2d.
 Yours,
 Horace Greeley.
 H. D. Thoreau Esq.*

Just past midnight, a sharp jolt caused the water level in Lake Merced in California to drop a full 30 feet.

December 9, Thursday: [Ellen Fuller Channing](#) received a notification from George M. Brooks, a [Concord](#) attorney, threatening legal action unless she return custody of the [Ellery Channing](#) children to their father within one week.¹⁹

Thoreau wrote in his journal about a coffee-table book that was forthcoming from a New-York trade press, [George William Curtis's HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS](#):



December 9: To C. Smith's Hill.

Those little ruby-crowned wrens (?) [**Common Redpoll**  *Carduelis flammea*] still about. They suddenly dash away from this side to that in flocks, with a tumultuous note, half jingle, half rattle, like nuts shaken in a bag, or a bushel of nutshells, soon returning to the tree they had forsaken on some alarm. They are oftenest seen

19. At the time American judges were simplistically presuming that all children always belonged like slaves with their father (they would transit from that wickedness into the equally simplistic but opposite wicked presumption that all children always belong with their mother). The reason why we have thus transited from a wicked simplicitude into an opposite wicked simplicitude is clear: our judges truly don't have the slightest concern for what happens to other people's children, and thus settle upon one or another simplifying presumptiveness — in order to be spared the frustration and annoyance of trying to figure anything out in the mysterious realm of "what's in the best interests of the child" (there is a nasty reason why we aver such great concern for our children: it is that this avowal is a necessary mask obscuring our persistent and very real refusal to allow this to be an actual priority in our lives). Thoreau put the nastiness of our attitude most succinctly in his journal entry for this day: "Very nice; as the old lady said when she had got a gravestone for her husband."



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

CAPE COD: This "charity house," as the wrecker called it, this "humane house," as some call it, that is, the one to which we first came, had neither window nor sliding shutter, nor clap-boards, nor paint. As we have said, there was a rusty nail put through the staple. However, as we wished to get an idea of a humane house, and we hoped that we should never have a better opportunity, we put our eyes, by turns, to a knot-hole in the door, and, after long looking, without seeing, into the dark -not knowing how many shipwrecked men's bones we might see at last, looking with the eye of faith, knowing that, though to him that knocketh it may not always be opened, yet to him that looketh long enough through a knot-hole the inside shall be visible, -for we had had some practice at looking inward, -by steadily keeping our other ball covered from the light meanwhile, putting the outward world behind us, ocean and land, and the beach -till the pupil became enlarged and collected the rays of light that were wandering in that dark, (for the pupil shall be enlarged by looking; there never was so dark a night but a faithful and patient eye, however small, might at last prevail over it,) -after all this, I say, things began to take shape to our vision, -if we may use this expression where there was nothing but emptiness,- and we obtained the long wished for insight. Though we thought at first that it was a hopeless case, after several minutes' steady exercise of the divine faculty, our prospects began decidedly to brighten, and we were ready to exclaim with the blind bard of "Paradise Lost and Regained,"-

"Hail! Holy Light, offspring of Heaven, first born.
Or of the eternal coeternal beam
May I express thee unblamed?"

A little longer, and a chimney rushed red on our sight. In short, when our vision had grown familiar with the darkness, we discovered that there were some stones and some loose wads of wool on the floor, and an empty fire-place at the further end; but it was not supplied with matches, or straw, or hay, that we could see, nor "accommodated with a bench." Indeed, it was the wreck of all cosmical beauty there within.

Turning our backs on the outward world, we thus looked through the knot-hole into the humane house, into the very bowels of mercy; and for bread we found a stone. It was literally a great cry (of seaweeds outside), and a little wool. However, we were glad to sit outside, under the lee of the humane house, to escape the piercing wind; and there we thought how cold is charity! how inhumane humanity! This, then, is what charity hides! Virtues antique and far away with ever a rusty nail over the latch; and very difficult to keep in repair, withal, it is so uncertain whether any will ever gain the beach near you. So we shivered round about, not being able to get into it, ever and anon looking through the knot-hole into that night without a star, until we concluded that it was not a humane house at all, but a sea-side box, now shut up, belonging to some of the family of night or chaos, where they spent their summers by the sea, for the sake of the sea-breeze, and that it was not proper for us to be prying into their concerns.

My companion had declared before this that I had not a particle of sentiment, in rather absolute terms, to my astonishment; but I suspect he meant that my legs did not ache just then, though I am not wholly a stranger to that sentiment. But I did not intend this for a sentimental journey.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

on the white birch, apparently feeding on its seeds, scattering the scales about.



A fresh dandelion.

The chestnuts are almost as plenty as ever, both in the fallen burs and out of them. There are more this year than the squirrels can consume. I picked three pints this afternoon, and though some bought at a store the other day were more than half mouldy, I did not find one mouldy one among these which I picked from under the wet and mouldy leaves, where they have been snowed on once. Probably they do not heat, though wet. These are also still plump and tender. I love to gather them, if only for the sense of the bountifulness of nature they give me.

A few petals of the witch-hazel still hold on.

In the "[Homes of American Authors](#)" it is said of most that at one time they wrote for the [North American Review](#). It is one of my qualifications that I have not written an article for the [North American Review](#).

A man tells me he saw a violet to-day.

Very nice; as the old lady said when she had got a gravestone for her husband.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1853

[George William Curtis](#) published an essay about William Makepeace Thackeray. (This would be reprinted in 1895 in Curtis's [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).) During this year and the following one he would author articles on Emerson and on Hawthorne. He became co-editor with Parke Goodwin and Charles F. Briggs of [Putnam's Weekly](#). Also during this year he issued his THE POTIPHAR PAPERS (a satire on fashionable society) and his [HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS; COMPRISING ANECDOTICAL, PERSONAL, AND DESCRIPTIVE SKETCHES, BY VARIOUS WRITERS, ILLUSTRATED WITH VIEWS OF THEIR RESIDENCES FROM ORIGINAL DRAWINGS, AND A FAC-SIMILE OF THE MANUSCRIPT OF EACH AUTHOR](#) (New-York: G.P. Putnam and Co.,



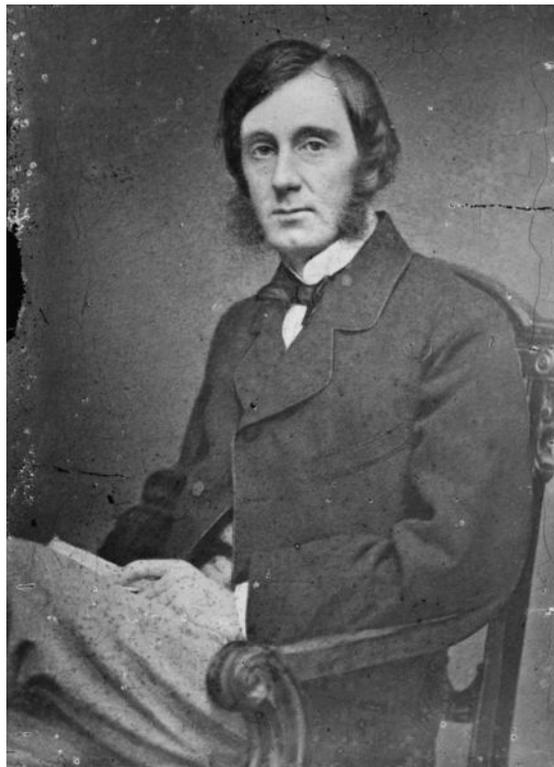
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

10 Park Place. London: Sampson Low, Son & Co.):

Once Emerson and Thoreau arrived to pay a call on Hawthorne at the Old Manse. They were shown into the little parlor upon the avenue, and Hawthorne presently entered. Each of the guests sat upright in his chair like a Roman Senator. "To them," Hawthorne, like a Dacian King. The call went on, but in a most melancholy manner. The host sat perfectly still, or occasionally propounded a question which Thoreau answered accurately, and there the thread broke short off. Emerson delivered sentences that only needed the setting of an essay, to charm the world; but the whole visit was a vague ghost of the Monday evening club at Mr. Emerson's, - it was a great failure. Had they all been lying idly upon the river bank, or strolling in Thoreau's blackberry pastures, the result would have been utterly different. But imprisoned in the proprieties of a parlor, each a wild man in his way, with a necessity of talking inherent in the nature of the occasion, there was only a waste of treasure. This was the only "call" in which I ever knew Hawthorne to be involved.



HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS

This "coffee table book" bound in brown cloth, with its gilt top edge and its color illustrations on proof paper glued to the text pages, included a presentation of the summerhouse that a couple of local artisans, named [Bronson Alcott](#) and [Henry Thoreau](#), had built for the famous American essayist and lecturer who lived in Concord, [Waldo Emerson](#). Here is the manner in which an image of that summerhouse would appear,

HDT

WHAT?

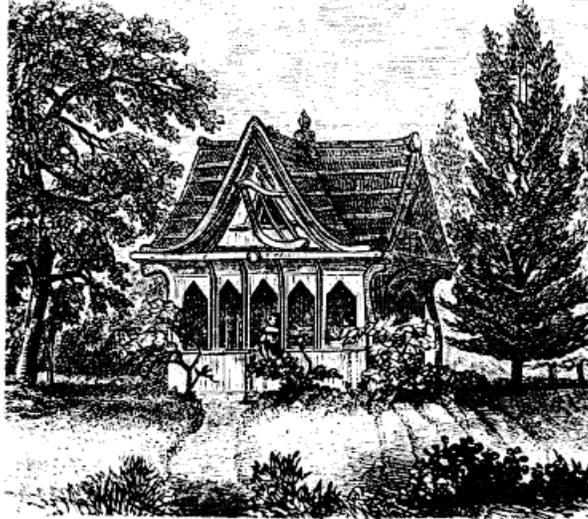
INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in a publication by Alcott:



THE ALCOTT FAMILY

Incidentally, the above 1853 coffee table book” bound in brown cloth, with its gilt top edge and its color illustrations on proof paper glued to the text pages, was present for [Thoreau](#)’s inspection in the personal library of [Alcott](#) (he would copy from it into his Indian Notebook #7) — and stands as the 1st book to make mention of Thoreau’s Walden Pond experiment in voluntary simplicity!



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

THACKERAY IN AMERICA²⁰

Mr. Thackeray's visit at least demonstrates that if we are unwilling to pay English authors for their books, we are ready to reward them handsomely for the opportunity of seeing and hearing them. If Mr. Dickens, instead of dining at other people's expense, and making speeches at his own, when he came to see us, had devoted an evening or two in the week to lecturing, his purse would have been fuller, his feelings sweeter, and his fame fairer. It was a Quixotic crusade, that of the Copyright, and the excellent Don has never forgiven the windmill that broke his spear.

Undoubtedly, when it was ascertained that Mr. Thackeray was coming, the public feeling on this side of the sea was very much divided as to his probable reception. "He'll come and humbug us, eat our dinners, pocket our money, and go home and abuse us, like that unmitigated snob Dickens," said Jonathan, chafing with the remembrance of that grand ball at the Park Theatre and the Boz tableaux, and the universal wining and dining, to which the distinguished Dickens was subject while he was our guest.

"Let him have his say," said others, "and we will have our look. We will pay a dollar to hear him, if we can see him at the same time; and as for the abuse, why, it takes even more than two such cubs of the roaring British Lion to frighten the American Eagle. Let him come, and give him fair play."

He did come, and had fair play, and returned to England with a comfortable pot of gold holding \$12,000, and with the hope and promise of seeing us again in September, to discourse of something not less entertaining than the witty men and sparkling times of Anne. We think there was no disappointment with his lectures. Those who knew his books found the author in the lecturer. Those who did not know his books were charmed in the lecturer by what is charming in the author—the unaffected humanity, the tenderness, the sweetness, the genial play of fancy, and the sad touch of truth, with that glancing stroke of satire which, lightning-like, illumines while it withers. The lectures were even more delightful than the books, because the tone of the voice and the appearance of the man, the general personal magnetism, explained and alleviated so much that would otherwise have seemed doubtful or unfair. For those who had long felt in the writings of Thackeray a reality quite inexpressible, there was a secret delight in finding it justified in his speaking; for he speaks as he writes—simply, directly, without flourish, without any cant of oratory, commending what he says by its intrinsic sense, and the sympathetic and humane way in which it was spoken. Thackeray is the kind of "stump orator" that would have pleased Carlyle. He never thrusts himself between you and his thought. If his conception of the time and

20. [George William Curtis](#), THACKERAY IN AMERICA, [Putnam's Magazine](#), Vol. I., 1853, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

his estimate of the men differ from your own, you have at least no doubt what his view is, nor how sincere and necessary it is to him. Mr. Thackeray considers Swift a misanthrope; he loves Goldsmith and Steele and Harry Fielding; he has no love for Sterne, great admiration for Pope, and alleviated admiration for Addison. How could it be otherwise? How could Thackeray not think Swift a misanthrope and Sterne a factitious sentimentalist? He is a man of instincts, not of thoughts: he sees and feels. He would be Shakespeare's call-boy, rather than dine with the Dean of St. Patrick's. He would take a pot of ale with Goldsmith, rather than a glass of burgundy with the "Reverend Mr. Sterne", and that simply because he is Thackeray. He would have done it as Fielding would have done it, because he values one genuine emotion above the most dazzling thought; because he is, in fine, a Bohemian, "a minion of the moon", a great, sweet, generous heart.

We say this with more unction now that we have personal proof of it in his public and private intercourse while he was here. The popular Thackeray-theory, before his arrival, was of a severe satirist, who concealed scalpels in his sleeves and carried probes in his waistcoat pockets; a wearer of masks; a scoffer and sneerer, and general infidel of all high aims and noble character. Certainly we are justified in saying that his presence among us quite corrected this idea. We welcomed a friendly, genial man; not at all convinced that speech is heaven's first law, but willing to be silent when there is nothing to say; who decidedly refused to be lionized—not by sulking, but by stepping off the pedestal and challenging the common sympathies of all he met; a man who, in view of the thirty-odd editions of Martin Farquhar Tupper, was willing to confess that every author should "think small-beer of himself". Indeed, he has this rare quality, that his personal impression deepens, in kind, that of his writings. The quiet and comprehensive grasp of the fact, and the intellectual impossibility of holding fast anything but the fact, is as manifest in the essayist upon the wits as in the author of HENRY ESMOND and VANITY FAIR. Shall we say that this is the sum of his power, and the secret of his satire? It is not what might be, nor what we or other persons of well-regulated minds might wish, but it is the actual state of things that he sees and describes. How, then, can he help what we call satire, if he accept Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's invitation and describe her party? There was no more satire in it, so far as he is concerned, than in painting lilies white. A full-length portrait of the fair Lady Beatrix, too, must needs show a gay and vivid figure, superbly glittering across the vista of those stately days. Then, should Dab and Tab, the eminent critics, step up and demand that her eyes be a pale blue, and her stomacher higher around the neck? Do Dab and Tab expect to gather pears from peach-trees? Or, because their theory of dendrology convinces them that an ideal fruit-tree would supply any fruit desired upon application, do they denounce the non-pear-bearing peach-tree in the columns of their



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

valuable journal? This is the drift of the fault found with Thackeray. He is not Fénelon, he is not Dickens, he is not Scott; he is not poetical, he is not ideal, he is not humane; he is not Tit, he is not Tat, complain the eminent Dabs and Tabs. Of course he is not, because he is Thackeray—a man who describes what he sees, motives as well as appearances—a man who believes that character is better than talent—that there is a worldly weakness superior to worldly wisdom—that Dick Steele may haunt the ale-house and be carried home muzzy, and yet be a more commendable character than the reverend Dean of St. Patrick's, who has genius enough to illuminate a century, but not sympathy enough to sweeten a drop of beer. And he represents this in a way that makes us see it as he does, and without exaggeration; for surely nothing could be more simple than his story of the life of "honest Dick Steele". If he allotted to that gentleman a consideration disproportioned to the space he occupies in literary history, it only showed the more strikingly how deeply the writer-lecturer's sympathy was touched by Steele's honest humanity.

An article in our April number complained that the tendency of his view of Anne's times was to a social laxity, which might be very exhilarating but was very dangerous; that the lecturer's warm commendation of fermented drinks, taken at a very early hour of the morning in tavern-rooms and club houses, was as deleterious to the moral health of enthusiastic young readers disposed to the literary life as the beverage itself to their physical health.

But this is not a charge to be brought against Thackeray. It is a quarrel with history and with the nature of literary life. Artists and authors have always been the good fellows of the world. That mental organization which predisposes a man to the pursuit of literature and art is made up of talent combined with ardent social sympathy, geniality, and passion, and leads him to taste every cup and try every experience. There is certainly no essential necessity that this class should be a dissipated and disreputable class, but by their very susceptibility to enjoyment they will always be the pleasure lovers and seekers. And here is the social compensation to the literary man for the surrender of those chances of fortune which men of other pursuits enjoy. If he makes less money, he makes more juice out of what he does make. If he cannot drink Burgundy he can quaff the nut-brown ale; while the most brilliant wit, the most salient fancy, the sweetest sympathy, the most genial culture, shall sparkle at his board more radiantly than a silver service, and give him the spirit of the tropics and the Rhine, whose fruits are on other tables. The golden light that transfigures talent and illuminates the world, and which we call genius, is erratic and erotic; and while in Milton it is austere, and in Wordsworth cool, and in Southey methodical, in Shakespeare it is fervent, with all the results of fervor; in Raphael lovely, with all the excesses of love; in Dante moody, with all the whims of caprice. The old quarrel of Lombard Street with Grub Street



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

is as profound as that of Osiris and Typho—it is the difference of sympathy. The Marquis of Westminster will take good care that no superfluous shilling escapes. Oliver Goldsmith will still spend his last shilling upon a brave and unnecessary banquet to his friends.

Whether this be a final fact of human organization or not, it is certainly a fact of history. Every man instinctively believes that Shakespeare stole deer, just as he disbelieves that Lord-mayor Whittington ever told a lie; and the secret of that instinct is the consciousness of the difference in organization. "Knave, I have the power to hang ye," says somebody in one of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays. "And I do be hanged and scorn ye," is the airy answer. "I had a pleasant hour the other evening," said a friend to us, "over my cigar and a book." "What book was that?" "A treatise conclusively proving the awful consequences of smoking." De Quincey came up to London and declared war upon opium; but during a little amnesty, in which he lapsed into his old elysium, he wrote his best book depicting its horrors.

Our readers will not imagine that we are advocating the claims of drunkenness nor defending social excess. We are only recognizing a fact and stating an obvious tendency. The most brilliant illustrations of every virtue are to be found in the literary guild, as well as the saddest beacons of warning; yet it will often occur that the last in talent and the first in excess of a picked company will be a man around whom sympathy most kindly lingers. We love Goldsmith more at the head of an ill-advised feast than Johnson and his friends leaving it, thoughtful and generous as their conduct was. The heart despises prudence.

In the single-hearted regard we know that pity has a larger share. Yet it is not so much that pity is commiseration for misfortune and deficiency, as that which is recognition of a necessary worldly ignorance. The literary class is the most innocent of all. The contempt of practical men for the poets is based upon a consciousness that they are not bad enough for a bad world. To a practical man nothing is so absurd as the lack of worldly shrewdness. The very complaint of the literary life that it does not amass wealth and live in palaces is the scorn of the practical man, for he cannot understand that intellectual opacity which prevents the literary man from seeing the necessity of the different pecuniary condition. It is clear enough to the publisher who lays up fifty thousand a year why the author ends the year in debt. But the author is amazed that he who deals in ideas can only dine upon occasional chops, while the man who merely binds and sells ideas sits down to perpetual sirloin. If they should change places, fortune would change with them. The publisher turned author would still lay up his thousands; the publishing author would still directly lose thousands. It is simply because it is a matter of prudence, economy, and knowledge of the world. Thomas Hood made his ten thousand dollars a year, but if he lived at the rate of fifteen



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

thousand he would hardly die rich. Mr. Jerdan, a gentleman who, in his AUTOBIOGRAPHY, advises energetic youth to betake themselves to the highway rather than to literature, was, we understand, in the receipt of an easy income, and was a welcome guest in pleasant houses; but living in a careless, shiftless, extravagant way, he was presently poor, and, instead of giving his memoirs the motto, *peccavi*, and inditing a warning, he dashes off a truculent defiance. Practical publishers and practical men of all sorts invest their earnings in Michigan Central or Cincinnati and Dayton instead, in steady works and devoted days, and reap a pleasant harvest of dividends. Our friends the authors invest in prime Havanas, Rhenish, in oyster suppers, love and leisure, and divide a heavy percentage of headache, dyspepsia, and debt.

This is as true a view, from another point, as the one we have already taken. If the literary life has the pleasures of freedom, it has also its pains. It may be willing to resign the queen's drawing-room, with the illustrious galaxy of stars and garters, for the chamber with a party nobler than the nobility. The author's success is of a wholly different kind from that of the publisher, and he is thoughtless who demands both. Mr. Roe, who sells sugar, naturally complains that Mr. Doe, who sells molasses, makes money more rapidly. But Mr. Tennyson, who writes poems, can hardly make the same complaint of Mr. Moxon, who publishes them, as was very fairly shown in a number of the Westminster Review, when noticing Mr. Jordan's book.

What we have said is strictly related to Mr. Thackeray's lectures, which discuss literature. All the men he commemorated were illustrations and exponents of the career of letters. They all, in various ways, showed the various phenomena of the temperament. And when in treating of them the critic came to Steele, he found one who was one of the most striking illustrations of one of the most universal aspects of literary life—the simple-hearted, unsuspecting, gay gallant and genial gentleman; ready with his sword or his pen, with a smile or a tear, the fair representative of the social tendency of his life. It seems to us that the Thackeray theory—the conclusion that he is a man who loves to depict madness, and has no sensibilities to the finer qualities of character—crumbled quite away before that lecture upon Steele. We know that it was not considered the best; we know that many of the delighted audience were not sufficiently familiar with literary history fully to understand the position of the man in the lecturer's review; but, as a key to Thackeray, it was, perhaps, the most valuable of all. We know in literature of no more gentle treatment; we have not often encountered in men of the most rigorous and acknowledged virtue such humane tenderness; we have not often heard from the most clerical lips words of such genuine Christianity. Steele's was a character which makes weakness amiable: it was a weakness, if you will, but it was certainly amiability, and it was a combination more attractive than many full-panoplied excellences. It was not presented as a model.



HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Captain Steele in the tap-room was not painted as the ideal of virtuous manhood; but it certainly was intimated that many admirable things were consonant with a free use of beer. It was frankly stated that if, in that character, virtue abounded, cakes and ale did much more abound. Captain Richard Steele might have behaved much better than he did, but we should then have never heard of him. A few fine essays do not float a man into immortality, but the generous character, the heart sweet in all excesses and under all chances, is a spectacle too beautiful and too rare to be easily forgotten. A man is better than many books. Even a man who is not immaculate may have more virtuous influence than the discreetest saint. Let us remember how fondly the old painters lingered round the story of Magdalen, and thank Thackeray for his full-length Steele.

We conceive this to be the chief result of Thackeray's visit, that he convinced us of his intellectual integrity; he showed us how impossible it is for him to see the world and describe it other than he does. He does not profess cynicism, nor satirize society with malice; there is no man more humble, none more simple; his interests are human and concrete, not abstract. We have already said that he looks through and through at the fact. It is easy enough, and at some future time it will be done, to deduce the peculiarity of his writings from the character of his mind. There is no man who masks so little as he in assuming the author. His books are his observations reduced to writing. It seems to us as singular to demand that Dante should be like Shakespeare as to quarrel with Thackeray's want of what is called ideal portraiture. Even if you thought, from reading his *VANITY FAIR*, that he had no conception of noble women, certainly after the lecture upon Swift, after all the lectures, in which every allusion to women was so manly and delicate and sympathetic, you thought so no longer. It is clear that his sympathy is attracted to women—to that which is essentially womanly, feminine. Qualities common to both sexes do not necessarily charm him because he finds them in women. A certain degree of goodness must always be assumed. It is only the rare flowering that inspires special praise. You call Amelia's fondness for George Osborne foolish, fond idolatry. Thackeray smiles, as if all love were not idolatry of the fondest foolishness. What was Hero's—what was Francesco di Rimini's—what was Juliet's? They might have been more brilliant women than Amelia, and their idols of a larger mould than George, but the love was the same old foolish, fond idolatry. The passion of love and a profound and sensible knowledge, regard based upon prodigious knowledge of character and appreciation of talent, are different things. What is the historic and poetic splendor of love but the very fact, which constantly appears in Thackeray's stories, namely, that it is a glory which dazzles and blinds. Men rarely love the women they ought to love, according to the ideal standards. It is this that makes the plot and mystery of life. Is it not the perpetual surprise of all Jane's friends that she should love Timothy instead of Thomas?



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and is not the courtly and accomplished Thomas sure to surrender to some accidental Lucy without position, wealth, style, worth, culture—without anything but heart? This is the fact, and it reappears in Thackeray, and it gives his books that air of reality which they possess beyond all modern story.

And it is this single perception of the fact which, simple as it is, is the rarest intellectual quality that made his lectures so interesting. The sun rose again upon the vanished century, and lighted those historic streets. The wits of Queen Anne ruled the hour, and we were bidden to their feast. Much reading of history and memoirs had not so sent the blood into those old English cheeks, and so moved those limbs in proper measure, as these swift glances through the eyes of genius. It was because, true to himself, Thackeray gave us his impression of those wits as men rather than authors. For he loves character more than thought. He is a man of the world, and not a scholar. He interprets the author by the man. When you are made intimate with young Swift, Sir William Temple's saturnine secretary, you more intelligently appreciate the Dean of St. Patrick's. When the surplice of Mr. Sterne is raised a little, more is seen than the reverend gentleman intends. Hogarth, the bluff Londoner, necessarily depicts a bluff, coarse, obvious morality. The hearty Fielding, the cool Addison, the genial Goldsmith, these are the figures that remain in memory, and their works are valuable as they indicate the man.

Mr. Thackeray's success was very great. He did not visit the West, nor Canada. He went home without seeing Niagara Falls. But wherever he did go he found a generous and social welcome, and a respectful and sympathetic hearing. He came to fulfil no mission, but he certainly knit more closely our sympathy with Englishmen. Heralded by various romantic memoirs, he smiled at them, stoutly asserted that he had been always able to command a good dinner, and to pay for it; nor did he seek to disguise that he hoped his American tour would help him to command and pay for more. He promised not to write a book about us, but we hope he will, for we can ill spare the criticism of such an observer. At least, we may be sure that the material gathered here will be worked up in some way. He found that we were not savages nor bores. He found that there were a hundred here for every score in England who knew well and loved the men of whom he spoke. He found that the same red blood colors all the lips that speak the language he so nobly praised. He found friends instead of critics. He found those who, loving the author, loved the man more. He found a quiet welcome from those who are waiting to welcome him again and as sincerely.

January 2, Sunday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was written to by [Horace Greeley](#) in New-York.

New York,
[J]an. 2, 1853.
Friend Thoreau,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

*I have yours of
the 29th, and credit you
\$20[.] Pay me when and in
such sums as may be conve-
nient.*

*I am sorry you and
Curtis cannot agree so
as to have your whole Ms.
printed. It will be worth
nothing elsewhere after
having partly appeared in*

Page 2

*Putnam. I think it is
a mistake to conceal the
authorship of the several
articles, making them all
(so to speak) Editorial;[]
but if that is done, don't
you see that the el[i]mina-
tion of very flagrant here-
sies (like your defiant
Panthem) becomes a neces-
sity?-- If you had ~~refused~~
withdrawn
^ your M[S], on account of the
abominable misp[r]ints in
the first number, your ground
would have been far more
tenable.*

Page 3

*However, do what you
will. Yours,
Horace Greeley.
(unwell)
H. D. Thoreau, Esq.*

[Thoreau](#) for the 5th time deployed in his journal a weather term that had been originated by [Luke Howard](#): “A clear day – a pure sky with **cirrho** ...”



January 2nd: 9 Am Down RR to Cliffs.

A clear day – a pure sky with cirrho In this clear air & bright sunlight the ice-covered trees have a new beauty. Especially the birches along under the edge of Warren’s wood on each side of the railroad – bent quite to the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ground in every kind of curve. At a distance as you are approaching them end-wise they look like white tents of Indians under the edge of the wood. The birch is thus remarkable perhaps because from the feathery form of the tree whose numerous small branches sustain so great a weight bending it to the ground – and moreover because from the color of the bark the core is less observable. The oaks not only are less pliant in the trunk but have fewer & stiffer twigs & branches. The birches droop over in all directions like ostrich feathers. Most wood paths are impassible now to a carriage almost to a foot traveller from the number of saplings & boughs bent over even to the ground in them. Both sides of the deep cut now shine in the sun as if silver plated – & the fine spray of a myriad brushes on the edge of the bank – sparkle like like silver. The telegraph wire is coated to ten times its size – & looks like a slight fence scalloping along at a distance. Is merged in nature. When we climb the bank at Stows wood lot and come upon the piles of freshly split white pine wood – (for he is ruthlessly laying it waste) the transparent ice like a thick varnish beautifully exhibits the color of the clear tender yellowish wood – pumpkin-pine? – and its grain and we pick our way over a bed of pine boughs & twigs a foot or two deep covering the ground, each twig & needle thickly coated with ice – into one vast gelid mass – which our feet crouch as if as if we were walking through the laboratory of some confectioner to the gods. The invigorating scent of the recently cut pines refreshes us – if that is any atonement for this devastation. The beauty of the oak tops all silvered o'er. Especially now do I notice the hips – barberries & winter berries – for their red. The red or purplish catkins of the alders are interesting as a winter-fruit. & also of the birch. But few birds about, apparently their granaries are locked up in ice – with which the grasses & buds are coated. Even far in the horizon the pine tops are turned to firs or spruce by the weight of the ice bending them down – so that they look like a spruce swamp. No two trees wear the ice alike. The short plumes & needles of the spruce make a very pretty & peculiar figure. I see some oaks in the distance which by their branches being curved or arched downward & massed are turned into perfect elms, which suggests that that is the peculiarity of the elm – Few if any other trees are this wisp-like – the branches gracefully drooping. I mean some slender red & white oaks which have recently been left in a clearing – Just apply a weight to the ends of the boughs which will cause them to droop on all sides – & to each particular twig which will mass them together & you have perfect elms. Seen at the right angle each ice incrustated stubble shines like a prism with some color of the rainbow – intense blue or violet & red. The smooth field clad the other day with a low wiry grass – is now converted into rough-stubble land – where you walk with crouching feet. It is remarkable that the trees ever recover from this burden which bends them to the ground. I should like to weigh a limb of this pitch-pine. The character of the tree is changed. I have now passed the bass and am approaching the cliffs. The forms & variety of the ice are particularly rich here – there are so many low bushes & weeds before me as I ascend toward the sun – especially very small white pines almost merged in the ice-incrustated ground. All objects – even the apple trees, & rails are to the eye polished silver. It is a perfect land of faery. As if the world were a great frosted cake with its ornaments – The boughs gleam like silver candlesticks. [Le Jeune](#) describes the same in Canada in 1636 as “nos grands bois ne paroissent qu'une forest de cristal.” The silvery ice stands out an inch by 3/4 an inch in width on the N side of every twig of these apple trees – with rich irregularities of its own in its edge. When I stoop and examine some fat icy stubble in my path, I find for all core a ridiculous wiry russet thread scarce visible not a hundredth part its size, which breaks with the ice under my feet, yet where this has a minute stub of a branch only a particle of an inch in length – there is a corresponding clumsy icy protuberance on the surface 1/8 of an inch off. Nature works with such luxuriance & fury that she follows the least hint. And on the twigs of bushes for each bud there is a corresponding icy swelling. The bells are particularly sweet this morning. I hear more methinks than ever before. How much more religion in their sound, than they ever call men together to – men obey their call & go to the stove-warmed church – though God exhibits himself to the walker in a frosted bush today as much as in a burning one to Moses of old. We build a fire on the cliffs. When kicking to pieces a pine stump for the fat knots which alone would burn in this icy day – at the risk of spoiling my boots having looked in vain for a stone I thought how convenient would be and Indian stone axe to batter it with. The bark of white birch though covered with ice burned well. We soon had a rousing fire of fat pine on a shelf of rock from which we overlooked the icy landscape. The sun too was melting the ice on the rocks & the water was bubbling & pulsing downward – in dark bubbles – exactly like pollywogs. What a good word is flame expressing the form & soul of fire – lambent with forked tongue – We lit a fire to see it rather than to feel it, it is so rare a sight these days. To have our eyes ache once more with smoke What a peculiar perhaps indescribable color has this flame – a reddish or lurid yellow – not so splendid or full of light as of life & heat. These fat roots made much flame and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

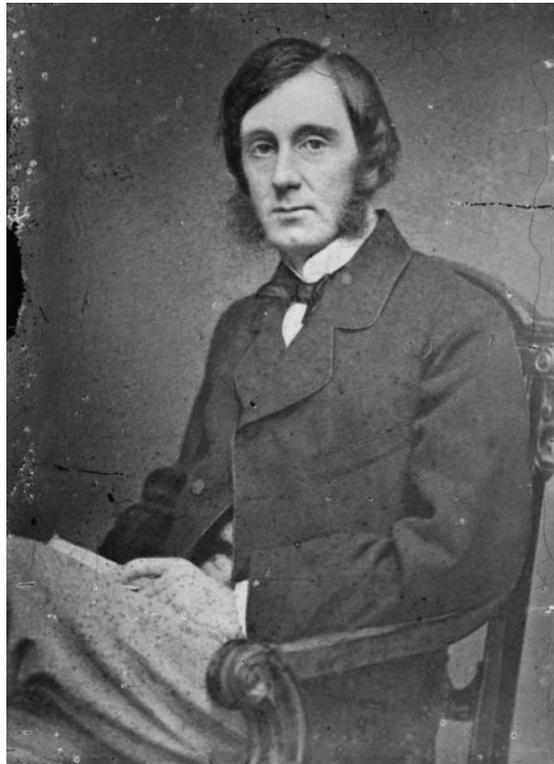
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

a very black smoke commencing where the flame left off which cast fine flickering shadows on the rocks – There was some bluish white smoke from the rotten part of the wood – Then there was the fine white ashes which farmer's wives sometimes use for pearlash. Fire is the most tolerable 3d party. I hear the wiry phoebe note of the chickadee as if the spring were coming in. Brown thinks my ruby-wren may be the lesser red pole linnet.

Walden begins to freeze in the coves or shallower water on the N side where it was slightly skimmed over several weeks ago

January-March: Most of chapters 1 to of Henry Thoreau's "A YANKEE IN CANADA" were being printed in Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art, until the remainder of the manuscript needed to be withdrawn due to editor George William Curtis's censorship of comments about religious institutions.





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

February 27, Sunday: [Moncure Daniel Conway](#) attended the Reverend [Theodore Parker](#)'s sermon in the downtown Boston Music Hall and was put off when Parker cracked jokes from the pulpit. Members of the congregation were, would you believe, **chuckling** during **worship**.



February 27. Went to hear Theodore Parker. His sermon was on Good and Evil Temper. Text, Proverbs 15:17, "Better is a dinner of herbs," etc. I don't like him at all, and wish I had worshipped at King's Chapel with Mr. Peabody, whom with his whole family I love.

Not only that, but Conway observed that some of the men in the congregation had **mustaches**, and that some of the women were wearing **rouge**. Still, he needed to talk to the Reverend Parker because he was bearing a message from Nancy Williams, one of the family's slaves in Virginia, to her escaped husband Benjamin Williams who was thought to be residing in the Boston area. Conway needed to make the contact by way of some white man who could trust him, who also had contacts in the local black community. The two men soon made contact with a black man who assured them that, although Benjamin Williams had escaped on to Canada, he would know how to pass this written message on to him.²¹

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

VOLUME II

Conway would explain why at first he didn't like the Reverend Parker, and went to hear Father Taylor at the Seamen's Bethel:

21. Of course, there's every possibility that this communicant merely trotted around the corner and handed his wife's note to Benjamin Williams. Why take a risk when you aren't obliged to?



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



As to my worry at the first sermon I heard in Boston, -that of Theodore Parker,- I was disturbed by the lack of anything in the Music Hall or in the secular music sympathetic with my lonely and forlorn heart. In the afternoon I was consoled by hearing at the Seamen's Bethel the famous Father Taylor. I had read the graphic description of him by Charles Dickens ("American Notes"), and had heard that Emerson was an admirer of Father Taylor. Some one told me that Taylor was a sort of Arian; also that in a circle of his ministerial brethren where Emerson was spoken of as leading youth to hell, Father Taylor remarked, "It may be that Emerson is going to hell, but of one thing I am certain: he will change the climate there, and emigration will set that way."

After listening to his sermon, -plain, practical, in no part sensational,- I approached Father Taylor and told him I had just left the Baltimore Conference. He urged me to go home with him, and on the way was at first severe about my leaving the Methodist Church. I answered that if I could, like himself, be a Methodist and ignore the Trinitarian dogma, I would have done so; but Methodism in Boston and that in the Baltimore Conference differed. The old man relented. "Well," said he, "our Southern brethren **are** very strict about some things of which they know nothing." I then knocked at the door of his heart with the name of Emerson, and it opened wide. Our talk became cordial. He told me, I think, that Emerson was a contributor to the Seamen's Bethel, and at any rate interested me in his account of Emerson as a man, and apart from his writings.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



There was something rather hard about Parker's manner at first that may have been due to very natural misgivings. Having found that he was the man most likely to help me fulfil aunt Nancy's commission, I carried a note of introduction to him from some antislavery friend at Cambridge, but even antislavery men might be mistaken. A Virginian asking the whereabouts of a negro might properly be met with hesitation, though it did not occur to me. I was courteously received in his large library, where he sat at his desk beneath his grandfather's old musket fixed to the wall. He took down the fugitive's name, etc., and said he would make inquiries, appointing a day for my return. For the rest he showed interest in my experiences, and spoke with such admiration of Emerson that I began to warm toward him. A few days later he went with me through the negro quarters, and I got still nearer to him. I remember by the way that a man met us and asked the way to the Roman Catholic Church. Parker took pains to inform him, and then remarked, "A heretic may sometimes point a man to the True Church." But he did not smile. At length we entered into the house of some intelligent coloured people, who saluted Parker with the greatest homage, which he received with pathetic humility. "This," he said, "is a Virginian, but an honourable Virginian, who wishes to find one Benjamin Williams, who some time ago escaped from his master in Stafford County, Va, and for whom he has a message from his wife, Nancy Williams. I hope you will be able to discover Mr. Williams." After a brief consultation with others of the family, the man went out to bring some neighbours, and meanwhile I was quite overcome by the pleasant conversation of Parker with the humble women around him. He spoke sweetly and graciously to young and old. It was all beautiful and touching, and I was ashamed that I had disliked him. The man returned with several neighbours, and having inquired closely as to the fugitive's appearance, they remembered such a man, who was in Canada. A little later I had the satisfaction of sending his address to a free negro in Falmouth, who conveyed it to aunt Nancy.

[Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to H.G.O. Blake.

Concord Feb. 27th '53

Mr Blake,

I have not answered your letter before because I have been almost

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

constantly in the fields surveying of late. It is long since I have spent so many days so profitably in a pecuniary sense; so unprofitably, it seems to me, in a more important sense. I have earned just a dollar a day for 76 days past; for though I charge at a higher rate for the days which are seen to be spent, yet so many more are spent than appears. This is instead of lecturing, which has not offered, to pay for that book which I printed. I have not only cheap hours, but cheap weeks and months, i.e. weeks which are bought at the rate I have named. Not that they are quite lost to me, or make me very melancholy, alas! for I too often take a cheap satisfaction in so spending them, – weeks of pasturing and browsing, like beeves and deer, which give me animal health, it may be, but create a tough skin over the soul and intellectual part. Yet if men should offer my body a maintenance for the work of my head alone, I feel that it would be a dangerous temptation.

As to whether what you speak of as the “world’s way” (Which for the most part is my way) or that which is shown me, is the better. The former is imposture, the latter is truth. I have the coldest confidence in the last. There is only such hesitation as the appetites feel in following the aspirations. The clod hesitates because it is inert, wants animation. The one is the way of death, the other of life everlasting. My hours are not “cheap in such a way that I doubt whether the world’s way would not have been better,” but cheap in such a way that I doubt whether the world’s way, which I have adopted for the time, could be worse. The whole enterprise of this nation which is not an upward, but a west-ward one, toward Oregon California, Japan &c, is totally devoid of interest to me, whether performed on foot or by a Pacific railroad. It is not illustrated by a thought, it is not warmed by a sentiment. There is nothing in it which one should lay down his life for, nor even his gloves, hardly which one should take up a newspaper for. It is perfectly heathenish – a flibustiering toward heaven by the great western route. No, they may go their way to their manifest destiny which I trust is not mine. May my 76 dollars whenever I get them help to carry me in the other direction. I see them on their winding way, but no music is wafted from their host, only the rattling of change in their pockets. I would rather be a captive knight, and let them all pass by, than be free only to go whither they are bound. What end do they propose to themselves beyond Japan? What aims more lofty have they than the prairie dogs?

As it respects these things I have not changed an opinion one iota from the first. As the stars looked to me when I was a shepherd in Assyria, they look to me now a New Englander. The higher the mt. on which you stand, the less change in the prospect from year to year, from age to age. Above a certain height, there is no change. I

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

am a Switzer on the edge of the glacier, with his advantages & disadvantages, goitre, or what not. (You may suspect it to be some kind of swelling at any rate). I have had but one spiritual birth (excuse the word,) and now whether it rains or snows, whether I laugh or cry, fall farther below or approach nearer to my standard, whether Pierce or Scott is elected, – not a new scintillation of light flashes on me, but ever and anon, though with longer intervals, the same surprising & everlastingly new light dawns to me, with only such variations as in the coming of the natural day, with which, indeed, it is often coincident. As to how to preserve potatoes from rotting, your opinion may change from year to year, but as how to preserve your Soul from rotting, I have nothing to learn, but something to practise. Thus I declaim against them, but I in my folly am the world I condemn.

I very rarely indeed if ever “feel any itching to be what is called useful to my fellow men”. Sometimes, it may be, when my thoughts for want of employment, fall into a beaten path or humdrum, I have dreamed idly of stopping a man’s horse that was running away, but perchance I wished that he might run in order that I might stop him, – or, of putting out a fire, but then of course it must have got well a-going. Now, to tell the truth, I do not dream much of acting upon horses before they run, or of preventing fires which are not yet kindled. What a foul subject is this of doing good, instead of minding ones life, which should be his business –doing good as a dead carcass, which is only fit for manure, instead of as a living man, – Instead of taking care to flourish & smell & taste sweet and refresh all mankind to the extent of our capacity & quality. People will sometimes try to persuade you that you have done something from that motive, as if you did not already know enough about it. If I ever did a man any good, in their sense, of course it was something exceptional, and insignificant compared with the good or evil which I am constantly doing by being what I am. As if you were to preach to ice to shape itself into burning glasses, which are sometimes useful, and so the peculiar properties of ice be lost— Ice that merely performs the office of a burning glass does not do its duty.

The problem of life becomes one cannot say by how many degrees more complicated as our material wealth is increased, whether that needle they tell of was a gate-way or not, – since the problem is not merely nor mainly to get life for our bodies, but by this or a similar

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

discipline to get life for our souls; by cultivating the lowland farm on right principles, that is with this view, to turn it into an upland farm. You have so many more talents to account for. If I accomplish as much more in spiritual work as I am richer in worldly goods, then I am just as worthy, or worth just as much as I was before, and no more. I see that, in my own case, money might be of great service to me, but probably it would not be, for the difficulty now is that I do not improve my opportunities, and therefore I am not prepared to have my opportunities increased. Now I warn you, if it be as you say, you have got to put on the pack of an Upland Farmer in good earnest the coming spring, the lowland farm being cared for, aye you must be selecting your seeds forth with and doing what winter work you can; and while others are raising potatoes and Baldwin apples for you, you must be raising apples of the Hesperides for them. (Only hear how he preaches!) No man can suspect that he is the proprietor of an Upland farm, i.e. upland in the sense that it will produce nobler crops and better repay cultivation in the long run, but he will be perfectly sure that he ought to cultivate it.

Though we are desirous to earn our bread, we need not be anxious to satisfy men for it—though we shall take care to pay them, — but Good who alone gave it to us— Men may in effect put us in the debtors jail, for that matter, simply for paying our whole debt to God, which includes our debt to them, and though we have his receipt for it, for his paper is dishonored. The cashier will tell you that he has no stock in his bank.

How prompt we are to satisfy the hunger & thirst of our bodies; how slow to satisfy the hunger & thirst of our souls. In deed we would be practical folks cannot use this word without blushing because of our infidelity, having starved this substance almost to a shadow. We feel it to be as absurd as if a man were to break forth into a eulogy on his dog who has 'nt any. An ordinary man will work every day for a year at shovelling dirt to support his body, or a family of bodies, but he is an extraordinary man who will work a whole day in a year for the support of his soul. Even the priests, the men of God, so called, for the most part confess that they work for the support of the body. But he alone is the truly enterprising & practical man who succeeds in maintaining his soul here. Have 'nt we our everlasting life to get? and is 'nt that the only excuse at last for eating drinking sleeping, or even carrying an umbrella when it rains? A man might as well devote himself to raising pork, as to fattening the bodies or temporal part merely of the whole human family. If we made the true distinction we should almost all of us be seen to be in the almshouse for Souls.

I am much indebted to you because you look so steadily at the better

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

side, or rather the true center of me (for our true center may & perhaps oftenest does lie entirely aside from us, and we are in fact eccentric,) and as I have elsewhere said "Give me an opportunity to live." You speak as if the image or idea which I see were reflected from me to you, and I see it again reflected from you to me, because we stand at the right angle to one another; and so it goes zigzag, to what successive reflecting surfaces, before it is all dissipated, or absorbed by the more unreflecting, or differently reflecting, – who knows? Or perhaps what you see directly you refer to me. What a little shelf is required, by which we may impinge upon another, and build there our eirie in the clouds, and all the heavens we see above us we refer to the crags around and beneath us. Some piece of mica, as it were, in the face or eyes of one, as on the Delectable Mts., slanted at the right angle, reflects the heavens to us. But in the slow geological upheavals & depressions, these mutual angles are disturbed, these suns set, & new ones rise to us. That ideal which I worshipped was a greater stranger to the mica than to me. It was not the hero I admired but the reflection from his epaulet or helmet. It is nothing (for us) permanently inherent in another, but his attitude or relation to what we prize that we admire. The meanest man may glitter with micacious particles to his fellow's eye. These are the spangles that adorn a man. The highest union – the only un-ion (don't laugh) or central oneness, is the coincidence of visual rays. Our club room was an apartment in a constellation where our visual rays met (and there was no debate about about the restaurant) The way between us is over the mount.

Your words make me think of a man of my acquaintance whom I occasionally meet, whom you too appear to have met, one Myself, as he is called, Yet why not call him Your-self? If you have met with him & know him it is all I have done, and surely where there is a mutual acquaintance the my & thy make a distinction without a difference. I do not wonder that you do not like my Canada story. It concerns me but little, and probably is not worth the time it took to tell it. Yet I had absolutely no design whatever in my mind, but simply to report what I saw. I have inserted all of myself that was implicated or made the excursion. It has come to an end at any rate, they will print no more, but return me my mss. when it is but little more than half done – as well as another I had sent them, because the editor Curtis requires the liberty to omit the heresies without consulting me – a privilege California is not rich enough to bid for.

I thank you again & again for attending to me; that is to say I am glad that you hear me and that you also are glad. Hold fast to your most indefinite waking dream. The very green dust on the walls is an organised vegetable; the atmosphere has its fauna & flora floating



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in it; & shall we think that dreams are but dust & ashes, are always disintegrated & crumbling thoughts and not dust like thoughts trooping to its standard with music, systems beginning to be organized. These expectations these are roots these are nuts which even the poorest man has in his bin, and roasts or cracks them occasionally in winter evenings, which even the poor debtor retains with his bed and his pig, i.e. his idleness & sensuality. Men go to the opera because they hear there a faint expression in sound of this news which is never quite distinctly proclaimed. Suppose a man were to sell the hue, the least amount of coloring matter in the superficies of his thought, –for a farm. –were to exchange an absolute & infinite value for a relative –& finite one –to gain the whole world & lose his own soul!

*Do not wait as long as I have before you write. If you will look at another star, I will try to supply my side of the triange
Tell Mr Brown that I remember him & trust that he remembers me.
Yrs H.D.T.*

PS. Excuse this rather flippant preaching – which does not cost me enough –and do not think that I mean you always– though your letter suggested the subjects.



Frank Brown has killed within a day or two a tree sparrow *Emberiza Canadensis* Canada Bunting or Tree sparrow of Audubon's Synopsis– I think this must be my bright chestnut fronted bird of the winter though Peabody says it is distinguished by the spot on the breast? which reminds me of the larger finch like bird. A week or two ago I brought home a handsome pitch pine cone which had freshly fallen and was closed perfectly tight...

Mr Herbert is strenuous that I say ruffed grouse for Partridge & hare for rabbit He says of the snipe "I am myself satisfied that the sound is produced by the fact, that the bird, by some muscular action or other, turns the quill-feathers edgewise, as he drops plumb through the air; and that, while in this position, during his accelerated descent, the vibration of the feathers, and the passage of the air between them, gives utterance to this wild humming sound."

March 11, Friday: On this day and the following two days US forces were landing in Nicaragua, to protect American lives and interests during political disturbances there.

US MILITARY INTERVENTIONS

On this day Henry Thoreau made no journal entry.



Thoreau wrote to George William Curtis about the whereabouts of the manuscript he had submitted to Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art:

TIMELINE OF CANADA

*Concord Mar. 11 '53
Mr Curtis,
Together with the MS*



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of my Cape Cod adventures Mr Put-
nam sends me only 70 or 80 pages of ^ *the first (out of 200)*
the "Canada", all which having been
printed is of course of no use to me.
He states that "the remainder of the
MSS seems to have been lost at the
printers'." *You will not be surprised*
if I wish to know if it actually is lost,
and if reasonable pains have been
taken to recover it. Supposing that
Mr P. may not have had an
opportunity to consult you respecting
its whereabouts –or have thought
it of importance enough to inquire
after particularly– I write again
to you to whom I entrusted it to as-
sure you that it is of more value to me than may appear.
With your leave I will improve
this opportunity to acknowledge the
receipt of another cheque from Mr–
Putnam.
I trust that if we ever have
any intercourse hereafter it may be some-

Page 2
thing more cheering than this
cut business kind.
Yrs
Henry D. Thoreau

[Thoreau](#) was being written to by [Horace Greeley](#) in New-York.

New York,
March, 11, 1853.
Dear Sir:
I have yours of the
9th, enclosing Putnam's
check for \$59, making
\$79 in all you have paid
me. I am paid in full, and
this letter is your receipt in
full. I don't want any [pay]
for my 'services,' [whatever]
they may have been consider



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

*me your friend who wished
to serve you, however unsuccess-
fully. Don't break with
Curtis or Putnam.*

Yours

H.D. Thoreau. Horace Greeley.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1854

[George William Curtis](#) became the author of a “The Easy Chair” column in [Harper’s Monthly Magazine](#). He published an essay about [Waldo Emerson](#) (this would be reprinted in 1895 in his LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.).



He received the honorary degree of AM from [Brown University](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

EMERSON²²

The village of Concord, Massachusetts, lies an hour's ride from Boston, upon the Great Northern Railway. It is one of those quiet New England towns, whose few white houses, grouped upon the plain, make but a slight impression upon the mind of the busy traveller hurrying to or from the city. As the conductor shouts "Concord!" the busy traveller has scarcely time to recall "Concord, Lexington, and Bunker Hill" before the town has vanished and he is darting through woods and fields as solitary as those he has just left in New Hampshire. Yet as it vanishes he may chance to "see" two or three spires, and as they rush behind the trees his eyes fall upon a gleaming sheet of water. It is Walden Pond—or Walden Water, as Orphic Alcott used to call it—whose virgin seclusion was a just image of that of the little village, until one afternoon, some half-dozen or more years since, a shriek, sharper than any that had rung from Walden woods since the last war-whoop of the last Indians of Musketaguid, announced to astonished Concord, drowsing in the river meadows, that the nineteenth century had overtaken it. Yet long before the material force of the age bound the town to the rest of the world, the spiritual force of a single mind in it had attracted attention to it, and made its lonely plains as dear to many widely scattered minds as the groves of the Academy or the vineyards of Vaucluse.

Except in causing the erection of the railway buildings and several dwellings near it, steam has not much changed Concord. It is yet one of the quiet country towns whose charm is incredible to all but those who, by loving it, have found it worthy of love. The shire-town of the great agricultural county of Middlesex, it is not disturbed by the feverish throb of factories, nor by any roar of inexorable toil but the few puffs of the locomotive. One day, during the autumn, it is thronged with the neighboring farmers, who hold their high festival—the annual cattle-show—there. But the calm tenor of Concord life is not varied, even on that day, by anything more exciting than fat oxen and the cud-chewing eloquence of the agricultural dinner. The population of the region is composed of sturdy, sterling men, worthy representatives of the ancestors who sowed along the Concord shores, with their seed-corn and rye, the germs of a prodigious national greatness. At intervals every day the rattle, roar, and whistle of the swift shuttle darting to and from the metropolitan heart of New England, weaving prosperity upon the land, remind those farmers in their silent fields that the great world yet wags and wrestles. And the farmer-boy—sweeping with flashing scythe through the river meadows, whose coarse grass glitters, apt for mowing, in the early June morning—pauses as the whistle dies into the distance, and, wiping his brow and whetting his blade anew, questions the

22. [George William Curtis](#), [HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS](#), 1854, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

country-smitten citizen, the amateur Corydon struggling with imperfect stroke behind him, of the mystic romance of city life. The sluggish repose of the little river images the farmer-boy's life. He bullies his oxen, and trembles at the locomotive. His wonder and fancy stretch towards the great world beyond the barn-yard and the village church as the torpid stream tends towards the ocean. The river, in fact, seems the thread upon which all the beads of that rustic life are strung—the clew to its tranquil character. If it were an impetuous stream, dashing along as if it claimed and required the career to which every American river is entitled, a career it would have. Wheels, factories, shops, traders, factory-girls, boards of directors, dreary white lines of boarding-houses, all the signs that indicate the spirit of the age, and of the American age, would arise upon its margin. Some shaven magician from State Street would run up by rail, and, from proposals, maps, schedules of stock, etc., educe a spacious factory as easily as Aladdin's palace arose from nothing. Instead of a dreaming, pastoral poet of a village, Concord would be a rushing, whirling, bustling manufacturer of a town, like its thrifty neighbor Lowell. Many a fine equipage, flashing along city ways—many an Elizabethan-Gothic-Grecian rural retreat, in which State Street woos Pan and grows Arcadian in summer, would be reduced, in the last analysis, to the Concord mills. Yet if these broad river meadows grew factories instead of corn, they might perhaps lack another harvest, of which the poet's thought is the sickle.

"One harvest from your field
Homeward brought the oxen strong.
Another crop your acres yield,
Which I gather in a song,"

sings Emerson, and again, as the afternoon light strikes pensive across his memory, as over the fields below him:

"Knows he who tills this lonely field,
To reap its scanty corn,
What mystic crops his acres yield,
At midnight and at morn?"

The Concord River, upon whose winding shores the town has scattered its few houses—as if, loitering over the plain some fervent day, it had fallen asleep obedient to the slumberous spell, and had not since awakened—is a languid, shallow stream, that loiters through broad meadows, which fringe it with rushes and long grasses. Its sluggish current scarcely moves the autumn leaves showered upon it by a few maples that lean over the Assabet—as one of its branches is named. Yellow lily-buds and leathery lily-pads tessellate its surface, and the white water-lilies—pale, proud Ladies of Shalott—bare their virgin breasts to the sun in the seclusion of its distant reaches. Clustering vines of wild grape hang its wooded shores with a tapestry of the South and the Rhine. The pickerel-weed marks with blue spikes of flowers the points where small tributary brooks flow



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in, and along the dusky windings of those brooks cardinal-flowers with a scarlet splendor paint the tropics upon New England green. All summer long, from founts unknown, in the upper counties, from some anonymous pond or wooded hillside moist with springs, steals the gentle river through the plain, spreading at one point above the town into a little lake, called by the farmers "Fairhaven Bay," as if all its lesser names must share the sunny significance of Concord. Then, shrinking again, alarmed at its own boldness, it dreams on towards the Merrimac and the sea.

The absence of factories has already implied its shallowness and slowness. In truth it is a very slow river, belonging much more to the Indian than to the Yankee; so much so, indeed, that until within a very few years there was an annual visit to its shores from a few sad heirs of its old masters, who pitched a group of tents in the meadows, and wove their tidy baskets and strung their beads in unsmiling silence. It was the same thing that I saw in Jerusalem among the Jews. Every Friday they repair to the remains of the old temple wall, and pray and wail, kneeling upon the pavement and kissing the stones. But that passionate Oriental regret was not more impressive than this silent homage of a waning race, who, as they beheld the unchanged river, knew that, unlike it, the last drops of their existence were gradually flowing away, and that for their tribes there shall be no ingathering.

So shallow is the stream that the amateur Corydons who embark at morning to explore its remoter shores will, not infrequently in midsummer, find their boat as suddenly tranquil and motionless as the river, having placidly grounded upon its oozy bottom. Or, returning at evening, they may lean over the edge as they lie at length in the boat, and float with the almost imperceptible current, brushing the tips of the long water-grass and reeds below them in the stream—a river jungle, in which lurk pickerel and trout—with the sensation of a bird drifting upon soft evening air over the tree-tops. No available or profitable craft navigate these waters, and animated gentlemen from the city who run up for "a mouthful of fresh air" cannot possibly detect the final cause of such a river. Yet the dreaming idler has a place on maps and a name in history.

Near the town it is crossed by three or four bridges. One is a massive structure to help the railroad over. The stern, strong pile readily betrays that it is part of good, solid stock, owned in the right quarter. Close by it is a little arched stone bridge, auxiliary to a great road leading to some vague region of the world called Acton upon guide-posts and on maps. Just beyond these bridges the river bends and forgets the railroad, but it is grateful to the graceful arch of the little stone bridge for making its curve more picturesque, and, as it muses towards the Old Manse, listlessly brushing the lilies, it wonders if Ellery Channing, who lives beyond, upon a hill-side sloping to the shore, wrote his poem of "The Bridge" to that particular one. There are two or three wooden bridges also,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

always combining well with the landscape, always making and suggesting pictures.

The Concord, as I said, has a name in history. Near one of the wooden bridges you turn aside from the main road, close by the Old Manse—whose mosses of mystic hue were gathered by Hawthorne, who lived there for three years—and a few steps bring you to the river and to a small monument upon its brink. It is a narrow, grassy way; not a field nor a meadow, but of that shape and character which would perplex the animated stranger from the city, who would see, also, its unfitness for a building-lot. The narrow, grassy way is the old road, which in the month of April, 1775, led to a bridge that crossed the stream at this spot. And upon the river's margin, upon the bridge and the shore beyond, took place the sharp struggle between the Middlesex farmers and the scarlet British soldiers known in tradition as "Concord fight". The small monument records the day and the event. When it was erected Emerson wrote the following hymn for the ceremony:

APRIL 19, 1836.

"By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard round the world.

"The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream that seaward creeps.

"On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We see to-day a votive stone,
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

"Spirit that made these heroes dare
To die, or leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and Thee."

Close under the rough stone wall at the left, which separates it from the little grassy orchard of the Manse, is a small mound of turf and a broken stone. Grave and headstone shrink from sight amid the grass and under the wall, but they mark the earthly bed of the first victims of that first fight. A few large trees overhang the ground, which Hawthorne thinks have been planted since that day, and he says that in the river he has seen mossy timbers of the old bridge, and on the farther bank, half hidden, the crumbling stone abutments that supported it. In an old house upon the main road, nearly opposite the entrance to this grassy way, I knew a hale old woman who well remembered the gay advance



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of the flashing soldiers, the terrible ring and crack of fire-arms, and the panic-stricken retreat of the regulars, blackened and bloody. But the placid river has long since overborne it all. The alarm, the struggle, the retreat, are swallowed up in its supreme tranquillity. The summers of more than seventy years have obliterated every trace of the road with thick grass, which seeks to bury the graves, as earth buried the victims. Let the sweet ministry of summer avail. Let its mild iteration even sap the monument and conceal its stones as it hides the abutment in foliage; for, still on the sunny slopes, white with the May blossoming of apple-orchards, and in the broad fields, golden to the marge of the river, and tilled in security and peace, survives the imperishable remembrance of that day and its results.

The river is thus the main feature of the Concord landscape. It is surrounded by a wide plain, from which rise only three or four low hills. One is a wooded cliff over Fairhaven Bay, a mile from the town; one separates the main river from the Assabeth; and just beyond the battle-ground one rises, rich with orchards, to a fine wood which crowns it. The river meadows blend with broad, lonely fields. A wide horizon, like that of the prairie or the sea, is the grand charm of Concord. At night the stars are seen from the roads crossing the plain, as from a ship at sea. The landscape would be called tame by those who think no scenery grand but that of mountains or the sea-coast. But the wide solitude of that region is not so accounted by those who live there. To them it is rich and suggestive, as Emerson shows, by saying in the essay upon "Nature", "My house stands in low land, with limited outlook, and on the skirt of the village. But I go with my friend to the shore of our little river, and with one stroke of the paddle I leave the village politics and personalities, yes, and the world of villages and personalities behind, and pass into a delicate realm of sunset and moonlight, too bright almost for spotted man to enter without novitiate and probation. We penetrate bodily this incredible beauty; we dip our hands in this painted element; our eyes are bathed in these lights and forms. A holiday, a villeggiatura, a royal-revel, the proudest, most heart-rejoicing festival that valor and beauty, power and taste ever decked and enjoyed, establishes itself upon the instant". And again, as indicating where the true charm of scenery lies: "In every landscape the point to astonishment is the meeting of the sky and the earth, and that is seen from the first hillock, as well as from the top of the Alleghanies. The stars stoop down over the brownest, homeliest common, with all the spiritual magnificence which they shed on the Campagna or on the marble deserts of Egypt." He is speaking here, of course, of the spiritual excitement of Beauty, which crops up everywhere in nature, like gold in a rich region; but the quality of the imagery indicates the character of the scenery in which the essay was written.

Concord is too far from Boston to rival in garden cultivation its neighbors, West Cambridge, Lexington, and Waltham; nor can

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

it boast, with Brookline, Dorchester, and Cambridge, the handsome summer homes of city wealth. But it surpasses them all, perhaps, in a genuine country freshness and feeling, derived from its loneliness. If not touched by city elegance, neither is it infected by city meretriciousness; it is sweet, wholesome country. By climbing one of the hills, your eye sweeps a wide, wide landscape, until it rests upon graceful Wachuset, or, farther and mistier, Monadnoc, the lofty outpost of New Hampshire hills. Level scenery is not tame. The ocean, the prairie, the desert, are not tame, although of monotonous surface. The gentle undulations which mark certain scenes—a rippling landscape, in which all sense of space, of breadth, and of height is lost—that is tame. It may be made beautiful by exquisite cultivation, as it often is in England and on parts of the Hudson shores, but it is, at best, rather pleasing than inspiring. For a permanent view the eye craves large and simple forms, as the body requires plain food for its best nourishment. The town of Concord is built mainly upon one side of the river. In its centre is a large open square, shaded by fine elms. A white wooden church, in the most classical style of Yankee-Greek, stands upon the square. The Court-house is upon one of the corners. In the old Courthouse, in the days when I knew Concord, many conventions were held for humane as well as merely political objects. One summer day I especially remember, when I did not envy Athens its forum, for Emerson and William Henry Channing spoke. In the speech of both burned the sacred fire of eloquence, but in Emerson it was light, and in Channing heat. From this square diverge four roads, like highways from a forum. One leads by the Courthouse and under stately sycamores to the Old Manse and the battle-ground, another goes directly to the river, and a third is the main avenue of the town. After passing the shops this third divides, and one branch forms a fair and noble street, spaciouly and loftily arched with elms, the houses standing liberally apart, each with its garden-plot in front. The fourth avenue is the old Boston road, also dividing, at the edge of the village, into the direct route to the metropolis and the Lexington turnpike.

The house of Mr. Emerson stands opposite this junction. It is a plain, square white dwelling-house, yet it has a city air and could not be mistaken for a farm-house. A quiet merchant, you would say, unostentatious and simple, has here hidden himself from town. But a thick grove of pine and fir trees, almost brushing the two windows upon the right of the door, and occupying the space between them and the road, suggests at least a peculiar taste in the retired merchant, or hints the possibility that he may have sold his place to a poet or philosopher—or to some old East India sea-captain, perhaps, who cannot sleep without the sound of waves, and so plants pines to rustle, surf-like, against his chamber window.

The fact, strangely enough, partly supports your theory. In the year 1828 Charles Coolidge, a brother of J. Templeman Coolidge, a merchant of repute in Boston and grandson of Joseph Coolidge,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

a patriarchal denizen of Bowdoin Square in that city, came to Concord and built this house. Gratefully remembering the lofty horse-chestnuts which shaded the city square, and which, perhaps, first inspired him with the wish to be a nearer neighbor of woods and fields, he planted a row of them along his lot, which this year ripen their twenty-fifth harvest. With the liberal hospitality of a New England merchant he did not forget the spacious cellars of the city, and, as Mr. Emerson writes, "he built the only good cellar that had then been built in Concord".

Mr. Emerson bought the house in the year 1835. He found it a plain, convenient, and thoroughly built country residence. An amiable neighbor of Mr. Coolidge had placed a miserable old barn irregularly upon the edge of that gentleman's lot, which, for the sake of comeliness, he was forced to buy and set straight and smooth into a decent dependence of the mansion house. The estate, upon passing into Mr. Emerson's hands, comprised the house, barn, and two acres of land. He has enlarged house and barn, and the two acres have grown to nine. Our author is no farmer, except as every country gentleman is, yet the kindly slope from the rear of the house to a little brook, which, passing to the calm Concord beyond, washes the edge of his land, yields him at least occasional beans and pease—or some friend, agriculturally enthusiastic and an original Brook-Farmer, experiments with guano in the garden, and produces melons and other vines with a success that relieves Brook Farm from every slur of inadequate practical genius. Mr. Emerson has shaded his originally bare land with trees, and counts near a hundred apple and pear trees in his orchard. The whole estate is quite level, inclining only towards the little brook, and is well watered and convenient.

The Orphic Alcott—or Plato Skimpole, as Aspasia called him—well known in the transcendental history of New England, designed and with his own hands erected a summer-house, which gracefully adorns the lawn, if I may so call the smooth grass-plot at the side of the house. Unhappily, this edifice promises no longer duration, not being "technically based and pointed". This is not a strange, although a disagreeable fact, to Mr. Emerson, who has been always the most faithful and appreciative of the lovers of Mr. Alcott. It is natural that the Orphic Alcott should build graceful summer-houses. There are even people who declare that he has covered the pleasant but somewhat misty lawns of ethical speculation with a thousand such edifices, which need only to be a little more "technically based and pointed" to be quite perfect. At present they whisper, the wind blows clean through them, and no figures of flesh and blood are ever seen there, but only pallid phantoms with large, calm eyes, eating uncooked grain, out of baskets, and discoursing in a sublime shibboleth of which mortals have no key. But how could Plato Skimpole, who goes down to Hingham on the sea, in a New England January, clad only in a suit of linen, hope to build immortal summer-houses? Mr. Emerson's library is the room at the right of the door upon



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

entering the house. It is a simple square room, not walled with books like the den of a literary grub, nor merely elegant like the ornamental retreat of a dilettante. The books are arranged upon plain shelves, not in architectural bookcases, and the room is hung with a few choice engravings of the greatest men. There was a fair copy of Michael Angelo's "Fates", which, properly enough, imparted that grave serenity to the ornament of the room which is always apparent in what is written there. It is the study of a scholar. All our author's published writings, the essays, orations, and poems, date from this room, as much as they date from any place or moment. The villagers, indeed, fancy their philosophical contemporary affected by the novelist James's constancy of composition. They relate, with wide eyes, that he has a huge manuscript book, in which he incessantly records the ends of thoughts, bits of observation and experience, and facts of all kinds—a kind of intellectual and scientific ragbag, into which all shreds and remnants of conversations and reminiscences of wayside reveries are incontinently thrust. This work goes on, they aver, day and night, and when he travels the rag-bag travels too, and grows more plethoric with each mile of the journey. And a story, which will one day be a tradition, is perpetuated in the village, that one night, before his wife had become completely accustomed to his habits, she awoke suddenly, and hearing him groping about the room, inquired anxiously,

"My dear, are you unwell?"

"No, my love, only an idea."

The library is not only the study of a scholar, it is the bower of a poet. The pines lean against the windows, and to the student deeply sunk in learned lore or soaring upon the daring speculations of an intrepid philosophy, they whisper a secret beyond that of the philosopher's stone, and sing of the springs of poetry.

The site of the house is not memorable. There is no reasonable ground to suppose that so much as an Indian wigwam ever occupied the spot; nor has Henry Thoreau, a very faithful friend of Mr. Emerson's and of the woods and waters of his native Concord, ever found an Indian arrowhead upon the premises. Henry Thoreau's instinct is as sure towards the facts of nature as the witch-hazel towards treasure. If every quiet country town in New England had a son who, with a lore like Selborne's and an eye like Buffon's, had watched and studied its landscape and history, and then published the result, as Thoreau has done, in a book as redolent of genuine and perceptive sympathy with nature as a clover-field of honey, New England would seem as poetic and beautiful as Greece. Thoreau lives in the berry pastures upon a bank over Walden Pond, and in a little house of his own building. One pleasant summer afternoon a small party of us helped him raise it—a bit of life as Arcadian as any at Brook Farm. Elsewhere in the village he turns up arrowheads abundantly, and Hawthorne mentions that Thoreau initiated him



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

into the mystery of finding them. But neither the Indians nor nature nor Thoreau can invest the quiet residence of our author with the dignity or even the suspicion of a legend. History stops short in that direction with Charles Coolidge, Esq., and the year 1828.

There is little prospect from the house. Directly opposite a low bluff overhangs the Boston road and obstructs the view. Upon the other sides the level land stretches away. Towards Lexington it is a broad, half-marshy region, and between the brook behind and the river good farms lie upon the outskirts of the town. Pilgrims drawn to Concord by the desire of conversing with the man whose written or spoken eloquence has so profoundly charmed them, and who have placed him in some pavilion of fancy, some peculiar residence, find him in no porch of philosophy nor academic grove, but in a plain white house by the wayside, ready to entertain every comer as an ambassador from some remote Cathay of speculation whence the stars are more nearly seen. But the familiar reader of our author will not be surprised to find the "walking eye-ball" simply sheltered, and the "endless experimenter with no past at my back" housed without ornament. Such a reader will have felt the Spartan severity of this intellect, and have noticed that the realm of this imagination is rather sculpturesque than pictorial, more Greek than Italian. Therefore he will be pleased to alight at the little gate, and hear the breezy welcome of the pines and the no less cordial salutation of their owner. For if the visitor knows what he is about, he has come to this plain for bracing mountain air. These serious Concord reaches are no vale of Cashmere. Where Plato Skimpole is architect of the summer-house, you may imagine what is to be expected in the mansion itself. It is always morning within those doors. If you have nothing to say, if you are really not an envoy from some kingdom or colony of thought and cannot cast a gem upon the heaped pile, you had better pass by upon the other side. For it is the peculiarity of Emerson's mind to be always on the alert. He eats no lotus, but for-ever quaffs the waters which engender immortal thirst.

If the memorabilia of his house could find their proper Xenophon, the want of antecedent arrowheads upon the premises would not prove very disastrous to the interest of the history. The fame of the philosopher attracts admiring friends and enthusiasts from every quarter, and the scholarly grace and urbane hospitality of the gentleman send them charmed away. Friendly foes, who altogether differ from Emerson, come to break a lance with him upon the level pastures of Concord, with all the cheerful and appreciative zeal of those who longed

"To drink delight of battle with their peers
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy."

It is not hazardous to say that the greatest questions of our day and of all days have been nowhere more amply discussed, with more poetic insight or profound conviction, than in the comely, square white house upon the edge of the Lexington turnpike.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

There have even been attempts at something more formal and club-like than the chance conversations of occasional guests, one of which will certainly be nowhere recorded but upon these pages. It was in the year 1845 that a circle of persons of various ages, and differing very much in everything but sympathy, found themselves in Concord. Towards the end of the autumn Mr. Emerson suggested that they should meet every Monday evening through the winter in his library. "Monsieur Aubepine", "Miles Coverdale", and other phantoms, since generally known as Nathaniel Hawthorne, who then occupied the Old Manse; the inflexible Henry Thoreau, a scholastic and pastoral Orson, then living among the blackberry pastures of Walden Pond; Plato Skimpole, then sublimely meditating impossible summer-houses in a little house upon the Boston road; the enthusiastic agriculturist and Brook-Farmer already mentioned, then an inmate of Mr. Emerson's house, who added the genial cultivation of a scholar to the amenities of the natural gentleman; a sturdy farmer neighbor, who had bravely fought his weary way through inherited embarrassments to the small success of a New England husbandman, and whose faithful wife had seven times merited well of her country; two city youths, ready for the fragments from the feast of wit and wisdom; and the host himself, composed this club. Ellery Channing, who had that winter harnessed his Pegasus to the New York Tribune, was a kind of corresponding member. The news of this world was to be transmitted through his eminently practical genius, as the club deemed itself competent to take charge of tidings from all other spheres.

I went, the first Monday evening, very much as Ixion may have gone to his banquet. The philosophers sat dignified and erect. There was a constrained but very amiable silence, which had the impertinence of a tacit inquiry, seeming to ask, "Who will now proceed to say the finest thing that has ever been said?" It was quite involuntary and unavoidable, for the members lacked that fluent social genius without which a club is impossible. It was a congress of oracles on the one hand, and of curious listeners upon the other. I vaguely remember that the Orphic Alcott invaded the Sahara of silence with a solemn "saying", to which, after due pause, the honorable member for blackberry pastures responded by some keen and graphic observation; while the Olympian host, anxious that so much good material should be spun into something, beamed smiling encouragement upon all parties. But the conversation became more and more staccato. Miles Coverdale, a statue of night and silence, sat, a little removed, under a portrait of Dante, gazing imperturbably upon the group; and as he sat in the shadow, his dark hair and eyes and suit of sables made him, in that society, the black thread of mystery which he weaves into his stories, while the shifting presence of the Brook-Farmer played like heat-lightning around the room. I recall little else but a grave eating of russet apples by the erect philosophers, and a solemn disappearance into night. The club struggled through three Monday evenings. Plato was perpetually putting apples of gold in pictures of silver; for



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

such was the rich ore of his thoughts, coined by the deep melody of his voice. Orson charmed us with the secrets won from his interviews with Pan in the Walden woods; while Emerson, with the zeal of an engineer trying to dam wild waters, sought to bind the wide-flying embroidery of discourse into a web of clear sweet sense. But still in vain. The oracular sayings were the unalloyed saccharine element; and every chemist knows how much else goes to practical food—how much coarse, rough, woody fibre is essential. The club struggled on valiantly, discoursing celestially, eating apples, and disappearing in the dark, until the third evening it vanished altogether. But I have since known clubs of fifty times its number, whose collective genius was not more than that of either one of the Dii Majores of our Concord coterie. The fault was its too great concentration. It was not relaxation, as a club should be, but tension. Society is a play, a game, a tournament; not a battle. It is the easy grace of undress; not an intellectual full-dress parade.

I have already hinted this unbending intellectual alacrity of our author. His sport is serious—his humor is earnest. He stands like a sentinel. His look and manner and habit of thought cry "Who goes there?" and if he does not hear the countersign, he brings the intruder to a halt. It is for this surprising fidelity and integrity that his influence has been so deep and sure and permanent upon the intellectual life of the young men of New England; and of old England, too, where, in Manchester, there were regular weekly meetings at which his works were read. What he said long ago in his preface to the American edition of Carlyle's MISCELLANIES, that they were papers which had spoken to the young men of the time "with an emphasis that hindered them from sleep", is strikingly true of his own writings. His first slim, anonymous duodecimo, NATURE, was as fair and fascinating to the royal young minds who met it in the course of their reading, as Egeria to Numa wandering in the grove. The essays, orations, and poems followed, developing and elaborating the same spiritual and heroic philosophy, applying it to life, history, and literature, with a vigor and richness so supreme that not only do many account him our truest philosopher, but others acknowledge him as our most characteristic poet.

It would be a curious inquiry how much and what kind of influence the placid scenery of Concord has exercised upon his mind. "I chide society, I embrace solitude," he says; "and yet I am not so ungrateful as not to see the wise, the lovely, and the noble-minded, as from time to time they pass my gate." It is not difficult to understand his fondness for the spot. He has been always familiar with it, always more or less a resident of the village. Born in Boston upon the spot where the Chauncey Place Church now stands, part of his youth was passed in the Old Manse, which was built by his grandfather and in which his father was born; and there he wrote NATURE. From the magnificent admiration of ancestral England he was glad to return two years since to quiet Concord and to acres which will not yield a single arrowhead. The Swiss sigh for their mountains; but the Nubians,

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

also, pine for their desert plains. Those who are born by the sea long annually to return and to rest their eyes upon its living horizon. Is it because the earliest impressions, made when the mind is most plastic, are most durable? or because youth is that golden age bounding the confines of memory and floating forever—an alluring mirage as we recede farther from it?

The imagination of the man who roams the solitary pastures of Concord, or floats, dreaming, down its river, will easily see its landscape upon Emerson's pages. "That country is fairest," he says, "which is inhabited by the noblest minds." And although that idler upon the river may have leaned over the Mediterranean from Genoese and Neapolitan villas, or have glanced down the steep green valley of Sicilian Enna, seeking "herself the fairest flower", or walked the shores where Cleopatra and Helen walked, yet the charm of a landscape which is felt rather than seen will be imperishable. "Travelling is a fool's paradise," says Emerson. But he passed its gates to learn that lesson. His writings, however, have no imported air. If there be something Oriental in his philosophy and tropical in his imagination, they have yet the strong flavor of his mother earth—the underived sweetness of the open Concord sky, and the spacious breadth of the Concord horizon.

[George William Curtis](#) published an essay about [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#). (This would be reprinted in 1895 in Curtis's LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

HAWTHORNE²³

Hawthorne has himself drawn the picture of the Old Manse in Concord. He has given to it that quiet richness of coloring which ideally belongs to an old country mansion. It seemed so fitting a residence for one who loves to explore the twilight of antiquity—and the gloomier the better—that the visitor, among the felicities of whose life was included the freedom of the Manse, could not but fancy that our author's eyes first saw the daylight enchanted by the slumberous orchard behind the house, or tranquillized into twilight by the spacious avenue in front. The character of his imagination, and the golden gloom of its blossoming, completely harmonize with the rusty, gable-roofed old house upon the river-side, and the reader of his books would be sure that his boyhood and youth knew no other friends than the dreaming river and the melancholy meadows and drooping foliage of its vicinity.

Since the reader, however, would greatly mistake if he fancied this, in good sooth, the ancestral halls of the Hawthornes—the genuine Hawthorne-den—he will be glad to save the credit of his fancy by learning that it was here our author's bridal tour—which commenced in Boston, then three hours away—ended, and his married life began. Here, also, his first child was born, and here those sad and silver mosses accumulated upon his fancy, from which he heaped so soft a bed for our dreaming. "Between two tall gate-posts of rough hewn stone (the gate itself having fallen from its hinges at some unknown epoch) we beheld the gray front of the old parsonage, terminating the vista of an avenue of black-ash trees." It was a pleasant spring day in the year 1843, and as they entered the house nosegays of fresh flowers, arranged by friendly hands, welcomed them to Concord and summer. The dark-haired man, who led his wife along the avenue that afternoon, had been recently an officer of the customs in Boston, before which he had led a solitary life in Salem. Graduated with Longfellow at Bowdoin College, in Maine, he had lived a hermit in respectable Salem, an absolute recluse even from his own family, walking out by night and writing wild tales by day, most of which were burnt in his bachelor fire, and some of which, in newspapers, magazines, and annuals, led a wandering, uncertain, and mostly unnoticed life.

Those tales among this class which were attainable he collected into a small volume, and apprizing the world that they were "twice-told", sent them forth anew to make their own way, in the year 1841. But he piped to the world, and it did not sing. He wept to it, and it did not mourn. The book, however, as all good books do, made its way into various hearts. Yet the few penetrant minds which recognized a remarkable power and a method of strange fascination in the stories did not make the public nor influence the public mind. "I was," he says in the last edition

23. [George William Curtis, HOMES OF AMERICAN AUTHORS](#), 1854, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of these tales, "the most unknown author in America". Full of glancing wit, of tender satire, of exquisite natural description, of subtle and strange analysis of human life, darkly passionate and weird, they yet floated unhailed barks upon the sea of publicity—unhailed, but laden and gleaming at every crevice with the true treasure of Cathay. Bancroft, then Collector in Boston, prompt to recognize and to honor talent, made the dreaming story-teller a surveyor in the custom-house, thus opening to him a new range of experience. From the society of phantoms he stepped upon Long Wharf and plumply confronted Captain Cuttle and Dirk Hatteraick. It was no less romance to our author. There is no greater error of those who are called "practical men" than the supposition that life is, or can be, other than a dream to a dreamer. Shut him up in a counting-room, barricade him with bales of merchandise, and limit his library to the ledger and cash-book and his prospect to the neighboring signs; talk "Bills receivable" and "Sundries Dr. to cash" to him forever, and you are only a very amusing or very annoying phantom to him. The merchant-prince might as well hope to make himself a poet, as the poet a practical or practicable man. He has laws to obey not at all the less stringent because men of a different temperament refuse to acknowledge them, and he is held to a loyalty quite beyond their conception.

So Captain Cuttle and Dirk Hatteraick were as pleasant figures to our author in the picture of life as any others. He went daily upon the vessels, looked and listened and learned, was a favorite of the sailors as such men always are, did his work faithfully, and, having dreamed his dream upon Long Wharf, was married and slipped up to the Old Manse and a new chapter in the romance. It opened in "the most delightful little nook of a study that ever offered its snug seclusion to a scholar". Of the three years in the Old Manse the prelude to the MOSSSES is the most perfect history, and of the quality of those years the MOSSSES themselves are sufficient proof. They were mostly written in the little study, and originally published in the Democratic Review, then edited by Hawthorne's friend O'Sullivan.

To the inhabitants of Concord, however, our author was as much a phantom and a fable as the old pastor of the parish, dead half a century before, and whose faded portrait in the attic was gradually rejoining its original in native dust. The gate, fallen from its hinges in a remote antiquity, was never rehung. "The wheel-track leading to the door" remained still overgrown with grass. No bold villager ever invaded the sleep of "the glimmering shadows" in the avenue. At evening no lights gleamed from the windows. Scarce once in many months did the single old knobby-faced coachman at the railroad bring a fare to "Mr. Hawthorne's". "Is there anybody in the old house?" sobbed the old ladies in despair, imbibing tea of a livid green. That knocker, which everybody had enjoyed the right of lifting to summon the good old pastor, no temerity now dared to touch. Heavens! what if the figure in the mouldy portrait should peer, in answer, over the eaves, and shake solemnly its decaying



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

surplice! Nay, what if the mysterious man himself should answer the summons and come to the door! It is easy to summon spirits—but if they come? Collective Concord, moving in the river meadows, embraced the better part of valor and left the knocker untouched. A cloud of romance suddenly fell out of the heaven of fancy and enveloped the Old Manse:

“In among the bearded barley
The reaper reaping late and early”

did not glance more wistfully towards the island of Shalott and its mysterious lady than the reapers of Concord rye looked at the Old Manse and wondered over its inmate. Sometimes in the forenoon a darkly clad figure was seen in the little garden-plot putting in corn or melon seed, and gravely hoeing. It was a brief apparition. The farmer passing towards town and seeing the solitary cultivator, lost his faith in the fact and believed he had dreamed when, upon returning, he saw no sign of life, except, possibly, upon some Monday, the ghostly skirt of a shirt flapping spectrally in the distant orchard. Day dawned and darkened over the lonely house. Summer with “buds and bird-voices” came singing in from the South, and clad the old ash-trees in deeper green, the Old Manse in profounder mystery. Gorgeous autumn came to visit the story-teller in his little western study, and, departing, wept rainbows among his trees. Winter impatiently swept down the hill opposite, rifling the trees of each last clinging bit of summer, as if thrusting aside opposing barriers and determined to search the mystery. But his white robes floated around the Old Manse, ghostly as the decaying surplice of the old pastor’s portrait, and in the snowy seclusion of winter the mystery was as mysterious as ever. Occasionally Emerson or Ellery Channing or Henry Thoreau—some poet, as once Whittier, journeying to the Merrimac, or an old Brook-Farmer who remembered Miles Coverdale with Arcadian sympathy—went down the avenue and disappeared in the house. Sometimes a close observer, had he been ambushed among the long grasses of the orchard, might have seen the host and one of his guests emerging at the back door and, sauntering to the river-side, step into the boat, and float off until they faded in the shadow. The spectacle would not have lessened the romance. If it were afternoon—one of the spectrally sunny afternoons which often bewitch that region—he would be only the more convinced that there was something inexplicable in the whole matter of this man whom nobody knew, who was never once seen at town-meeting, and concerning whom it was whispered that he did not constantly attend church all day, although he occupied the reverend parsonage of the village and had unmeasured acres of manuscript sermons in his attic, besides the nearly extinct portrait of an utterly extinct clergyman. Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis were nothing to this, and the awe-stricken observer, if he could creep safely out of the long grass, did not fail to do so quietly, fortifying his courage by remembering stories of the genial humanity of the last old pastor who inhabited the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Manse, and who for fifty years was the bland and beneficent Pope of Concord. A genial, gracious old man, whose memory is yet sweet in the village, and who, wedded to the grave traditions of New England theology, believed of his young relative Waldo Emerson, as Miss Flite, touching her forehead, said of her landlord, that he was "m, quite m", but was proud to love in him the hereditary integrity of noble ancestors.

This old gentleman—an eminent figure in the history of the Manse and in all reminiscences of Concord—partook sufficiently of mundane weaknesses to betray his mortality. Hawthorne describes him watching the battle of Concord from his study window. But when the uncertainty of that dark moment had so happily resulted, and the first battle-ground of the Revolution had become a spot of hallowed and patriotic consideration, it was a pardonable pride in the good old man to order his servant, whenever there was company, to assist him in reaping the glory due to the owner of a spot so sacred. Accordingly, when some reverend or distinguished guest sat with the pastor in his little parlor, or, of a summer evening, at the hospitable door under the trees, Jeremiah or Nicodemus, the cow-boy, would deferentially approach and inquire,

"Into what pasture shall I turn the cow tonight, sir?"

And the old gentleman would audibly reply:

"Into the battle-field, Nicodemus, into the battle-field."

Then naturally followed wonder, inquiry, a walk in the twilight to the river-bank, the old gentleman's story, the corresponding respect of the listening visitor, and the consequent quiet complacency and harmless satisfaction in the clergyman's bosom. That throb of pride was the one drop of peculiar advantage which the pastor distilled from the Revolution. He could not but fancy that he had a hand in so famous a deed accomplished upon land now his own, and demeaned himself accordingly with continental dignity.

The pulpit, however, was his especial sphere. There he reigned supreme; there he exhorted, rebuked, and advised, as in the days of Mather. There he inspired that profound reverence of which he was so proud, and which induced the matrons of the village, when he was coming to make a visit, to bedizen the children in their Sunday suits, to parade the best teapot, and to offer the most capacious chair. In the pulpit he delivered everything with the pompous cadence of the elder New England clergy, and a sly joke is told at the expense of his even temper, that on one occasion, when loftily reading the hymn, he encountered a blot upon the page quite obliterating the word; but without losing the cadence, although in a very vindictive tone at the truant word, or the culprit who erased it, he finished the reading as follows:

"He sits upon His throne above, Attending angels bless,
While Justice, Mercy, Truth—and another word which is



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

blotted out— Compose His princely dress.”

We linger around the Old Manse and its occupants as fondly as Hawthorne, but no more fondly than all who have been once within the influence of its spell. There glimmer in my memory a few hazy days, of a tranquil and half-pensive character, which I am conscious were passed in and around the house, and their pensiveness I know to be only that touch of twilight which inhered in the house and all its associations. Beside the few chance visitors I have named there were city friends occasionally, figures quite unknown to the village, who came preceded by the steam-shriek of the locomotive, were dropped at the gate-posts, and were seen no more. The owner was as much a vague name to me as to any one.

During Hawthorne's first year's residence in Concord I had driven up with some friends to an aesthetic tea at Mr. Emerson's. It was in the winter, and a great wood-fire blazed upon the hospitable hearth. There were various men and women of note assembled, and I, who listened attentively to all the fine things that were said, was for some time scarcely aware of a man who sat upon the edge of the circle, a little withdrawn, his head slightly thrown forward upon his breast, and his bright eyes clearly burning under his black brow. As I drifted down the stream of talk, this person, who sat silent as a shadow, looked to me as Webster might have looked had he been a poet—a kind of poetic Webster. He rose and walked to the window, and stood quietly there for a long time, watching the dead white landscape. No appeal was made to him, nobody looked after him, the conversation flowed steadily on as if every one understood that his silence was to be respected. It was the same thing at table. In vain the silent man imbibed aesthetic tea. Whatever fancies it inspired did not flower at his lips. But there was a light in his eye which assured me that nothing was lost. So supreme was his silence that it presently engrossed me to the exclusion of everything else. There was very brilliant discourse, but this silence was much more poetic and fascinating. Fine things were said by the philosophers, but much finer things were implied by the dumbness of this gentleman with heavy brows and black hair. When he presently rose and went, Emerson, with the "slow, wise smile" that breaks over his face, like day over the sky, said, "Hawthorne rides well his horse of the night."

Thus he remained in my memory, a shadow, a phantom, until more than a year afterwards. Then I came to live in Concord. Every day I passed his house, but when the villagers, thinking that perhaps I had some clue to the mystery, said, "Do you know this Mr. Hawthorne?" I said "No," and trusted to time.

Time justified my confidence, and one day I, too, went down the avenue and disappeared in the house. I mounted those mysterious stairs to that apocryphal study. I saw "the cheerful coat of paint, and golden-tinted paper-hangings, lighting up the small apartment; while the shadow of a willow-tree, that swept against the overhanging eaves, attempered the cheery western sunshine."



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

I looked from the little northern window whence the old pastor watched the battle, and in the small dining-room beneath it, upon the first floor, there were

“Dainty chicken, snow-white bread,”

and the golden juices of Italian vineyards, which still feast insatiable memory.

Our author occupied the Old Manse for three years. During that time he was not seen, probably, by more than a dozen of the villagers. His walks could easily avoid the town, and upon the river he was always sure of solitude. It was his favorite habit to bathe every evening in the river, after nightfall, and in that part of it over which the old bridge stood, at which the battle was fought. Sometimes, but rarely, his boat accompanied another up the stream, and I recall the silent and preternatural vigor with which, on one occasion, he wielded his paddle to counteract the bad rowing of a friend who conscientiously considered it his duty to do something and not let Hawthorne work alone; but who, with every stroke, neutralized all Hawthorne's efforts. I suppose he would have struggled until he fell senseless, rather than ask his friend to desist. His principle seemed to be, if a man cannot understand without talking to him, it is quite useless to talk, because it is immaterial whether such a man understands or not. His own sympathy was so broad and sure that although nothing had been said for hours his companion knew that not a thing had escaped his eye, nor had a single pulse of beauty in the day or scene or society failed to thrill his heart. In this way his silence was most social. Everything seemed to have been said. It was a Barmecide feast of discourse, from which a greater satisfaction resulted than from an actual banquet.

When a formal attempt was made to desert this style of conversation, the result was ludicrous. Once Emerson and Thoreau arrived to pay a call. They were shown into the little parlor upon the avenue, and Hawthorne presently entered. Each of the guests sat upright in his chair like a Roman senator. “To them” Hawthorne, like a Dacian king. The call went on, but in a most melancholy manner. The host sat perfectly still, or occasionally propounded a question which Thoreau answered accurately, and there the thread broke short off. Emerson delivered sentences that only needed the setting of an essay to charm the world; but the whole visit was a vague ghost of the Monday-evening club at Mr. Emerson's—it was a great failure. Had they all been lying idly upon the river brink, or strolling in Thoreau's blackberry pastures, the result would have been utterly different. But imprisoned in the proprieties of a parlor, each a wild man in his way, with a necessity of talking inherent in the nature of the occasion, there was only a waste of treasure. This was the only “call” in which I ever knew Hawthorne to be involved.

In Mr. Emerson's house, I said, it seemed always morning. But Hawthorne's black-ash trees and scraggy apple-boughs shaded

“a land in which it seemed always afternoon.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

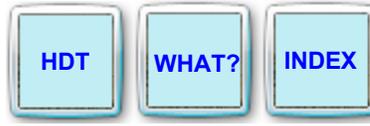
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

I do not doubt that the lotus grew along the grassy marge of the Concord behind his house, and it was served, subtly concealed, to all his guests. The house, its inmates, and its life lay, dream-like, upon the edge of the little village. You fancied that they all came together and belonged together, and were glad that at length some idol of your imagination, some poet whose spell had held you and would hold you forever, was housed as such a poet should be.

During the lapse of the three years since the bridal tour of twenty miles ended at the "two tall gate-posts of rough-hewn stone", a little wicker wagon had appeared at intervals upon the avenue, and a placid babe, whose eyes the soft Concord day had touched with the blue of its beauty, lay looking tranquilly up at the grave old trees, which sighed lofty lullabies over her sleep. The tranquillity of the golden-haired Una was the living and breathing type of the dreamy life of the Old Manse. Perhaps, that being attained, it was as well to go. Perhaps our author was not surprised nor displeased when the hints came, "growing more and more distinct, that the owner of the old house was pining for his native air". One afternoon I entered the study, and learned from its occupant that the last story he should ever write there was written. The son of the old pastor yearned for his homestead. The light of another summer would seek its poet in the Old Manse, but in vain.

While Hawthorne had been quietly writing in the "most delightful little nook of a study", Mr. Polk had been elected President, and Mr. Bancroft, in the cabinet, did not forget his old friend, the surveyor in the custom-house. There came suggestions and offers of various attractions. Still loving New England, would he tarry there, or, as inspector of woods and forests in some far-away island of the southern sea, some hazy strip of distance seen from Florida, would he taste the tropics? He meditated all the chances, without immediately deciding. Gathering up his household gods, he passed out of the Old Manse as its heir entered, and before the end of summer was domesticated in the custom-house of his native town of Salem. This was in the year 1846. Upon leaving the Old Manse he published the *MOSSSES*, announcing that it was the last collection of tales he should put forth. Those who knew him and recognized his value to our literature trembled lest this was the last word from one who spoke only pearls and rubies. It was a foolish fear. The sun must shine, the sea must roll, the bird must sing, and the poet write. During his life in Salem, of which the introduction to *THE SCARLET LETTER* describes the official aspect, he wrote that romance. It is inspired by the spirit of the place. It presents more vividly than any history the gloomy picturesqueness of early New England life. There is no strain in our literature so characteristic or more real than that which Hawthorne had successfully attempted in several of his earlier sketches, and of which *THE SCARLET LETTER* is the great triumph. It became immediately popular, and directly placed the writer of stories for a small circle among the world's masters of romance.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Times meanwhile changed, and presidents with them. General Taylor was elected, and the Salem collector retired. It is one of the romantic points of Hawthorne's quiet life that its changes have been so frequently determined by political events, which, more than all others, are the most entirely foreign to his tastes and habits. He retired to the hills of Berkshire, the eye of the world now regarding his movements. There he lived a year or two in a little red cottage upon the "Stockbridge Bowl", as a small lake near that town is called. In this retreat he wrote *THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES*, which more deeply confirmed the literary position already acquired for him by the first romance. The scene is laid in Salem, as if he could not escape a strange fascination in the witch-haunted town of our early history. It is the same black canvas upon which plays the rainbow-flash of his fancy, never, in its brightest moment, more than illuminating the gloom. This marks all his writings. They have a terrible beauty, like the siren, and their fascination is as sure.

After six years of absence Hawthorne returned to Concord, where he purchased a small house formerly occupied by Orphic Alcott. When that philosopher came into possession it was a miserable little house of two peaked gables. But the genius which recreated itself in devising graceful summer-houses, like that for Mr. Emerson, already noticed, soon smoothed the new residence into some kind of comeliness. It was an old house when Mr. Alcott entered it, but his tasteful finger touched it with picturesque grace.

Not like a tired old drudge of a house, rusting into unlionored decay, but with a modest freshness that does not belie the innate sobriety of a venerable New England farm-house, the present residence of our author stands, withdrawn a few yards from the high-road to Boston, along which marched the British soldiers to Concord bridge. It lies at the foot of a wooded hill, a neat house of a "rusty olive hue", with a porch in front, and a central peak, and a piazza at each end. The genius for summer-houses has had full play upon the hill behind. Here, upon the homely steppes of Concord, is a strain of Persia. Mr. Alcott built terraces and arbors and pavilions of boughs and rough stems of trees, revealing—somewhat inadequately, perhaps—the hanging gardens of delight that adorn the Babylon of his orphic imagination. The hill-side is no unapt emblem of his intellectual habit, which garnishes the arid commonplaces of life with a cold poetic aurora, forgetting that it is the inexorable law of light to deform as well as adorn. Treating life as a grand epic poem, the philosophic Alcott forgets that Homer must nod or we should all fall asleep. The world would not be very beautiful nor interesting if it were all one huge summit of Mont Blanc.

Unhappily, the terraced hill-side, like the summer-house upon Mr. Emerson's lawn, "lacks technical arrangement", and the wild winds play with these architectural toys of fancy, like lions with humming-birds. They are gradually falling, shattered, and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

disappearing. Fine locust-trees shade them and ornament the hill with perennial beauty. The hanging gardens of Semiramis were not more fragrant than Hawthorne's hill-side during the June blossoming of the locusts. A few young elms, some white-pines and young oaks, complete the catalogue of trees. A light breeze constantly fans the brow of the hill, making harps of the tree-tops and singing to our author, who, "with a book in my hand, or an unwritten book in my thoughts", lies stretched beneath them in the shade.

From the height of the hill the eye courses, unrestrained, over the solitary landscape of Concord, broad and still, broken only by the slight wooded undulations of insignificant hillocks. The river is not visible, nor any gleam of lake. Walden Pond is just behind the wood in front, and not far away over the meadows sluggishly steals the river. It is the most quiet of prospects. Eight acres of good land lie in front of the house, across the road, and in the rear the estate extends a little distance over the brow of the hill.

This latter is not good garden-ground, but it yields that other crop which the poet "gathers in a song". Perhaps the world will forgive our author that he is not a prize farmer, and makes but an indifferent figure at the annual cattle-show. We have seen that he is more nomadic than agricultural. He has wandered from spot to spot, pitching a temporary tent, then striking it for "fresh fields and pastures new". It is natural, therefore, that he should call his house "The Wayside"—a bench upon the road where he sits for a while before passing on. If the wayfarer finds him upon that bench he shall have rare pleasure in sitting with him, yet shudder while he stays. For the pictures of our poet have more than the shadows of Rembrandt. If you listen to his story, the lonely pastures and dull towns of our dear old homely New England shall become suddenly as radiant with grace and terrible with tragedy as any country and any time. The waning afternoon in Concord, in which the blue-frosted farmers are reaping and hoeing, shall set in pensive glory. The woods will forever after be haunted with strange forms. You will hear whispers and music "i' the air". In the softest morning you will suspect sadness; in the most fervent noon a nameless terror. It is because the imagination of our author treads the almost imperceptible line between the natural and the supernatural. We are all conscious of striking it sometimes. But we avoid it. We recoil and hurry away, nor dare to glance over our shoulders lest we should see phantoms. What are these tales of supernatural appearances, as well authenticated as any news of the day—and what is the sphere which they imply? What is the more subtle intellectual apprehension of fate and its influence upon imagination and life? Whatever it is, it is the mystery of the fascination of these tales. They converse with that dreadful realm as with our real world. The light of our sun is poured by genius upon the phantoms we did not dare to contemplate, and lo! they are ourselves, unmasked, and playing our many parts. An unutterable sadness seizes the reader as the inevitable black



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

thread appears. For here genius assures us what we trembled to suspect, but could not avoid suspecting, that the black thread is inwoven with all forms of life, with all development of character.

It is for this peculiarity, which harmonizes so well with ancient places, whose pensive silence seems the trance of memory musing over the young and lovely life that illuminated its lost years—that Hawthorne is so intimately associated with the Old Manse. Yet that was but the tent of a night for him. Already, with the BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, which is dated from Concord, a new interest begins to cluster around "The Wayside".

I know not how I can more fitly conclude these reminiscences of Concord and Hawthorne, whose own stories have always a saddening close, than by relating an occurrence which blighted to many hearts the beauty of the quiet Concord river, and seemed not inconsistent with its lonely landscape. It has the further fitness of typifying the operation of our author's imagination: a tranquil stream, clear and bright with sunny gleams, crowned with lilies and graceful with swaying grass, yet doing terrible deeds inexorably, and therefore forever after of a shadowed beauty.

Martha was the daughter of a plain Concord farmer, a girl of delicate and shy temperament, who excelled so much in study that she was sent to a fine academy in a neighboring town, and won all the honors of the course. She met at the school, and in the society of the place, a refinement and cultivation, a social gayety and grace, which were entirely unknown in the hard life she had led at home, and which by their very novelty, as well as because they harmonized with her own nature and dreams, were doubly beautiful and fascinating. She enjoyed this life to the full, while her timidity kept her only a spectator; and she ornamented it with a fresher grace, suggestive of the woods and fields, when she ventured to engage in the airy game. It was a sphere for her capacities and talents. She shone in it, and the consciousness of a true position and general appreciation gave her the full use of all her powers. She admired and was admired. She was surrounded by gratifications of taste, by the stimulants and rewards of ambition. The world was happy, and she was worthy to live in it. But at times a cloud suddenly dashed athwart the sun—a shadow stole, dark and chill, to the very edge of the charmed circle in which she stood. She knew well what it was and what it foretold, but she would not pause nor heed. The sun shone again; the future smiled; youth, beauty, and all gentle hopes and thoughts bathed the moment in lambent light.

But school-days ended at last, and with the receding town in which they had been passed the bright days of life disappeared, and forever. It is probable that the girl's fancy had been fed, perhaps indiscreetly pampered, by her experience there. But it was no fairy-land. It was an academy town in New England, and the fact that it was so alluring is a fair indication of the kind of life from which she had emerged, and to which she now returned. What could she do? In the dreary round of petty



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

details, in the incessant drudgery of a poor farmer's household, with no companions of any sympathy—for the family of a hard-working New England farmer are not the Chloes and Clarissas of pastoral poetry, nor are cow-boys Corydons—with no opportunity of retirement and cultivation, for reading and studying—which is always voted "stuff" under such circumstances—the light suddenly quenched out of life, what was she to do?

"Adapt herself to her circumstances. Why had she shot from her sphere in this silly way?" demands unanimous common-sense in valiant heroics.

The simple answer is, that she had only used all her opportunities, and that, although it was no fault of hers that the routine of her life was in every way repulsive, she did struggle to accommodate herself to it—and failed. When she found it impossible to drag on at home, she became an inmate of a refined and cultivated household in the village, where she had opportunity to follow her own fancies, and to associate with educated and attractive persons. But even here she could not escape the feeling that it was all temporary, that her position was one of dependence; and her pride, now grown morbid, often drove her from the very society which alone was agreeable to her. This was all genuine. There was not the slightest strain of the *femme incomprise* in her demeanor. She was always shy and silent, with a touching reserve which won interest and confidence, but left also a vague sadness in the mind of the observer. After a few months she made another effort to rend the cloud which was gradually darkening around her, and opened a school for young children. But although the interest of friends secured for her a partial success, her gravity and sadness failed to excite the sympathy of her pupils, who missed in her the playful gayety always most winning to children. Martha, however, pushed bravely on, a figure of tragic sobriety to all who watched her course. The farmers thought her a strange girl, and wondered at the ways of a farmer's daughter who was not content to milk cows and churn butter and fry pork, without further hope or thought. The good clergyman of the town, interested in her situation, sought a confidence she did not care to bestow, and so, doling out a, b, c, to a wild group of boys and girls, she found that she could not untie the Gordian knot of her life, and felt, with terror, that it must be cut.

One summer evening she left her father's house and walked into the fields alone. Night came, but Martha did not return. The family became anxious, inquired if any one had noticed the direction in which she went, learned from the neighbors that she was not visiting, that there was no lecture or meeting to detain her, and wonder passed into apprehension. Neighbors went into the adjacent woods and called, but received no answer. Every instant the awful shadow of some dread event solemnized the gathering groups. Every one thought what no one dared whisper, until a low voice suggested "the river". Then, with the swiftness of certainty, all friends, far and near, were roused, and thronged along the banks of the stream. Torches flashed in

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

boats that put off in the terrible search. Hawthorne, then living in the Old Manse, was summoned, and the man whom the villagers had only seen at morning as a musing spectre in his garden, now appeared among them at night to devote his strong arm and steady heart to their service. The boats drifted slowly down the stream—the torches flared strangely upon the black repose of the water, and upon the long, slim grasses that, weeping, fringed the marge. Upon both banks silent and awe-stricken crowds hastened along, eager and dreading to find the slightest trace of what they sought. Suddenly they came upon a few articles of dress, heavy with the night-dew. No one spoke, for no one had doubted the result. It was clear that Martha had strayed to the river and quietly asked of its stillness the repose she sought. The boats gathered around the spot. With every implement that could be of service the melancholy search began. Long intervals of fearful silence ensued, but at length, towards midnight, the sweet face of the dead girl was raised more placidly to the stars than ever it had been to the sun.

“Oh! is it weed or fish or floating hair— A tress o’ golden hair, O’ drowned maiden’s hair, Above the nets at sea? Was never salmon yet that shone so fair Among the stakes on Dee.”

So ended a village tragedy. The reader may possibly find in it the original of the thrilling conclusion of the BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, and learn anew that dark as is the thread with which Hawthorne weaves his spells, it is no darker than those with which tragedies are spun, even in regions apparently so torpid as Concord.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

THE WORKS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE²⁴

The traveller by the Eastern Railroad, from Boston, reaches in less than an hour the old town of Salem, Massachusetts. It is chiefly composed of plain wooden houses, but it has a quaint air of past provincial grandeur, and has indeed been an important commercial town. The first American ship for Calcutta and China sailed from this port; and Salem ships opened our trade with New Holland and the South Seas. But its glory has long since departed, with that of its stately and respectable neighbors, Newburyport and Portsmouth. There is still, however, a custom-house in Salem, there are wharves and chandlers' shops and a faint show of shipping and an air of marine capacity which no apparent result justifies. It sits upon the shore like an antiquated sea-captain, grave and silent, in tarpaulin and duck trousers, idly watching the ocean upon which he will never sail again.

But this touching aspect of age and lost prosperity merely serves to deepen the peculiar impression of the old city, which is not derived from its former commercial importance, but from other associations. Salem village was a famous place in the Puritan annals. The tragedy of the witchcraft tortures and murders has cast upon it a ghostly spell, from which it seems never to have escaped; and even the sojourner of to-day, as he loiters along the shore in the sunniest morning of June, will sometimes feel an icy breath in the air, chilling the very marrow of his bones. Nor is he consoled by being told that it is only the east wind; for he cannot help believing that an invisible host of Puritan spectres have breathed upon him, revengeful, as he poached upon their ancient haunts.

The Puritan spirit was neither gracious nor lovely, but nothing softer than its iron hand could have done its necessary work. The Puritan character was narrow, intolerant, and exasperating. The forefathers were very "sour" in the estimation of Morton and his merry company at Mount Wollaston. But for all that, Bradstreet and Carver and Winthrop were better forefathers than the gay Morton, and the Puritan spirit is doubtless the moral influence of modern civilization, both in Old and New England. By the fruit let the seed be judged. The State to whose rough coast the *Mayflower* came, and in which the Pilgrim spirit has been most active, is to-day the chief of all human societies, politically, morally, and socially. It is the community in which the average of well-being is higher than in any State we know in history. Puritan though it be, it is more truly liberal and free than any large community in the world. But it had bleak beginnings. The icy shore, the sombre pines, the stealthy savages, the hard soil, the unbending religious austerity, the Scriptural severity, the arrogant virtues, the angry intolerance

24. [George William Curtis](#), THE WORKS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, [North American Review](#), Vol. XCIX., 1864, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of contradiction—they all made a narrow strip of sad civilization between the pitiless sea and the remorseless forests. The moral and physical tenacity which is wrestling with the Rebellion was toughened among these flinty and forbidding rocks. The fig, the pomegranate, and the almond would not grow there, nor the nightingale sing; but nobler men than its children the sun never shone upon, nor has the heart of man heard sweeter music than the voices of James Otis and Samuel Adams. Think of Plymouth in 1620, and of Massachusetts to-day! Out of strength came forth sweetness.

With some of the darkest passages in Puritan history this old town of Salem, which dozes apparently with the most peaceful conscience in the world, is identified, and while its Fourth of July bells were joyfully ringing sixty years ago Nathaniel Hathorne was born. He subsequently chose to write the name Hawthorne, because he thought he had discovered that it was the original spelling. In the introduction to *THE SCARLET LETTER*, Hawthorne speaks of his ancestors as coming from Europe in the seventeenth century, and establishing themselves in Salem, where they served the State and propitiated Heaven by joining in the persecution of Quakers and witches. The house known as the Witch House is still standing on the corner of Summer and Essex streets. It was built in 1642 by Captain George Corwin, and here in 1692 many of the unfortunates who were palpably guilty of age and ugliness were examined by the Honorable Jonathan Curwin, Major Gedney, Captain John Higginson, and John Hathorn, Esquire. The name of this last worthy occurs in one of the first and most famous of the witch trials, that of "Goodwife Gory", in March, 1692, only a month after the beginning of the delusion at the house of the minister Parris. Goodwife Gory was accused by ten children, of whom Elizabeth Parris was one; they declared that they were pinched by her and strangled, and that she brought them a book to sign. "Mr. Hathorn, a magistrate of Salem", says Robert Calef, in *MORE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD*, "asked her why she afflicted these children. She said she did not afflict them. He asked her who did then. She said, I do not know; how should I know? She said they were poor, distracted creatures, and no heed ought to be given to what they said. Mr. Hathorn and Mr. Noyes replied, that it was the judgment of all that were there present that they were bewitched, and only she (the accused) said they were distracted. She was accused by them that the *black man* whispered to her in her ear now (while she was upon examination), and that she had a yellow bird that did use to suck between her fingers, and that the said bird did suck now in the assembly." John Hathorn and Jonathan Curwin were "the Assistants" of Salem village, and held most of the examinations and issued the warrants. Justice Hathorn was very swift in judgment, holding every accused person guilty in every particular. When poor Jonathan Gary of Charlestown attended his wife charged with witchcraft before Justice Hathorn, he requested that he might hold one of her hands, "but it was denied me. Then she desired me to wipe the tears from her eyes and the

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

sweat from her face, which I did; then she desired that she might lean herself on me, saying she should faint. Justice Hathorn replied, she had strength enough to torment these persons, and she should have strength enough to stand. I speaking something against their cruel proceedings, they commanded me to be silent, or else I should be turned out of the room". What a piteous picture of the awful colonial inquisition and the village Torquemada! What a grim portrait of an ancestor to hang in your memory, and to trace your kindred to!

Hawthorne's description of his ancestors in the Introduction to THE SCARLET LETTER is very delightful. As their representative, he declares that he takes shame to himself for their sake, on account of these relentless persecutions; but he thinks them earnest and energetic. "From father to son, for above a hundred years, they followed the sea; a gray-headed ship-master, in each generation, retiring from the quarter-deck to the homestead, while a boy of fourteen took the hereditary place before the mast, confronting the salt spray and the gale, which had blustered against his sire and grand-sire. The boy also, in due time, passed from the forecabin to the cabin, spent a tempestuous manhood, and returned from his world-wanderings, to grow old, and die, and mingle his dust with the natal earth." Not all, however, for the last of the line of sailors, Captain Nathaniel Hathorne, who married Elizabeth Clarke Manning, died at Calcutta after the birth of three children, a boy and two girls. The house in which the boy was born is still standing upon Union Street, which leads to the Long Wharf, the chief seat of the old foreign trade of Salem. The next house, with a back entrance on Union Street, is the Manning house, where many years of the young Hawthorne's life were spent in the care of his uncle, Robert Manning. He lived often upon an estate belonging to his mother's family, in the town of Raymond, near Sebago Lake, in Maine. The huge house there was called Manning's Folly, and is now said to be used as a meeting-house. His uncle sent Hawthorne to Bowdoin College, where he graduated in 1825. A correspondent of the Boston Daily Advertiser, writing from Bowdoin at the late commencement, says that he had recently found "in an old drawer" some papers which proved to be the manuscript "parts" of the students at the Junior exhibition of 1824; among them was Hawthorne's "De Patribus Conscriptis Romanorum". "It is quite brief," writes the correspondent, "but is really curious as perhaps the only college exercise in existence of the great tragic writer of our day (has there been a greater since Shakespeare?). The last sentence is as follows (note the words which I put in italics): 'Augustus equidem antiquam magnificentiam patribus reddidit, *sed fulgor tantum fuit sine fervore*. Nunquam in republica senatoribus potestas recuperata, postremum species etiam amissa est.' On the same occasion Longfellow had the salutatory oration in Latin- 'Oratio Latina; Anglici Poetae.'"

Hawthorne has given us a charming glimpse of himself as a college boy in the letter to his fellow-student, Horatio Bridge, of the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Navy, whose JOURNAL OF AN AFRICAN CRUISER he afterwards edited. "I know not whence your faith came; but while we were lads together at a country college, gathering blueberries, in study-hours, under those tall academic pines; or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin; or shooting pigeons and gray squirrels in the woods; or bat-fowling in the summer twilight; or catching trouts in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest—though you and I will never cast a line in it again—two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things that the faculty never heard of, or else it had been the worse for us,—still it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny that he was to be a writer of fiction." From this sylvan university Hawthorne came home to Salem; "as if," he wrote later, "Salem were for me the inevitable centre of the universe."

The old witch-hanging city had no weirder product than this dark-haired son. He has certainly given it an interest which it must otherwise have lacked; but he speaks of it with small affection, considering that his family had lived there for two centuries. "An unjoyous attachment," he calls it. And, to tell the truth, there was evidently little love lost between the little city and its most famous citizen. Stories still float in the social gossip of the town, which represent the shy author as inaccessible to all invitations to dinner and tea; and while the pleasant circle awaited his coming in the drawing-room, the impracticable man was—at least so runs the tale—quietly hobnobbing with companions to whom his fame was unknown. Those who coveted him as a phoenix could never get him, while he gave himself freely to those who saw in him only a placid barn-door fowl. The sensitive youth was a recluse, upon whose imagination had fallen the gloomy mystery of Puritan life and character. Salem was the inevitable centre of his universe more truly than he thought. The mind of Justice Hathorn's descendant was bewitched by the fascination of a certain devilish subtlety working under the comeliest aspects in human affairs. It overcame him with strange sympathy. It colored and controlled his intellectual life.

Devoted all day to lonely reverie and musing upon the obscurer spiritual passages of the life whose monuments he constantly encountered, that musing became inevitably morbid. With the creative instinct of the artist, he wrote the wild fancies into form as stories, many of which, when written, he threw into the fire. Then, after nightfall, stealing out from his room into the silent streets of Salem, and shadowy as the ghosts with which to his susceptible imagination the dusky town was thronged, he glided beneath the house in which the witch-trials were held, or across the moonlit hill upon which the witches were hung, until the spell was complete. Nor can we help fancying that, after the murder of old Mr. White in Salem, which happened within a few years after his return from college, which drew from Mr. Webster his most famous criminal plea, and filled a shadowy

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

corner of every museum in New England, as every shivering little man of that time remembers, with an awful reproduction of the scene in wax-figures, with real sheets on the bed, and the murderer, in a glazed cap, stooping over to deal the fatal blow—we cannot help fancying that the young recluse who walked by night, the wizard whom as yet none knew, hovered about the house, gazing at the windows of the fatal chamber, and listening in horror for the faint whistle of the confederate in another street.

Three years after he graduated, in 1828, he published anonymously a slight romance with the motto from Southey, "Wilt thou go with me?" Hawthorne never acknowledged the book, and it is now seldom found; but it shows plainly the natural bent of his mind. It is a dim, dreamy tale, such as a Byron-struck youth of the time might have written, except for that startling self-possession of style and cold analysis of passion, rather than sympathy with it, which showed no imitation, but remarkable original power. The same lurid gloom overhangs it that shadows all his works. It is uncanny; the figures of the romance are not persons, they are passions, emotions, spiritual speculations. So the TWICE-TOLD TALES that seem at first but the pleasant fancies of a mild recluse, gradually hold the mind with a Lamia-like fascination; and the author says truly of them, in the Preface of 1851, "Even in what purport to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver." There are sunny gleams upon the pages, but a strange, melancholy chill pervades the book. In "The Wedding Knell", "The Minister's Black Veil", "The Gentle Boy", "Wakefield", "The Prophetic Pictures", "The Hollow of the Three Hills", "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment", "The Ambitious Guest", "The White Old Maid", "Edward Fane's Rose-bud", "The Lily's Quest"—or in the "Legends of the Province House", where the courtly provincial state of governors and ladies glitters across the small, sad New England world, whose very baldness jeers it to scorn—there is the same fateful atmosphere in which Goody Cloyse might at any moment whisk by upon her broomstick, and in which the startled heart stands still with unspeakable terror.

The spell of mysterious horror which kindled Hawthorne's imagination was a test of the character of his genius. The mind of this child of witch-haunted Salem loved to hover between the natural and the supernatural, and sought to tread the almost imperceptible and doubtful line of contact. He instinctively sketched the phantoms that have the figures of men, but are not human; the elusive, shadowy scenery which, like that of Gustave Doré's pictures, is Nature sympathizing in her forms and aspects with the emotions of terror or awe which the tale excites. His genius broods entranced over the evanescent phantasmagoria of the vague debatable land in which the realities of experience blend with ghostly doubts and wonders.

But from its poisonous flowers what a wondrous perfume he distilled! Through his magic reed, into what penetrating melody

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

he blew that deathly air! His relentless fancy seemed to seek a sin that was hopeless, a cruel despair that no faith could throw off. Yet his nave and well-poised genius hung over the gulf of blackness, and peered into the pit with the steady nerve and simple face of a boy. The mind of the reader follows him with an aching wonder and admiration, as the bewildered old mother forester watched Undine's gambols. As Hawthorne describes Miriam in *THE MARBLE FAUN*, so may the character of his genius be most truly indicated. Miriam, the reader will remember, turns to Hilda and Kenyon for sympathy. "Yet it was to little purpose that she approached the edge of the voiceless gulf between herself and them. Standing on the utmost verge of that dark chasm, she might stretch out her hand and never clasp a hand of theirs; she might strive to call out 'Help, friends! help!' but, as with dreamers when they shout, her voice would perish inaudibly in the remoteness that seemed such a little way. This perception of an infinite, shivering solitude, amid which we cannot come close enough to human beings to be warmed by them, and where they turn to cold, chilly shapes of mist, is one of the most forlorn results of any accident, misfortune, crime, or peculiarity of character, that puts an individual ajar with the world."

Thus it was because the early New England life made so much larger account of the supernatural element than any other modern civilized society, that the man whose blood had run in its veins instinctively turned to it. But beyond this alluring spell of its darker and obscurer individual experience, it seems neither to have touched his imagination nor even to have aroused his interest. To Walter Scott the romance of feudalism was precious for the sake of feudalism itself, in which he believed with all his soul, and for that of the heroic old feudal figures which he honored. He was a Tory in every particle of his frame, and his genius made him the poet of Toryism. But Hawthorne had apparently no especial political, religious, or patriotic affinity with the spirit which inspired him. It was solely a fascination of the intellect. And although he is distinctively the poet of the Puritans, although it is to his genius that we shall always owe that image of them which the power of *The Scarlet Letter* has imprinted upon literature, and doubtless henceforth upon historical interpretation, yet what an imperfect picture of that life it is! All its stern and melancholy romance is there—its picturesque gloom and intense passion; but upon those quivering pages, as in every passage of his stories drawn from that spirit, there seems to be wanting a deep, complete, sympathetic appreciation of the fine moral heroism, the spiritual grandeur, which overhung that gloomy life, as a delicate purple mist suffuses in summer twilights the bald crags of the crystal hills. It is the glare of the scarlet letter itself, and all that it luridly reveals and weirdly implies, which produced the tale. It was not beauty in itself nor deformity, not virtue nor vice, which engaged the author's deepest sympathy. It was the occult relation between the two.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Thus while the Puritans were of all men pious, it was the instinct of Hawthorne's genius to search out and trace with terrible tenacity the dark and devious thread of sin in their lives.

Human life and character, whether in New England two hundred years ago or in Italy to-day, interested him only as they were touched by this glamour of sombre spiritual mystery; and the attraction pursued him in every form in which it appeared. It is as apparent in the most perfect of his smaller tales, RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER, as in THE SCARLET LETTER, THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES, and THE MARBLE FAUN. You may open almost at random, and you are as sure to find it as to hear the ripple in Mozart's music, or the pathetic minor in a Neapolitan melody. Take, for instance, The BIRTH-MARK, which we might call the best of the smaller stories, if we had not just said the same thing of RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER—for so even and complete is Hawthorne's power, that, with few exceptions, each work of his, like Benvenuto's, seems the most characteristic and felicitous. In this story, a scholar marries a beautiful woman, upon whose face is a mark which has hitherto seemed to be only a greater charm. Yet in one so lovely the husband declares that, although it is the slightest possible defect, it is yet the mark of earthly imperfection, and he proceeds to lavish all the resources of science to procure its removal. But it will not disappear; and at last he tells her that the crimson hand "has clutched its grasp" into her very being, and that there is mortal danger in trying the only means of removal that remains. She insists that it shall be tried. It succeeds; but it removes the stain and her life together. So in RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER. The old philosopher nourishes his beautiful child upon the poisonous breath of a flower. She loves, and her lover is likewise bewitched. In trying to break the spell, she drinks an antidote which kills her. The point of interest in both stories is the subtle connection, in the first, between the beauty of Georgiana and the taint of the birth-mark; and, in the second, the loveliness of Beatrice and the poison of the blossom.

This, also, is the key of his last romance, THE MARBLE FAUN, one of the most perfect works of art in literature, whose marvellous spell begins with the very opening words: "Four individuals, in whose fortunes we should be glad to interest the reader, happened to be standing in one of the saloons of the sculpture-gallery in the Capitol at Rome." When these words are read, the mind familiar with Hawthorne is already enthralled. "What a journey is beginning, not a step of which is trodden, and yet the heart palpitates with apprehension! Through what delicate, rosy lights of love, and soft, shimmering humor, and hopes and doubts and vanishing delights, that journey will proceed, on and on into utter gloom." And it does so, although "Hilda had a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountain-tops". It does so, because Miriam and Donatello are the figures which interest us most profoundly, and they are both lost in the shadow. Donatello, indeed, is the true centre of interest, as he is one



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of the most striking creations of genius. But the perplexing charm of Donatello, what is it but the doubt that does not dare to breathe itself, the appalled wonder whether, if the breeze should lift those clustering locks a little higher, he would prove to be faun or man? It never does lift them; the doubt is never solved, but it is always suggested. The mystery of a partial humanity, morally irresponsible but humanly conscious, haunts the entrancing page. It draws us irresistibly on. But as the cloud closes around the lithe figure of Donatello, we hear again from its hidden folds the words of "The Birth-Mark": "Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence, which, in this dim sphere of half-development, demands the completeness of a higher state". Or still more sadly, the mysterious youth, half vanishing from our sympathy, seems to murmur, with Beatrice Rappaccini, "And still as she spoke, she kept her hand upon her heart,—'Wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?'"

We have left the story of Hawthorne's life sadly behind. But his life had no more remarkable events than holding office in the Boston Customhouse under Mr. Bancroft as collector; working for some time with the Brook-Farmers, from whom he soon separated, not altogether amicably; marrying and living in the Old Manse at Concord; returning to the Custom-house in Salem as surveyor; then going to Lenox, in Berkshire, where he lived in what he called "the ugliest little old red farm-house that you ever saw", and where the story is told of his shyness, that, if he saw anybody coming along the road whom he must probably pass, he would jump over the wall into the pasture, and so give the stranger a wide berth; back again to Concord; then to Liverpool as consul; travelling in Europe afterwards, and home at last and forever, to "The Wayside" under the Concord hill. "The hillside," he wrote to a friend in 1852, "is covered chiefly with locust-trees, which come into luxuriant blossom in the month of June, and look and smell very sweetly, intermixed with a few young elms and some white-pines and infant oaks, the whole forming rather a thicket than a wood. Nevertheless, there is some very good shade to be found there; I spend delectable hours there in the hottest part of the day, stretched out at my lazy length with a book in my hand or an unwritten book in my thoughts. There is almost always a breeze stirring along the side or the brow of the hill."

It is not strange, certainly, that a man such as has been described, of a morbid shyness, the path of whose genius diverged always out of the sun into the darkest shade, and to whom human beings were merely psychological phenomena, should have been accounted ungenial, and sometimes even hard, cold, and perverse. From the bent of his intellectual temperament it happens that in his simplest and sweetest passages he still seems to be studying and curiously observing, rather than sympathizing. You cannot help feeling constantly that the author is looking askance both at his characters and you, the reader; and many a young and fresh mind is troubled strangely by his



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

books, as if it were aware of a half-Mephistophelean smile upon the page. Nor is this impression altogether removed by the remarkable familiarity of his personal disclosures. There was never a man more shrinkingly retiring, yet surely never was an author more naively frank. He is willing that you should know all that a man may fairly reveal of himself. The great interior story he does not tell, of course, but the Introduction to the *MOSSSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*, the opening chapter of *THE SCARLET LETTER*, and the *CONSULAR EXPERIENCES*, with much of the rest of *OUR OLD HOME*, are as intimate and explicit chapters of autobiography as can be found. Nor would it be easy to find anywhere a more perfect idyl than that introductory chapter of the *MOSSSES*. Its charm is perennial and indescribable; and why should it not be, since it was written at a time in which, as he says, "I was happy?" It is, perhaps, the most softly-hued and exquisite work of his pen. So the sketch of "The Custom-house", although prefatory to that most tragically powerful of romances,

THE SCARLET LETTER, is an incessant play of the shyest and most airy humor. It is like the warbling of bobolinks before a thunder-burst. How many other men, however unreserved with the pen, would be likely to dare to paint, with the fidelity of Teniers and the simplicity of Fra Angelico, a picture of the office and the companions in which and with whom they did their daily work? The surveyor of customs in the port of Salem treated the town of Salem, in which he lived and discharged his daily task, as if it had been, with all its people, as vague and remote a spot as the town of which he was about to treat in the story. He commented upon the place and the people as modern travellers in Pompeii discuss the ancient town. It made a great scandal. He was accused of depicting with unpardonable severity worthy folks, whose friends were sorely pained and indignant. But he wrote such sketches as he wrote his stories. He treated his companions as he treated himself and all the personages in history or experience with which he dealt, merely as phenomena to be analyzed and described, with no more private malice or personal emotion than the sun, which would have photographed them, warts and all.

Thus it was that the great currents of human sympathy never swept him away. The character of his genius isolated him, and he stood aloof from the common interests. Intent upon studying men in certain aspects, he cared little for man; and the high tides of collective emotion among his fellows left him dry and untouched. So he beholds and describes the generous impulse of humanity with sceptical courtesy rather than with hopeful cordiality. He does not chide you if you spend effort and life itself in the ardent van of progress, but he asks simply, "Is six so much better than half a dozen?" He will not quarrel with you if you expect the millennium to-morrow. He only says, with that glimmering smile, "So soon?" Yet in all this there was no shadow of spiritual pride. Nay, so far from this, that the tranquil and pervasive sadness of all Hawthorne's writings, the kind of heartache that they leave behind, seem to spring from the fact



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

that his nature was related to the moral world, as his own Donatello was to the human. "So alert, so alluring, so noble", muses the heart as we climb the Apennines towards the tower of Monte Beni; "alas! is he human?" it whispers, with a pang of doubt.

How this directed his choice of subjects, and affected his treatment of them, when drawn from early history, we have already seen. It is not, therefore, surprising, that the history into which he was born interested him only in the same way.

When he went to Europe as consul, UNCLE TOM'S CABIN was already published, and the country shook with the fierce debate which involved its life. Yet eight years later Hawthorne wrote with calm ennui, "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land." Is crime never romantic, then, until distance ennobles it? Or were the tragedies of Puritan life so terrible that the imagination could not help kindling, while the pangs of the plantation are superficial and commonplace? Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and Thackeray were able to find a shadow even in "merrie England". But our great romancer looked at the American life of his time with these marvellous eyes, and could see only monotonous sunshine. That the devil, in the form of an elderly man clad in grave and decent attire, should lead astray the saints of Salem village, two centuries ago, and confuse right and wrong in the mind of Goodman Brown, was something that excited his imagination, and produced one of his weirdest stories. But that the same devil, clad in a sombre sophism, was confusing the sentiment of right and wrong in the mind of his own countrymen he did not even guess. The monotonous sunshine disappeared in the blackest storm. The commonplace prosperity ended in tremendous war. What other man of equal power, who was not intellectually constituted precisely as Hawthorne was, could have stood merely perplexed and bewildered, harassed by the inability of positive sympathy, in the vast conflict which tosses us all in its terrible vortex?

In political theories and in an abstract view of war men may differ. But this war is not to be dismissed as a political difference. Here is an attempt to destroy the government of a country, not because it oppressed any man, but because its evident tendency was to secure universal justice under law. It is, therefore, a conspiracy against human nature. Civilization itself is at stake; and the warm blood of the noblest youth is everywhere flowing in as sacred a cause as history records—flowing not merely to maintain a certain form of government, but to vindicate the rights of human nature. Shall there not be sorrow and pain, if a friend is merely impatient or confounded by it—if he sees in it only danger or doubt, and not hope for the right—or if he seem to insinuate that it would have been better if the war had been avoided, even at that countless cost



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

to human welfare by which alone the avoidance was possible? Yet, if the view of Hawthorne's mental constitution which has been suggested be correct, this attitude of his, however deeply it may be regretted, can hardly deserve moral condemnation. He knew perfectly well that if a man has no ear for music he had better not try to sing. But the danger with such men is that they are apt to doubt if music itself be not a vain delusion. This danger Hawthorne escaped. There is none of the shallow persiflage of the sceptic in his tone, nor any affectation of cosmopolitan superiority. Mr. Edward Dicey, in his interesting reminiscences of Hawthorne, published in Macmillan's Magazine, illustrates this very happily.

"To make his position intelligible, let me repeat an anecdote which was told me by a very near friend of his and mine, who had heard it from President Pierce himself. Frank Pierce had been, and was to the day of Hawthorne's death, one of the oldest of his friends. At the time of the Presidential election of 1856, Hawthorne, for once, took part in politics, wrote a pamphlet in favor of his friend, and took a most unusual interest in his success. When the result of the nomination was known, and Pierce was President-elect, Hawthorne was among the first to come and wish him joy. He sat down in the room moodily and silently, as he was wont when anything troubled him; then, without speaking a word, he shook Pierce warmly by the hand, and at last remarked, 'Ah, Frank, what a pity!' The moment the victory was won, that timid, hesitating mind saw the evils of the successful course—the advantages of the one which had not been followed. So it was always. Of two lines of action, he was perpetually in doubt which was the best; and so, between the two, he always inclined to letting things remain as they are.

"Nobody disliked slavery more cordially than he did; and yet the difficulty of what was to be done with the slaves weighed constantly upon his mind. He told me once that, while he had been consul at Liverpool, a vessel arrived there with a number of negro sailors, who had been brought from slave States, and would, of course, be enslaved again on their return. He fancied that he ought to inform the men of the fact, but then he was stopped by the reflection—who was to provide for them if they became free? and, as he said, with a sigh, 'while I was thinking, the vessel sailed.' So, I recollect, on the old battle-field of Manassas, in which I strolled in company with Hawthorne, meeting a batch of runaway slaves—worn, foot-sore, wretched, and helpless beyond conception; we gave them food and wine, some small sums of money, and got them a lift upon a train going northward; but not long afterwards Hawthorne turned to me with the remark, 'I am not sure we were doing right after all. How can these poor beings

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

find food and shelter away from home?' Thus this ingrained and inherent doubt incapacitated him from following any course vigorously. He thought, on the whole, that Wendell Phillips and Lloyd Garrison and the Abolitionists were in the right, but then he was never quite certain that they were not in the wrong after all; so that his advocacy of their cause was of a very uncertain character. He saw the best, to alter slightly the famous Horatian line, but he never could quite make up his mind whether he altogether approved of its wisdom, and therefore followed it but falteringly.

"`Better to bear those ills we have, Than fly to others that we know not of,'

"expressed the philosophy to which Hawthorne was thus borne imperceptibly. Unjustly, but yet not unreasonably, he was looked upon as a pro-slavery man, and suspected of Southern sympathies. In politics he was always halting between two opinions; or, rather, holding one opinion, he could never summon up his courage to adhere to it and it only."

The truth is that his own times and their people and their affairs were just as shadowy to him as those of any of his stories, and his mind held the same curious, half-wistful poise among all the conflicts of principle and passion around him, as among those of which he read and mused. If you ask why this was so—how it was that the tragedy of an old Italian garden, or the sin of a lonely Puritan parish, or the crime of a provincial judge, should so stimulate his imagination with romantic appeals and harrowing allegories, while either it did not see a Carolina slave-pen, or found in it only a tame prosperity—you must take your answer in the other question, why he did not weave into any of his stories the black and bloody thread of the Inquisition. His genius obeyed its law. When he wrote like a disembodied intelligence of events with which his neighbors' hearts were quivering—when the same half-smile flutters upon his lips in the essay ABOUT WAR MATTERS, sketched as it were upon the battle-field, as in that upon FIRE WORSHIP, written in the rural seclusion of the mossy Manse—ah me! it is Donatello, in his tower of Monte Beni, contemplating with doubtful interest the field upon which the flower of men are dying for an idea. Do you wonder, as you see him and hear him, that your heart, bewildered, asks and asks again, "Is he human? Is he a man?"

Now that Hawthorne sleeps by the tranquil Concord, upon whose shores the Old Manse was his bridal bower, those who knew him chiefly there revert beyond the angry hour to those peaceful days. How dear the Old Manse was to him he has himself recorded; and in the opening of the TANGLEWOOD TALES he pays his tribute to that placid landscape, which will always be recalled with pensive tenderness by those who, like him, became familiar with it in happy hours. "To me," he writes, "there is a peculiar, quiet charm in these broad meadows and gentle eminences. They are better than mountains, because they do not stamp and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

stereotype themselves into the brain, and thus grow wearisome with the same strong impression, repeated day after day. A few summer weeks among mountains, a lifetime among green meadows and placid slopes, with outlines forever new, because continually fading out of the memory, such would be my sober choice." He used to say, in those days—when, as he was fond of insisting, he was the obscurest author in the world, because, although he had told his tales twice, nobody cared to listen—that he never knew exactly how he contrived to live. But he was then married, and the dullest eye could not fail to detect the feminine grace and taste that ordered the dwelling, and perceive the tender sagacity that made all things possible.

Such was his simplicity and frugality that, when he was left alone for a little time in his Arcadia, he would dismiss "the help", and, with some friend of other days who came to share his loneliness, he cooked the easy meal, and washed up the dishes. No picture is clearer in the memory of a certain writer than that of the magician, in whose presence he almost lost his breath, looking at him over a dinner-plate which he was gravely wiping in the kitchen, while the handy friend, who had been a Western settler, scoured the kettle at the door. Blithedale, where their acquaintance had begun, had not allowed either of them to forget how to help himself. It was amusing to one who knew this native independence of Hawthorne, to hear, some years afterwards, that he wrote the "campaign" LIFE OF FRANKLIN PIERCE for the sake of getting an office. That such a man should do such a work was possibly incomprehensible to those who did not know him upon any other supposition, until the fact was known that Mr. Pierce was an old and constant friend. Then it was explained. Hawthorne asked simply how he could help his friend, and he did the only thing he could do for that purpose. But although he passed some years in public office, he had neither taste nor talent for political life. He owed his offices to works quite other than political. His first and second appointments were virtually made by his friend Mr. Bancroft, and the third by his friend Mr. Pierce. His claims were perceptible enough to friendship, but would hardly have been so to a caucus.

In this brief essay we have aimed only to indicate the general character of the genius of Hawthorne, and to suggest a key to his peculiar relation to his time. The reader will at once see that it is rather the man than the author who has been described; but this has been designedly done, for we confess a personal solicitude, shared, we are very sure, by many friends of Nathaniel Hawthorne, that there shall not be wanting to the future student of his works such light as acquaintance with the man may throw upon them, as well as some picture of the impression his personality made upon his contemporaries.

Strongly formed, of dark, poetic gravity of aspect, lighted by the deep, gleaming eye that recoiled with girlish coyness from contact with your gaze; of rare courtesy and kindness in personal intercourse, yet so sensitive that his look and manner can be suggested by the word "glimmering;" giving you a sense



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of restrained impatience to be away; mostly silent in society, and speaking always with an appearance of effort, but with a lambent light of delicate humor playing over all he said in the confidence of familiarity, and firm self-possession under all, as if the glimmering manner were only the tremulous surface of the sea, Hawthorne was personally known to few, and intimately to very few. But no one knew him without loving him, or saw him without remembering him; and the name Nathaniel Hawthorne, which, when it was first written, was supposed to be fictitious, is now one of the most enduring facts of English literature.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1855

[George William Curtis](#) published an essay about a French actress whose stage name was “Rachel.” (This would be reprinted in 1895 in Curtis’s LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

RACHEL²⁵

One evening in Paris, we were strolling through that most Parisian spot the Palais Royal, or, as it was called at that moment, the Palais National. It was after the revolution of February; but, although the place was full of associations with French revolutions, it seemed to have no special sympathy with the trouble of the moment, and was as gay as the youngest imagination conceives Paris to be. There was a constant throng loitering along the arcades; the cafes were lighted and crowded; men were smoking, sipping coffee, playing billiards, reading the newspapers, discussing the debates in the Chamber and the coming "Prophete" of Meyerbeer at the opera; women were chatting together in the boutiques, pretty grisettes hurrying home; little blanchisseuses, with their neatly-napkinned baskets, tripping among the crowd; strangers watched the gay groups, paused at the windows of tailors and jewellers, and felt the fascination of Paris. It was the moment of high-tide of Parisian life. It was an epitome of Paris, and Paris is an epitome of the time and of the world.

At the corner of the Palais Royal is the Comédie Française, and to that we were going. There Rachel was playing. There she had recently recited the "Marseillaise" to frenzied Paris; and there, in the vestibule, genius of French comedy, of French intellect, and of French life, sits the wonderful Voltaire of Houdon, the statue which, for the first time, after the dreadful portraits which misrepresent him, gives the spectator some adequate idea of the personal appearance and impression of the man who moulded an age. You can scarcely see the statue without a shudder. It is remorseless intellect laid bare. The cold sweetness of the aspect, the subtle penetration of the brow, the passionless supremacy of a figure which is neither manly nor graceful, fill your mind with apprehension and with the conviction that the French Revolution you have seen is not the last.

The curtain rises, and Paris and France roll away. A sad, solitary figure, like a dream of tragic Greece, glides across the scene. The air grows cold and thin, with a sense of the presence of lost antiquity. The feeling of fate, vast, resistless, and terrible, rises like a suffocating vapor; and the hopeless woe of the face, the pathetic dignity of the form, assure you, before she speaks, that this is indeed Rachel. The scenery is poor and hard; but its severe outlines and its conventional character serve to suggest Greece. The drapery which hangs upon Rachel is exquisitely studied from the most perfect statue. There is not a fold which is not Greek and graceful, and which does not seem obedient to the same law which touches her face with tragedy. As she slowly opens her thin lips, your own blanch; and from her melancholy eyes all smiles and possibility of joy have utterly passed away. Rachel stands alone, a solitary statue of fate and woe.

When she speaks, the low, thrilling, distinct voice seems to

25. [George William Curtis](#), RACHEL, [Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art](#), Vol. VI., 1855, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

proceed rather from her eyes than her mouth. It has a wan sound, if we may say so. It is the very tone you would have predicted as coming from that form, like the unearthly music which accompanies the speech of the Commendatore's statue in "Don Giovanni". That appearance and that voice are the key of the whole performance. Before she has spoken, you are filled with the spirit of an age infinitely remote, and only related to human sympathy now by the grandeur of suffering. The rest merely confirms that impression. The whole is simple and intense. It is conceived and fulfilled in the purest sense of Greek art.

Of the early career and later life of Rachel such romantic stories are told and believed that only to see the heroine of her own life would be attraction enough to draw the world to Paris. Dr. Vernon, in his *MÉMOIRES D'UN BOURGEOIS*, has described her earliest appearance upon the Boulevards—her studies, her trials, and her triumph. That triumph has been unequalled in stage annals for enthusiasm and permanence. Other actors have achieved single successes as brilliant; but no other has held for so long the most fickle and fastidious nation thrall to her powers; owning no rival near the throne, and ruling with a sway whose splendor was only surpassed by its sternness.

For Rachel has never sought to ally her genius to goodness, and has rather despised than courted the aid of noble character. Not a lady by birth or breeding, she is reported to have surpassed Messalina in debauchery and Semiramis in luxury. Paris teems with tales of her private life, which, while they are undoubtedly exaggerated, yet serve to show the kind of impression her career has produced. Those modern Sybarites, the princes and nobles of Russia, are the heroes of her private romances; and her sumptuous apartments, if not a Tour de Nesle, are at least a bower of Rosamond.

As if to show the independent superiority of her art, she has been willing to appear, or she really is, avaricious, mean, jealous, passionate, false; and then, by her prodigious power, she has swayed the public that so judged her as the wind tosses a leaf. There has, alas, been disdain in her superiority. Perhaps Paris has found something fascinating in her very contempt, as in the *MÉMOIRES DU DIABLE* the heroine confesses that she loved the ferocity of her lover. Nor is it a traditional fame that she has enjoyed; but whenever Rachel plays, the theatre is crowded, and the terror and the tears are what they were when she began.

Rachel is the greatest of merely dramatic artists. Others are more beautiful; others are more stately and imposing; others have been fitted by external gifts of nature to personify characters of very marked features; others are more graceful and lovely and winning; most others mingle their own personality with the characters they assume, but Rachel has this final evidence of genius, that she is always superior to what she does; her mind presides over her own performances. It is the perfection of art. In describing this peculiar supremacy of genius, a scholar, in whose early death a poet and philosopher



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

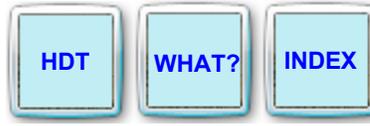
was lost, says of Shakespeare: "He sat pensive and alone above the hundred-handed play of his imagination." And Fanny Kemble, in her journal, describes a conversation upon the stage, in the tomb-scene of "Romeo and Juliet", where she, as Juliet, says to Mr. Romeo Keppel, "Where the devil is your dagger?" while all the tearful audience are lost in the soft woe of the scene.

This is very much opposed to the general theory of acting, and the story is told with great gusto of a boy who was sent to see Garrick, we believe, and who was greatly delighted with the fine phrasing and swagger of a supernumerary, but could not understand why people applauded such an ordinary bumpkin as Garrick, who did not differ a whit from all the country boobies he had ever seen. It is insisted that the actor must persuade the spectator that he is what he seems to be, and this is gravely put as the first and final proof of good acting.

This is, however, both a false view of art and a false interpretation and observation of experience. Shakespeare, through the mouth of Hamlet, tells the players to "hold the mirror up to nature"—that is, to represent nature. For what is the dramatic art, like all other arts, but a representation? If it aims to deceive the eye—if it tries to juggle the senses of the spectator—it is as trivial as if a painter should put real gold upon his canvas instead of representing gold by means of paint; or as if a sculptor should tinge the cheeks of his statue to make it more like a human face. We have seen tin pans so well represented in painting that the result was atrocious. For, if the object intended is really a tin pan, and not the pleasure produced by a conscious representation of one, then why not insert the veritable pan in the picture at once? If art is only a more or less successful imitation of natural objects, with a view to cheat the senses, it is an amusing game, but it is not a noble pursuit.

It is an equally false observation of experience; because, if the spectator were really deceived, if the actor became, in the mind of the audience, truly identical with the character he represents, then, when that character was odious, the audience would revolt. If we cannot quietly sit and see one dog tear another, without interfering, could we gravely look on and only put our handkerchiefs to our eyes, when Othello puts the pillow to the mouth of Desdemona? If we really supposed him to be a murderous man, how instantly we should leap upon the stage and rescue "the gentle lady". The truth is, to state it boldly, we know the roaring lion to be only Snug, the joiner.

All works of art must produce pleasure. Even the sternest and most repulsive subjects must be touched by art into a pensive beauty, or they fail to reach the height of great works. Goethe has shown this in the LAOCOÖN, and every man feels it in constant experience. One of the grand themes of modern painting is the great tragedy of history, the Crucifixion. Materially it is repulsive, as the spectacle of a man in excruciating bodily torture; spiritually it is overwhelming, as the symbolized suffering of God for sin. If, now, the pictures which treat this



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

subject were indeed only imitations of the scene, so that the spectator listened for the groans of agony and looked to see the blood drop from the brow crowned with thorns, how hideous and insupportable the sight would be! The mind is conscious as it contemplates the picture that it is a representation, and not a fact. The mere force of actuality is, therefore, destroyed, and thought busies itself with the moral significance of the scene. In the same way, in the tragedy of "Othello", conscious that there is not the actual physical suffering which there seems to be, the mind contemplates the real meaning which underlies that appearance, and curses jealousy and the unmanly passions.

Even in a very low walk of art the same principle is manifested. A man might not care to adorn his parlor with the carcass of an ox or a hog, nor invite to his table boors muzzy with beer. But the most elegant of nations prizes the pictures of Teniers at extraordinary prices, and hangs its galleries with works minutely representing the shambles. Here, again, the explanation is this: that the mind, rejecting any idea of actuality in the picture, is charmed with the delicacy of detail, with lovely color, with tone, with tenderness, and all these are qualities inseparable from the picture, and do not belong by any necessity to the actual carcasses of animals. In the shambles, the sense of disgust and repulsion overcomes any pleasure in light and color. In the parlor, if the spectator were persuaded by the picture to hold his nose, the thing would be as unlovely as it is in nature. Imitation pleases only so far as it is known to be imitation. If deception by imitation were the object of art, then the material of the sculptor should be wax, and not marble. Every visitor mistakes the sitting figure of Cobbett, in Madame Tussaud's collection of wax-works, for a real man, and will very likely, as we did, speak to it. But who would accost the Moses of Michael Angelo, or believe the sitting Medici in his chapel to have speech?

There is something unhandsomely derogatory to art in this common view. It is forgotten that art is not subsidiary nor auxiliary to nature, but it is a distinct ministry, and has a world of its own. They are not in opposition, nor do they clash. The cardinal fact of imitation in works of art is evident enough. The exquisite charm of art lies in the perfection of the imitation, coexisting with the consciousness of an absolute difference, so that the effect produced is not at all that which the object itself produces, but is an intellectual pleasure arising from the perception of the mingling of rational intention with the representation of the natural object. We can illustrate this by supposing a child bringing in a fresh rose, and a painter his picture of a rose. The pleasure derived from the picture is surely something better than wonder at the skill with which the form and color of the flower are imitated. Since imitation can never attain to the dignity and worth of the original, and since we live in the midst of nature, it would be folly to claim for its more or less successful copy the position and form of a great mental and moral influence.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Of course we are not unmindful of the inevitable assertion that if certain forms are to be used for the expression of certain truths, the first condition is that those forms shall be accurately rendered. Hence arises the great stress laid by the modern schools upon a rigorous imitation of nature, and hence what is called the pre-Raphaelite spirit, with its marvellous detail. But mere imitation does not come any nearer to great art by being perfect. If it is not informed by a great intention, sculpture is only wax-work and painting a juggle.

It is by her instinctive recognition of these fundamental principles that Rachel shows herself to be an artist. She is fully persuaded of the value of the modern spirit, and she belongs to the time by nothing more than by her instinctive and hearty adaptation of the principles of art which are illustrated in all other departments. There is nothing in Millais's or Hunt's paintings more purely pre-Raphaelite than Rachel's acting in the last scenes of "Adrienne Lecouvreur". It is the perfection of detail. It was studied, gasp by gasp, and groan by groan, in the hospital wards of Paris, where men were dying in agony. It is terrible, but it is true. We have seen a crowded theatre hanging in a suspense almost suffocating over that fearful scene. Men grew pale, women fainted, a spell of silence and awe held us enchanted. But it was all pure art. The actor was superior to the scene. It was the passion with which she threw herself into the representation, with a distinct conception of the whole, and a thorough knowledge of the means necessary to produce its effect, that secured the success. There was a sublimity of self-control in the spectacle, for, if she had allowed herself to be overwhelmed by the excitement, the play must have paused; real feeling would have invaded that which was represented, and we should, by a rude shock, have been staring in wonder at the weeping woman Rachel, instead of thrilling with the woes of the dying, despairing Adrienne. She seems to be what we know she is not.

Rachel's earlier triumphs were in the plays of Racine. Certainly nothing could show the essential worth of the old Greek dramatic material more than the fact that it could be rendered into French rhyme without losing all its dignity. If a man should know Homer only through Pope's translations, he could hardly understand the real greatness and peculiar charm of Homer. And as most of us know him in no other way, we all understand that the eminence of Homer is conceded upon the force of tradition and the feeling of those who have read him in the original. So, to the reader of Racine, it is his knowledge of the outline of the grand old Greek stories that prevents their loss of charm and loftiness when they masquerade in French rhyme. They have lost their sublimity, so far as treatment can effect it, while they retain their general form of interest. But it is the splendid triumph of Rachel that she restores the original Greek grandeur to the drama. We no longer wonder at Racine's idea of Phædre, but we are confronted with Phædre herself. From the moment she appears, through every change and movement of the scene until the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

catastrophe, a sense of fate, the grim, remorseless, and inexorable destiny that presides over Greek story, is stamped upon every look and nod and movement of Rachel. It is stated that, since the enthusiasm produced in Paris by Ristori, Rachel's Italian rival, the sculptor Schlesinger has declared that his statue of Rachel which he had called Tragedy was only Melodrama after all. If the report be true, it does not prove that Rachel, but Schlesinger, is not a great artist.

It is this simplicity and grandeur that make the excellence of Rachel in the characters of Racine. They cease to be French and become Greek. As a victim of fate, she moves, from the first scene to the last, as by a resistless impulse. Her voice has a low concentrated tone. Her movement is not vehement, but intense. If she smiles, it is a wan gleam of sadness, not of joy, as if the eyes that lighten for a moment saw all the time the finger of fate pointing over her shoulder. The thin form, graceful with intellectual dignity, not rounded with the ripeness of young womanhood, the statuesque simplicity and severity of the drapery, the pale cheek, the sad lips, the small eyes—these are accessory to the whole impression, the melancholy ornaments of the tragic scene. Her fine instinct avoids the romantic and melodramatic touches which, however seductive to an actor who aims at effect, would destroy at once that breadth and unity which characterize her best impersonations. Wherever the idea of fate inspires the tragedy, or can properly be introduced as the motive, there Rachel is unsurpassed and unapproachable. Her stillness, her solemnity, her intensity; the want of mouthing, of ranting, of all extravagance; the slight movement of the arms, and the subtle inflections of the voice which are more expressive than gestures, haunt the memory and float through the mind afterwards as the figure of Francesca di Rimini, in the exquisite picture of Ary Scheffer, sweeps, full of woe, which every line suggests, across the vision of Dante and his guide.

There was, naturally, the greatest curiosity and a good deal of scepticism about Rachel's power in the modern drama, the melodrama of Victor Hugo, and the social drama of Scribe. But her appearance in the "Angelo" of Victor Hugo and in "Adrienne Lecouvreur" of Scribe satisfied the curiosity and routed the scepticism. It was pleasant after the vast and imposing forms, the tearless tragedy of Greek story, to see the mastery of this genius in the conditions of a life and spirit with which we were more familiar and sympathetic. It was clear that the same passionate intensity which, united with the most exquisite perceptions, enabled her so perfectly to restore the Greek spirit to the Greek form, would as adequately represent the voluptuous southern life. If in the old drama she was sculpture, so in the modern she was painting, not only with the flowing outline, but with all the purple, palpitating hues of passion. This is best manifested in the "Angelo", of which the scene is laid in old Padua and is, therefore, full of the mysterious spirit of mediaeval Italian, and especially Venetian life. Miss



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Cushman has played in an English version of this drama, called the "Actress of Padua". But it is hardly grandiose enough in its proportions to be very well adapted to the talent of Miss Cushman. It was remarkable how perfectly the genius which had, the evening before, adequately represented Phædre, could impersonate the ablest finesse of Italian subtilty. The old Italian romances were made real in a moment. The dim chambers, the dusky passages, the sliding doors, the vivid contrast of gayety and gloom, the dance in the palace and the duel in the garden, the smile on the lip and the stab at the heart, the capricious feeling, the impetuous action, the picturesque costume of life and society—all the substance and the form of our ideas of characteristic Italian life, are comprised in Rachel's Thisbe and Angelo.

There is one scene in that play not to be forgotten. The curtain rises and shows a vast, dim chamber in the castle, with a heavily-curtained bed, and massive carved furniture, and a deep bay-window. It is night; a candle burns upon the table, feebly flickering in the gloom of the great chamber. Angelo, whom Thisbe loves, and who pretends to love her, is sitting uneasily in the chamber with his mistress, whose name we have forgotten, but whom he really loves. Thisbe is suspicious of his want of faith, and burns with jealousy, but has had no proof.

A gust of wind, the rustle of the tapestry, the creak of a bough in the garden, the note of a night bird, any slightest sound makes the lovers start and quiver, as if they stood upon the verge of an imminent peril. Suddenly they both start at a low noise, apparently in the wall. Angelo rises and looks about, his mistress shivers and shrinks, but they discover nothing. The night deepens around them. The sense of calamity and catastrophe rises in the spectator's mind. They start again. This time they hear a louder noise, and glance helplessly around and feebly try to scoff away their terror. The sound dies away, and they converse in appalled and fragmentary whispers. But again a low, cautious, sliding noise arrests them. Angelo springs up, runs for his hat and cloak, blows out the candle upon the table, and escapes from the room, while his mistress totters to the bed and throws herself upon it, feigning sleep. The stage is left unoccupied, while the just-extinguished candle still smokes upon the table, and the sidelights and footlights, being lowered, wrap the vast chamber in deeper gloom.

At this moment a small secret door in the wall at the bottom of the stage slips aside, and Thisbe, still wearing her ball-dress, and with a head-dress of gold sequins flashing in her black hair, is discovered crouching in the aperture, holding an antique lamp in one hand, a little raised, and with the other softly putting aside the door, while, bending forward with a cat-like stillness, she glares around the chamber with eager eyes, that flash upon everything at once. The picture is perfect. The light falls from the raised lamp upon this jewelled figure crouching in the darkness at the bottom of the stage. Judith was not more terrible; Lucrezia Borgia not more superb. But, magnificent as



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

it is, it is a moment of such intense interest that applause is suspended. The house is breathless, for it is but the tiger's crouch that precedes the spring. The next instant she is upon the floor of the chamber, and, still bending slightly forward to express the eager concentration of her mind, she glances at the bed and the figure upon it with a scornful sneer, that indicates how clearly she sees the pretence of sleep, and how evidently somebody has been there, or something has happened which justifies all her suspicion, and then, with panther-like celerity, she darts about the chamber to find some trace of the false lover—a hat, a glove, a plume, a cloak—to make assurance doubly sure. But there is nothing upon the floor, nothing upon the table, nothing in the bay-window, nothing upon the sofa, nor in the huge carved chairs; there is nothing that proves the treachery she suspects. But her restless eye leads her springing foot from one corner of the chamber to the other. Speed increases with the lessening chance of proof; the eye flashes more and more fiercely; the breast heaves; the hand clinches; the cheek burns, until, suddenly, in the very moment of despair, having as yet spoken no word, she comes to the table, sees the candle, which still smokes, and drawing herself up with fearful calmness, her cheeks grow pallid, the lips livid, the hands relax, the eye deadens as with a blow, and, with the despairing conviction that she is betrayed, her heart-break sighs itself out in a cold whisper, "*Elle fume encore*".

In this she is as purely dramatic as in other plays she is classical. But neither in the one nor the other is there a look, or a gesture, or a word, which is not harmonious with the spirit of the style and the character of the person represented.

This is pure passion as the other is implacable fate. There is something so tearfully human in it that you are touched as by a picture of the Magdalen. Every representation of Rachel is preserved in your memory with the first sights of the great statues and the famous pictures.

In the French translation of Schiller's "Mary Stuart", a character which may be supposed especially to interest Americans and English, Rachel is not less excellent. The sad grace, the tender resignation, the poetic enthusiasm, the petulant caprice, the wilful, lovely womanliness of the lovely queen, are made tragically real by her representation. Perhaps it is not the Mary of Mignet nor of history. But Mary Queen of Scots is one of the characters which the imagination has chosen to take from history and decorate with immortal grace. It cares less for what the woman Mary was, than to have a figure standing upon the fact of history, but radiant with the beauty of poetry. It has invested her with a loveliness that is perhaps unreal, with a tenderness and sweetness that were possibly foreign to her character, and with a general fascination and good intention which a contemporary might not have discovered.

It has made her the ideal of unfortunate womanhood. For it seemed that a fate so tragic deserved a fame so fair. Perhaps the weakness which Mary had, and which Lady Jane Grey had not, have



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

been the very reasons why the unfortunate, unhappy Queen Mary is dearer to our human sympathies than the unfortunate Lady Jane. Perhaps because it was a woman who pursued her, the instinct of men has sought to restore, by the canonization of Mary, the womanly ideal injured by Elizabeth.

But, whatever be the reason, there is no question that we judge Mary Queen of Scots more by the imagination than by historical rigor; and it is Mary, as the mind insists upon having her, that Rachel represents. She conspires with the imagination to complete the ideal of Mary. It is a story told in sad music to which we listen; it is a mournful panorama, unfolding itself scene by scene, upon which we gaze. Lost in soft melancholy, the figures of the drama move before us as in a tragic dream. But after seeing Rachel's Mary we can see no other. If we meet her in history or romance, it is always that figure, those pensive eyes, forecasting a fearful doom, that voice whose music is cast in a hopeless minor. It is thus that dramatic genius creates, and poetry disputes with history.

Jules Janin says that Rachel is best in those parts of this play where the anger of the Queen is more prominent than the grief of the woman.

This is true to a certain extent. It was not difficult to see that the fierceness was more natural than the tenderness to the woman Rachel, and that, therefore, those parts had a reality which the tenderness had not. But the performance was symmetrical, and, so far as the mere acting was concerned, the woman was as well rendered as the Queen. The want of the spectacle was this, and it is, we fully grant, the defect of all her similar personations: you felt that it was only intellect feigning heart, though with perfect success. The tenderness and caprice of the woman, and the pride and dignity of the Queen, are all there. She would not be the consummate artist she is if she could not give them. But even through your tears you see that it is art. It is, indeed, concealed by its own perfection, but it is not lost in the loveliness of the character it suggests, as might be the case with a greatly inferior artist. You are half sure, as you own the excellence, that much of the tender effect arises from your feeling that Rachel, as she represents a woman so different from herself, regards her rôle with sad longing and vague regret. When we say that she is the ideal Mary, we mean strictly the artistic ideal.

The late Charlotte Brontë, in her novel of *VILLETTE*, has described Rachel with a splendor of rhetoric that is very unusual with the author of *JANE EYRE*. But in the style of the description it is very easy to see the influence of the thing described. It has a picturesque stateliness, a grave grace and musical pomp, which all belong to the genius of Rachel. Even the soft gloom of her eyes is in it; a gloom and a fire which no one could more subtly feel than Miss Brontë. Her description is the best that we have seen of what is, in its nature, after all indescribable.

As the fame of an actor or singer is necessarily traditional, and rapidly perishes, it is not easy to compare one with another



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

when they are not contemporaries, for you find yourself only comparing vague impressions and reports. Of Roscius and Betterton we must accept the names and allow the fame. We can see Reynolds's pictures, we can hear Handel's music, we can read Goldsmith's and Johnson's books; but of Garrick what can we have but a name, and somebody's account of what he thought of Garrick? The touch of Shakespeare we can feel as well as did our ancestors, and our great-grandchildren's great-grandchildren will feel it as fully as we. But the voice of Malibran lingers in only a few happy memories, and we know Mrs. Siddons better by Sir Joshua's portrait than by her own glories.

It is, therefore, impossible to decide what relative rank among actresses Rachel occupies. Mrs. Jameson, in her COMMON-PLACE BOOK OF THOUGHTS, MEMORIES, AND FANCIES, says some sharp things of her, and Mrs. Jameson is a critic of too delicate a mind not to be heeded. The general view she takes of Rachel is, that she is not a great artist in the true sense of the word. She is a finished actress, but not an artist fine enough to conceal her art. The last scene of "Adrienne Lecouvreur" seems to Mrs. Jameson a mistake and a failure—so beyond the limits of art, a mere imitation of a repulsive physical fact; and finally she pronounces that Rachel has talent but not genius; while it is the "entire absence of the high poetic element which distinguishes Rachel as an actress, and places her at such an immeasurable distance from Mrs. Siddons, that it shocks me to hear their names together".

It may be fairly questioned, whether a woman so refined and cultivated as Mrs. Jameson may not have judged Rachel rather by her wants as a woman than by her excellence as an artist. That the terrible last scene of "Adrienne" is a harrowing imitation of nature we have conceded. The play is, in truth, a mere melodrama. It is a vaudeville of costume, with a frightful catastrophe appended. But as an artist she seems to us perfectly to render the part. She does not make it more than it is, but she makes it just what it is—a proud, injured, and betrayed actress. Whether the accuracy of her imitation is not justified by the intention, which alone can redeem imitation, will remain a question to each spectator. Mrs. Jameson also insists that Rachel's power is extraneous, and excites only the senses and the intellect, and that she has become a hard mannerist.

In our remarks upon this celebrated actress we have viewed her simply as an artist, and not as a woman. She appeals to the public only in that way. Perhaps the sinister stories that are told of her private career only serve to confirm and deepen the feeling of the intensity of her nature, she so skilfully represents the most fearful passions, not from the perception of genius alone, but from the knowledge of actual experience. Certainly no woman's character has been more freely discussed, and no public performer of any kind ever sought so little to propitiate her audience. She has seemed to scorn the world she fascinated; and like a superb snake, with glittering eyes and cold crest, to gloat over the terror which held her captives



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

thrall. Hence it is not surprising to one who has seen her a great deal, and has felt the peculiarity of her power, to find in Lehmann's portrait of her—which is, perhaps, the most characteristic of all that have been taken—a subtle resemblance to a serpent, which is at once fascinating and startling. Mrs. Jameson mentions that when she first saw her in Hermione, she was reminded of a Lamia, or serpent nature in woman's form. As you look at Lehmann's portrait this feeling is irresistible. The head bends slightly forward, with a darting, eager movement, yet with a fine, lithe grace. The keen, bright eyes glance a little askance, with a want of free confidence. There are a slim smoothness, a silent alertness, in the general impression—a nervous, susceptible intentness, united with undeniable beauty, that recall the deadly nightshade among flowers and Keats's "Lamia" among poems. The portrait would fully interpret the poem, She looked the lovely Lamia upon the verge of flight, at the instant when she felt the calm, inexorable eye of criticism and detection. In a moment, while you gaze, that form will be prone, those bright, cold eyes malignant, that wily grace will undulate into motion and glide away. You feel that there is no human depravity that Rachel could not adequately represent. Perhaps you doubt if she could be Desdemona or Imogen.

Rachel is great, but there is something greater. It is not an entirely satisfactory display of human power, even in its own way. Her triumph is that of an actress. It is only an intellectual success. For however subtly dramatic genius may seize and represent the forms of human emotion, yet the representation is most perfect—not, indeed, as art, but as a satisfaction of the heart—when the personal character of the artist interests those emotions to himself, and thus sympathetically affects the audience. Rachel's Mary is a perfect portrait of Mary; but it is only a picture, after all, that expresses the difference in feeling between the impression of her personation and that which will be derived from another woman. The fiercer and darker passions of human nature are depicted by her with terrible force-power. They throb with reality; but in the soft, superior shades you still feel that it is emotion, intellectually discerned.

Such facts easily explain the present defection of Paris from Rachel. Ristori has come up from Italy, and with one woman's smile, "full of the warm South", she has lured Paris to her feet. There is no more sudden and entire desertion of a favorite recorded in all the annals of popular caprice. The feuilletonists, who are a power in Paris, have gone over in a body to the beautiful Italian. They describe her triumphs precisely as they described Rachel's. The old ecstasies are burnished up for the new occasion. In a country like ours, where there is no theatre, and where the dramatic differences only creep into an advertisement, such an excitement as Paris feels, from such a cause and at such a time, is simply incredible. It is, possibly, as real and dignified an excitement as that which New York experienced upon the decease of the late lamented



HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

William Poole.

There are various explanations of this fall of Rachel, without resorting to the theory of superior genius in Ristori. Undoubtedly Paris loves novelty, and has been impatient of the disdainful sway of Rachel. Her reputed avarice and want of courtesy and generosity, her total failure to charm as a woman while she fascinated as an artist, have, naturally enough, after many years, fatigued the patience and disappointed the humane sympathies of a public whose mere curiosity had been long satisfied. Rachel seemed only more Parisian than Paris.

But when over the Alps came Ristori, lovely as a woman and eminent as an artist, then there was a new person who could make Paris weep at her greatness upon the stage, and her goodness away from it; who, in the plenitude of her first success, could shame the reported avarice of her fallen rival by offers of the sincerest generosity. When Ristori came, who seemed to have a virtue for every vice of Rachel, Paris, with one accord, hurried with hymns and incense to the new divinity. We regard it as a homage to the woman no less than a tribute to the artist. We regard it as saying to Rachel that if, being humane and lovely, she chose, from pride, to rule by scornful superiority, she has greatly erred; or if, being really unlovely, she has held this crown only by her genius, she has yet to see human nature justify itself by preferring a humane to an inhuman power. The most splendid illustration of this kind of homage was the career of [Jenny Lind](#) in America. It was rather the fashion among the *dilettanti* to undervalue her excellence as an artist. A popular superficial criticism was fond of limiting her dramatic power to inferior rôles. She was denied passion and great artistic skill; she was accused of tricks. But, even had these things been true, what a career it was! It was unprecedented, and can never be repeated. Yet it was, at bottom, the success of a saint rather than that of a singer. Had she been a worse or better artist the homage would have been the same. If the public—and it is a happy fact—can love the woman even more than it admires the artist, her triumph is assured.

We look upon the enthusiasm for Ristori by no means as an unmingled tribute to superior genius. We make no question of her actual womanly charms. Even if appearance of generosity, of simplicity, and sweetness were only deep Italian wile, and assumed, upon profound observation and consideration of human nature and the circumstances of Rachel's position in Paris, merely for the purpose of exciting applause, that applause would still be genuine, and would prove the loyalty of the public mind to what is truly lovely. It was our good-fortune to see Ristori in Italy, where, for the last ten years, she has been accounted the first Italian actress. She has there been seen by all the travelling world of Europe and America. It is not possible that so great a talent, as the Parisians consider it, could have been so long overlooked. We well remember Ristori as a charming, natural, simple actress; but of the surpassing power which Paris has discovered probably very few of us retain any recollection.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

March 19, Monday: The temporary vehicular suspension bridge which had been thrown across the chasm of the [Niagara River](#) in 1848, which had had to be removed, was replaced in a form strengthened by wooden trusses for the passage of railway trains. (These wooden trusses would be replaced with steel trusses in 1880.)

A little more detail on this: The chasm of the Niagara River had for many years prevented connection of New York Central tracks with the Great Western Railway of Canada. The solution had to be a railway suspension structure, but of a magnitude never previously attempted. A company had formed for that purpose with Ellet as their engineer. When the main effort began, there were disagreements and Ellet left the project. In 1851 John Augustus Roebling had been invited to submit plans and estimates.



(While all this was going on, another railway suspension bridge had been being constructed by the Roebling firm, across the Kentucky River on the line of the Southern Railroad leading from Cincinnati to Chattanooga. The gorge of that river in that region is deeper and wider than the gorge of the Niagara, necessitating a clear span of no less than 1,224 feet. The anchorage and stone towers had rapidly been completed, the necessary plates and saddles hoisted up the towers; most of the cable wire delivered, as also the material for the superstructure, the girder principle adopted there being essentially different from that carried out in the Niagara Bridge since no floor for vehicles was required in that case; suddenly, however, the finances of the railway company had collapsed and the building of that stupendous bridge, already well advanced, had immediately stopped, as well as work on the railroad — and has never since been renewed.)

Construction of the Niagara span, however, had been uninterrupted even during the coldest Canada winters and in this month the 1st locomotive and train crossed the new 825-foot span. A railroad train hanging from wires! This clear span was not merely longer than the Britannia rail bridge over the Menai Strait in North Wales, it was twice as long, and it was very light, using only $\frac{1}{6}$ th the weight of materials in proportion to its length. Its 4 wire cables were each 10 inches in diameter and hung from the cliffs in such a manner as to resist deck uplift from the winds. The bridge had two decks, a lower one devoted to vehicles and an upper one for

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

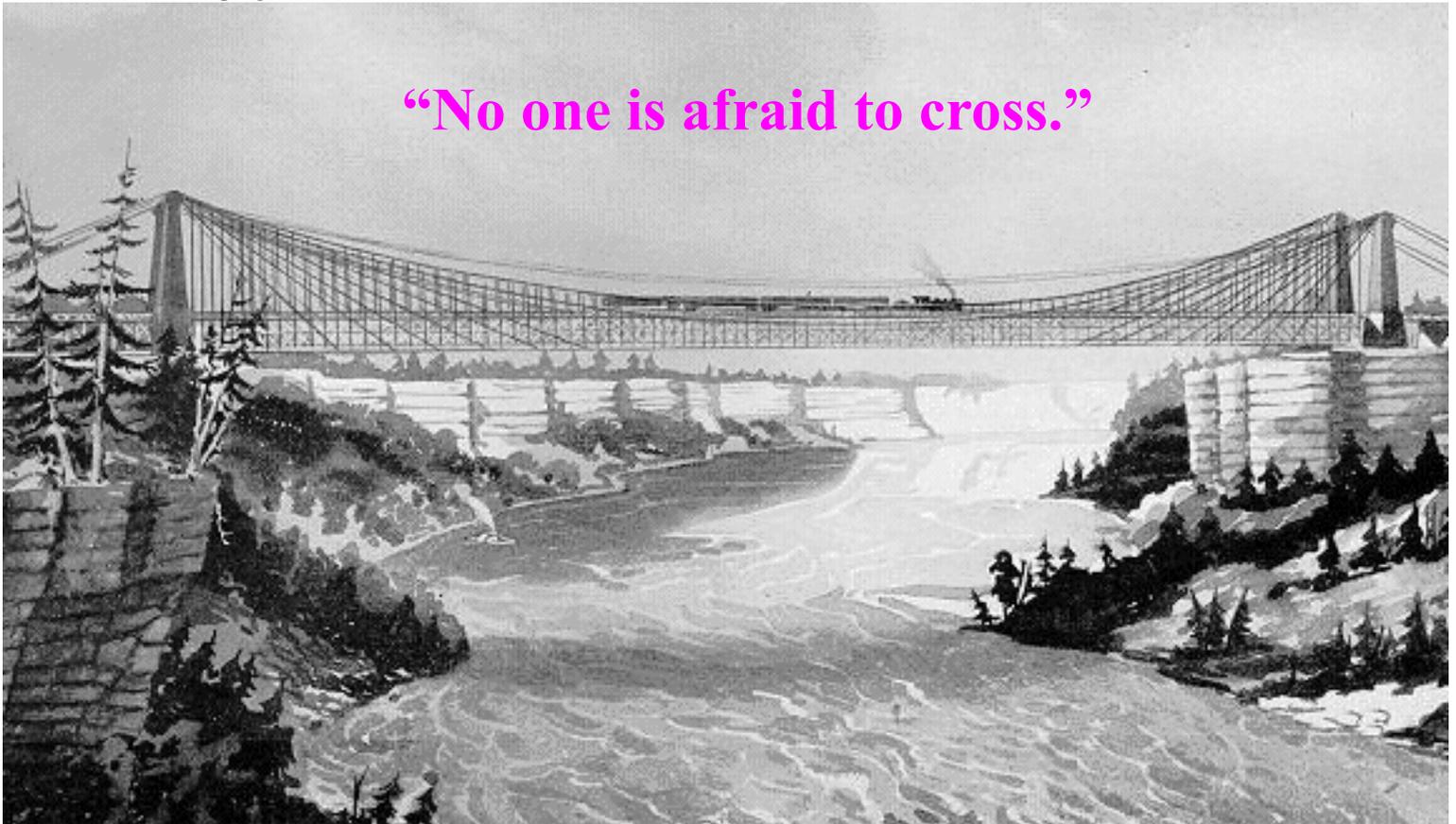
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

trains. The decks were connected by struts and diagonal tension rods so as to create a continuous, hollow suspended²⁶ girder stiff enough to support rolling load. Inclined cable stays above its top deck further stiffened the bridge. John Augustus Roebling had positioned the bridge over the rapids of the river rather than above the falls themselves, slightly downstream, which were then being touted to America by [George William Curtis](#) – he claimed to be able to hear Niagara roar “FORWARD!” – as a natural USer symbol of our “irresistible progress.”²⁷

“No one is afraid to cross.”



We may speculate that John Augustus Roebling’s claim “No one is afraid to cross” needed to be issued simply because hundreds of people had fallen to their deaths five years earlier when a suspension bridge had collapsed in France. Of all the people who would pass over this bridge, it would be Mark Twain (of course) who would

26. The structure would be referred to as a suspension structure, although it was not like the Golden Gate bridge and really classifies instead as a cable-stayed span, similar to the one over a ship canal east of Houston TX.

27. For some reason this is reminiscent of the concluding scene in the movie “Doctor Zhivago.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

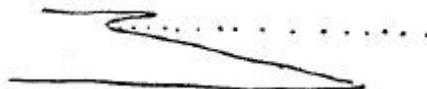
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

have the most apposite remark:

You drive over the Suspension Bridge, and divide your misery between the chances of smashing down two hundred feet into the river below, and the chances of having a railway train overhead smashing down onto you. Either possibility is discomfiting taken by itself, but, mixed together, they amount in the aggregate to positive unhappiness.



March 19. A fine clear and warm day for the season. Launched my boat. P. M. — Paddled to Fair Haven Pond. Very pleasant and warm, when the wind lulls and the water is perfectly smooth. I make the voyage without gloves. The snow of March 14th is about gone, and the landscape is once more russet. The thick ice of the meadows lies rotting on each side of the stream, white and almost soft as snow. In many places it extends still over the shallower parts of the river. As I paddle or pole up the side of the stream, the muddy bottom looks dark and dead, and no greenness is observed but on a close scrutiny. The unsightly dead leaf-stalks of the pontederia cover it in irregular whorls covered with filth. The black stems of the polygonums here and there still rise above the surface. But on a closer scrutiny you detect here and there bits of the evergreen ranunculus (commonly floating), the cress, some reddish pads of nuphar expanded close to the bottom, and a few points of its closely rolled, unexpanded leaves, also some radical greenness in the pontederia. And what is that fresh green oblong, perhaps spatulate, leaf one and a half inches long, making little rosettes on a running root, in one place just this side the ash above the railroad [It is forget-me-not.]? There is this radical greenness to correspond with that on the land. The muskrat-houses are for the most part flatted down, even below the present level of the water (at least five feet and more below the truss), probably by the water and ice a month ago. I see but three or four well repaired. One new one at least, however, on a piece of meadow lately lodged. It is to be inferred that they have not the same need of them as in the fall. Already Farrar is out with his boat looking for spring cranberries, and here comes, slowly paddling, the dark-faced trapper Melvin with his dog and gun. [See him out here the first boating day next year also.]. I see a poor drowned gray rabbit floating, back up as in life, but three quarters submerged. I see a hawk circling over a small maple grove through this calm air, ready to pounce on the first migrating sparrow that may have arrived. As I paddle or push along by the edge of the thick ice which lines the shore, sometimes pushing against it, I observe that it is curiously worn by the water into this form: the dotted line being the water's edge. The water has eaten into the edge of the ice just where its surface meets it



(which may be one and a half inches beneath the top), four or five inches or more, leaving a sharp projecting eave above, while the lower part, five or six inches thick, being preserved hard by the water, slopes off to a very sharp edge from one to even four feet from the upper. The undulations made by my boat and paddle, striking under this eave, make a constant sound as I pass. I am surprised to find that the river has not yet worn through Fair Haven Pond. Getting up a weed with the paddle close to the shore under water, where five or six inches deep, I found a fishworm in the mud. Here and there, floating or on the edge of the ice, I see small pieces of nuphar root, with a few rolled, pointed leaf-buds, probably gnawed off by the muskrats. The greater part of the Wood meadow this side Clamshell has been lifted up and settled again, and it now sounds hollow and sinks under my steps. The wind has got round more to the east now, at 5 P. M., and is raw and disagreeable, and produces a bluish haze or mist at once in the air. It is early for such a phenomenon. Smelled muskrats in two places, and saw two. Saw, by their white droppings on the bottom, where ducks had fed. I hear at last the tchuck tchuck of a blackbird and, looking up, see him flying high over the river southwesterly, — the wrong way, — in great haste to reach somewhere; and when I reach my landing I hear my first bluebird, somewhere about Cheney's trees by the river. I hear him out of the blue deeps, but do not yet see his blue body. He comes with a warble. Now first generally heard in the village. Not a duck do I see. It is perhaps too bright and serene a day for them.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

April 13, Friday: The legislature of the state of New York amended its 1853 Agricultural and Horticultural Societies Act, lowering the number of required directors from 6 to 2.

The state permitted the Regents of its University to designate academies where free subsidized classes might be taught.

Establishment of the New York State Lunatic Asylum for Insane Convicts, the world's 1st mental hospital, separate from a prison or general hospital, for criminal patients. The 1st facility would be opened in 1859 in Auburn, adjoining the state prison there. The hospital would move to a new building in Matteawan in 1892 and be renamed Matteawan State Hospital.²⁸

PSYCHOLOGY

Henry Thoreau wrote to George William Curtis of Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art concerning revision to CAPE COD chapters.

*Concord Mass. Ap 13th
'55
Mr Editor,
I used the ex-
pressions of Mr Treat's biographe[r]
& to some extent eulogist,
them merely condensing, being my- ^ self
a wholly indifferent party;
but I see that I was not
careful enough to preserve
the past tense. I suppose
that your objection will
be avoided by writing the
passage thus,—
“not one of those moderate
Calvinists, said to be common in
the write[r's] day, who, 'by giving up
or explaining away the peculiar
doctrines of the party', became
'like a porcupine disarmed of
its quills', but a consistent*

Page 2
*Calvinist, who could dart
his quills to a distance and
courageously defend himself.”*

28. Street, W.R. A CHRONOLOGY OF NOTEWORTHY EVENTS IN AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY. Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 1994

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

*“So common at the present time” are the historian’s words. You perceive that I omit one of the porcupines, but I prefer to leave something to be explained away. By “Scripture” I mean the bible. I suspected that the line was derived from Elliot’s Indian bible. It will be better if it is printed “the Scriptures”, and so save me from the suspicion of weakness. If this is obscure, I do not see any help for it, but must consent to be understood by the few.
In the remaining clause I*

Page 3
*should like to substitute “probably” for “may be”.
Henry D. Thoreau.*

Page 4
*written upside down: Henry D Therau
Apl 13/55*



April 13. P.M. — To Second Division cowslips.

A fair day, but a cool wind still, from the snow-covered country in the northwest. It is, however, pleasant to sit in the sun in sheltered places.

The small croaking frogs are now **generally** heard in all those stagnant ponds or pools in woods floored with leaves, which are mainly dried up in the summer. At first, perhaps, you hear but one or two dry croaks, but, if you sit patiently, you may hear quite a concert of them at last, — *er-wah er-wah er-wah*, with a nasal twang and twist,— and see them dimpling the surface here and there by their movements. But if you approach the pond-side, they suddenly cease. We hear them at J.P. Brown’s Pond, which is edged with ice still on the north. The water must be smooth and the weather pretty warm.

There is still some icy snow in hollows under the north sides of woods.

I see the feathers, apparently of a fox-colored sparrow, completely covering a stump, where some creature has devoured it. At a great ant-hill, the common half-red, half-black ants are stirring, apparently clearing out rubbish from their nest. Great quantities of odoriferous sweet-gale seed are collected with the scum at the outlet of Nut Meadow, for they float. The *Alnus incana* blossoms begin generally to show. The *serrulata* will undoubtedly blossom to-morrow in some places. (Or probably not till the 15th. Did I not take the *incana* for this in '54?)

The pine on the Marlborough road which I saw from my window has been sawed down the past winter. I try to count its circles; count sixty-one from centre to sap, but there the pitch conceals the rest completely. I guessed there were fifteen more, at least. The tree was probably quite eighty Years old. It was about two and a quarter feet in diameter.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

The common hazel just out. It is perhaps the prettiest flower of the *shrubs* that have opened. A little bunch of (in this case) half a dozen catkins, one and three quarters inches long, trembling in the wind, shedding golden pollen on the hand, and, close by, as many minute, but clear crystalline crimson stars at the end of a bare and seemingly dead twig. For two or three days in my walks, I had given the hazel catkins a fillip with my finger under their chins to see if they were in bloom, but in vain; but here, on the warm south side of a wood, I find one bunch fully out and completely relaxed. They know when to trust themselves to the weather. At the same time I hear through the wood the sharp peep of the first hylodes I have chanced to hear. Many cowslip buds show a little yellow, but they will not open there for two or three days. The road is paved with solid ice there. Returning by the steep side-hill just south of Holden's wood-lot and some dozen or fourteen rods west of the open land, I saw, amid the rattlesnake-plantain leaves, what I suspect to be the *Polygala paucifolia*, — some very beautiful oval leaves of a dull green (green turned dark) above, but beneath — and a great many showed the underside — a clear and brilliant purple (or lake??), growing and looking like checkerberry leaves, but more flaccid. It is three or four inches high, with the oval and revolute leaves at top and a few remote small bract-like leaves on the (three-sided) stem. This polygala is sometimes called flowering wintergreen, and, indeed, it is not only an evergreen but somewhat pyrola-like to the eye. See a sparrow without marks on throat or breast, running peculiarly in the dry grass in the open field beyond, and hear its song, and then see its white feathers in tail; the baywing. A small willow by the roadside beyond William Wheeler's, to-morrow.

April 20, Friday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George William Curtis](#).

Concord Ap. 20th '55
Mr Editor
You may omit
the words "in Scripture",
if you will indicate an
omission somewhat in
this wise—
"Somewhere + +; may be" &c
Yrs
Henry D. Thoreau

August 8, Wednesday: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George William Curtis](#) about revisions to "The Beach Again" (which would become Chapter 6 of [CAPE COD](#)) at [Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art](#) (this manuscript eventually needed to be withdrawn).

Concord Mass. Aug 8th
1855
Mr. Editor,
Will you
allow me to trouble you
once more about my
Cape Cod paper. I
should like to substitute
the accompanying sheets



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

*for about ten pages
of my MS, in the
Chapter called "The Beach
Again," that is, for the
pages between the words
"heaped & then scraped" (which
I think occur at the end
of a paragraph about
a dozen pages from the
beginning of the chapter,
and the words "It was
a poetic recreation &c",*

*Page 2
as you will see.
Yrs respectfully
Henry D. Thoreau*

TIMELINE OF CAPE COD



Aug.8. Blue-curls, how long? Not long.

August: [Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George William Curtis](#).

*Mr Editor,
You say that
you had no idea that the Cape
Cod [paper] "was to be expanded into
a book". It has not been expanded—
It is no longer than it was when I
~~told you~~ sent you the first[]pages &
told you of its length though you had
not inquired about it. You say there
is enough for 4 numbers of your
magazine still on hand— I have
sent some 208 pages in all & you
have printed about 137 of them in
3 numbers. I write this merely in self
defence & not to induce you to print
it.
Will you please send to me the remainder
of the MSS by express—
Yrs Henry D Thoreau*



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Thoreau's "The Beach" appeared in Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art.

READ THIS ARTICLE

TIMELINE OF CAPE COD

Herman Melville's "The Bell-Tower" appeared anonymously in Putnam's Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art. This was the first short story inspired by Mary Shelly's FRANKENSTEIN; OR, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS. In the Melville rendition, a machine-man which has been constructed to strike the hours in a Renaissance Italian bell tower destroys its creator. The summation sentence: "And so pride went before the fall."



CONSULT THIS ISSUE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

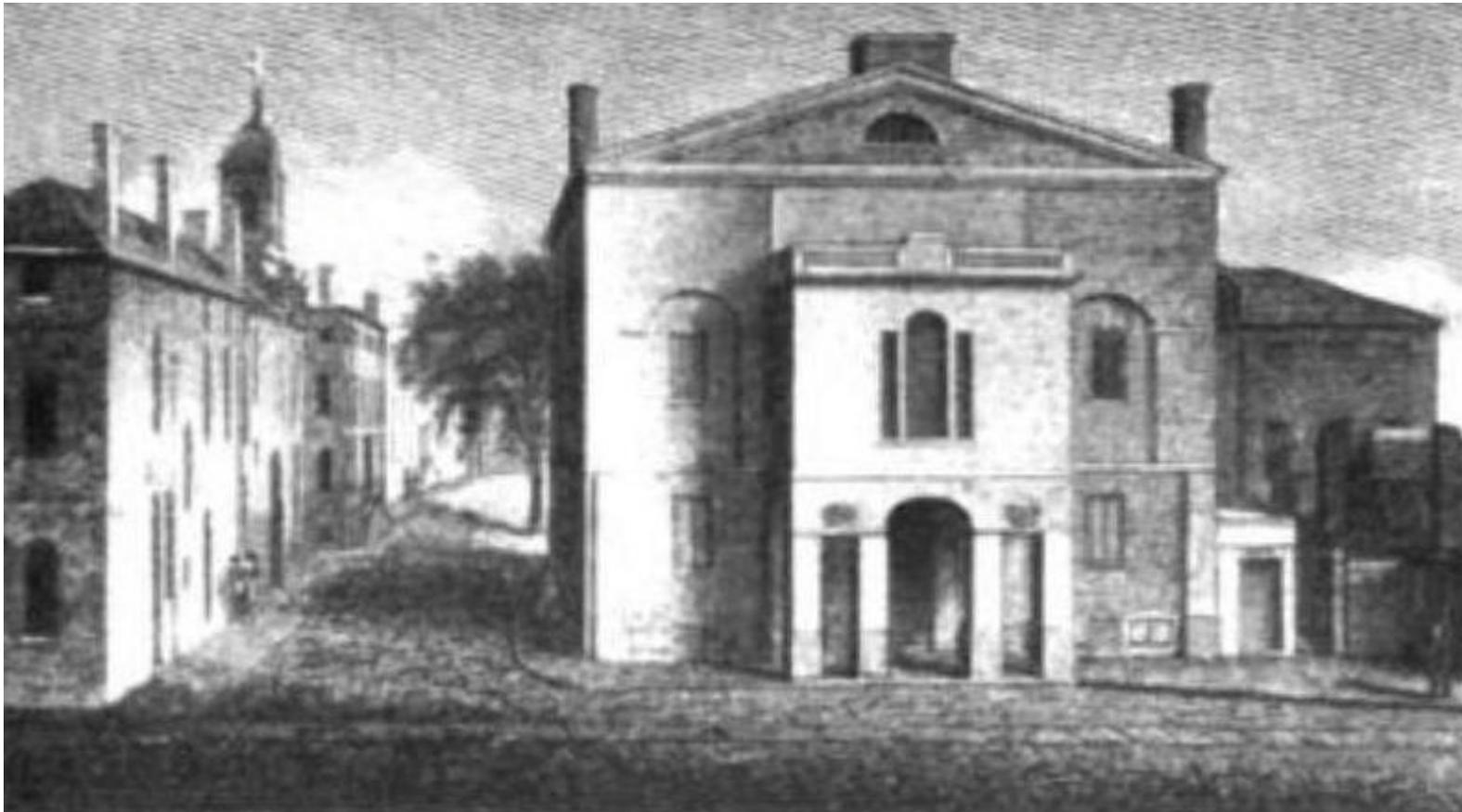
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Winter: Lecture Season of '55/56, at the [Odeon Hall](#) in [Boston](#): [James Russell Lowell](#)'s series on the English poets was so popular that each lecture was being repeated, for those who had not managed to get inside the hall on the designated night, on the next afternoon. They were appearing verbatim in the newspaper. It was this series for [The Lowell Institute](#) which would win Lowell his appointment to succeed [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) at [Harvard College](#):²⁹

THE LOWELL INSTITUTE

17th Season of [The Lowell Institute](#)

Reverend Orville Dewey. <i>Education of the Human Race</i>	12 lectures
Reverend W.H. Milburn. <i>Early History and Settlement of the Mississippi Valley</i>	12 lectures
George William Curtis . <i>Contemporaneous English Fiction</i>	6 lectures
Professor J.P. Cooke, Jr. <i>Chemistry of the Non-metallic Elements</i>	12 lectures
Professor E. Vitalis Scharb. <i>The Great Religious and Philosophical Poems of Modern Times</i>	12 lectures





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

29. This was the way [Louis Agassiz](#) also got onto the [Harvard College](#) faculty, for he had been brought to America to lecture for [The Lowell Institute](#) and had initially given over a hundred popular lectures. Yet, as the Lowell Institute's historian later boasted:

Crude theories and plans for moral and political reforms are not to be found in the Lowell lectures. The selection of lectures and lecturers is made from a broad and comprehensive knowledge of the safe thought and intelligent study of the time.

Thus [Louis Agassiz](#)'s lifelong disdain for the development theory of [Charles Darwin](#) may not have been motivated solely by his racism, and by an awareness of how his "scientific" posturing could be utilized to bolster the institution of slavery and the financial interests of his slavemaster friends, but may also have been motivated by his desire to be lauded by and followed by the general public — for in fact no paid Lowell lecturer would have been allowed to advocate anything as leveling as the theory of Darwin.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1856

[George William Curtis](#)'s PRUE AND I. Also, his THE HOWADJI IN SYRIA was published by Harper of New-York.



The author actively participated in the 1856 presidential campaign.

Fall: [George William Curtis](#), who had made of himself a popular abolitionist lecturer, campaigned for Republican presidential candidate [John Charles Frémont](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

November 29, Saturday: [George William Curtis](#) got married with Anna Shaw, 20-year-old daughter of the abolitionists Francis George Shaw and Sarah Blake Sturgis Shaw. The wedding was conducted by the Reverend John Parkman either in the bride's home on Staten Island or at the Unitarian Church of the Redeemer. The young couple would take up residence on Staten Island. There would be 3 children, Frank George Curtis, Elizabeth Burrill Curtis, and Sarah Shaw Curtis.



There appeared in The Illustrated London News a woodcut sketch purporting to represent a “Public Sale of Slaves in Charleston, SC.” This graphic illustration of an auction would in 1931 resurface as the centerfold of Frederic Bancroft’s SLAVE-TRADING IN THE OLD SOUTH. On the reverse page an accompanying article described the slave auctions in South Carolina. Within the report appeared a typical slave sale notice as follows: “AN ENTIRE GANG OF NEGROES” Notice—Particular attention is called to the sale at auction, this day, at eleven o’clock, by Alonzo J. White, of a very prime gang of negroes, who have been accustomed to the culture of rice. Until within the last five years, they cultivated sea-island cotton. These negroes are very orderly and well disciplined, and have been long organised and worked as a gang. Among them are carpenters and a cooper.”

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

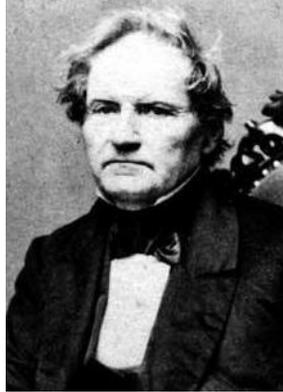
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

June 22, Sunday: [H. Rider Haggard](#) was born.

[Friend Daniel Ricketson](#) spent the forenoon in [Henry Thoreau](#)'s room copying titles of books, etc. The [Reverend Convers Francis](#) was preaching in [Concord](#) that morning, and his proof-text was Colossians 1:27 and



his topic "Christ in Us the Hope of Glory." The thermometer reaching 95 at 3PM. At 4PM Ricketson and Thoreau went over to the Emerson home for tea by prior invitation, stopping by on the way to call on Mrs. Mary Merrick Brooks. Then he, Thoreau, and Emerson went with the Emerson children to [Walden Pond](#).



Thoreau walked back from the pond with [Ellen Emerson](#) and [Edith Emerson](#) while Ricketson, [Waldo Emerson](#), and 12-year-old [Edward Waldo Emerson](#) "bathed" and discussed the birds and flowers that they had met on the way. Upon return to the Emersons, Ricketson had a chance to meet Mrs. Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley with Miss Ripley, Mrs. Marsten Goodwin, and the Reverend Francis. They visited until 9, and Ricketson was in bed back at the Thoreaus' at 10. He had found the day very satisfactory and mused to his journal about Concord's opportunity of becoming the famous-author [tourist trap](#) it is today:



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

 My ideas of Mr. Emerson, with whom I had my second interview last night, are that he is a kind, gentle-natured man, even loving, but not what is usually termed warm-hearted. His mind does not strike me as being so great and strong as good in quality; it appears to me also limited as to its power. I should think he could rarely surprise one with any outburst of inspiration – his genius, for what he undoubtedly has, is sui generis. He is thoughtful, original, and only Emerson, and the founder of his race. It does not appear to me that he is even indebted to Carlyle, although the latter has recognized him as a kindred spirit. Emerson's strength appears to me to lie in his honesty with himself; by his honesty he has produced a genuine article in the way of thought. He is an intelligent philosopher, a recipient of the divine cordial in doses rather homœopathic, but effectual specifics for those seeking a purer and better draught than what the schools afford. He is a blessing to the age. I am much interested in Concord, and should prefer it for a residence to almost any other place. The scenery is very picturesque in and about the village, and all appears quiet and peaceful, none of the stir and bustle of New Bedford. The Concord, or Musketaquid or grass-grown river, as my friend H.D.T. has learned its meaning from the Indians, runs along the edge of the village, which is chiefly on one street, although there are several others. It is a fine stream, and remarkable for its gentle current. With Thoreau I rowed up the river several miles, and had many pleasant views from different points. Walden Pond, by the shore where Thoreau built him a little house and there lived two years, is a small but delightful little lake, surrounded by woods. It is very deep and clear, a kind of well of nature. Concord has been for a long time the home or place of temporary abode for many of our most intellectual men and women, – commencing, so far as I am informed, with Dr. Ripley, then Emerson, Margaret Fuller for a short time as a visitor, Hawthorne, G.W. Curtis, H.D. Thoreau, the true Concord aborigine, William E. Channing, 2d, poet, Hon. Samuel Hoar, and his son, ex-Judge Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar. It is also the home of Mrs. Brooks, a true and stirring abolitionist. Concord has a large number of fine old houses, and the old parsonage, once the home of Dr. Ripley and near the battle-ground, is one of the finest old homes in this county.

WALDO EMERSON

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

ELLERY CHANNING

SAMUEL HOAR

EBENEZER ROCKWOOD HOAR

EZRA RIPLEY

MARGARET FULLER

THOMAS CARLYLE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

April: [George William Curtis](#) had become a partner with the new owners of [Putnam's Monthly](#), the publishing firm Dix, Edwards & Co. When the company failed Curtis accepted a large indebtedness. To repay this sum would require almost two decades on the lecture circuit.

The [Melvilles](#) sold half their farm "[Arrowhead](#)" in north-western Massachusetts in the vicinity of [Mount Greylock](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1857

In Brooklyn, New-York [Gabriel Franchère](#) established his own fur commission house.

William Beard and Jeremiah Robinson began filling in tidal flats and building a breakwater in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood (the start of construction of the Erie Basin).

Industrialist Peter Cooper founded the Cooper Union school.

A house in the Italianate style was erected at 234 Bard Avenue in Livingston on Staten Island for [George William Curtis](#) and Anna Shaw Curtis.

Fall: The new Republican Party took firm control of the Massachusetts state government.

[George William Curtis](#) initiated a column in Harper's entitled "The Lounger."

December: During a shower, lizards fell upon the streets and sidewalks of Montréal, Québec.

Birth on Staten Island of the initial child of [George William Curtis](#) with Anna Shaw Curtis, named Frank George Curtis.

December 31, Thursday: [Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau](#) wrote to her cousin Marianne or Mary Anne Mitchell Dunbar of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, among other things about concerts in Boston and her current reading:

In October ... my dear father was attacked with jaundice & became very dangerously ill, for many weeks I was absorbed in the duties of nurse. The good man is now much better & were it not for a cough which is very severe at present I should consider him quite sound -.... As to Concord we are kept awake by our Lyceum lectures which have been particularly acceptable thus far. Mr. Emerson gave the first of the season, next came Mr. Algar & then Geo. W. Curtis charmed us all with his discourse on "Sir Philip Sidney." We are now listening to a course of lectures from Rev. Mr. Stone on English literature. The Concord "Dramatic Union" composed of some gifted young people serve us to an entertainment occasionally. Christmas night they gave us some scenes from Dickens.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

[George William Curtis](#) lectured about [Sir Philip Sidney](#) (this would in 1895 appear in his [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#)).



[Waldo Emerson](#) checked out [Edmond Francois Valentin About](#)'s GREECE AND THE GREEKS OF THE PRESENT DAY from the Boston Athenaeum library.

GREECE AND THE GREEKS

[Richard Henry Horne](#) was a commissioner of the Yan Yean water supply in Australia.



December 31, Thursday: P.M. Surveying Goose Pond.

After some rain yesterday and in the night, there was a little more snow, and the ground is still covered. I am surprised to find Walden still closed since Sunday night, notwithstanding the warm weather since it skimmed over, and that Goose Pond bears, though covered with slush; but ice under water is slow to thaw. It does not break up so soon as you would expect. Walking over it, I thought that I saw an old glove on the ice or slush, but, approaching, found it to be a bullfrog, flat on its belly with its legs stretched out. Touching it, I found it to be alive, though it could only partially open its eyes, and it hung motionless and flimsy like a rag in my hands. It was evidently nearly chilled to death and could not jump, though there was then no freezing. I looked round a good while and finally found a hole to put it into, squeezing it through. Perhaps in such a warm rain the surface water becomes warmer than at the bottom, and so tempts the frogs up on to the ice through a hole. This one was wholly unscathed by any animal, but would surely have frozen stiff in the night.

It is remarkable that in ordinary winter weather you will commonly find some of these small holes called air or breathing holes, in most ponds. But of whatever service they may be to the inhabitants of the water, they are not commonly formed by any undulation or upwelling from below, but as far as I have observed, by surface water flowing in through a crevice and wearing away the ice.

Warm as it is, underneath all this slush the ice seems as solid as ever.

Under and attached to one of the lowermost branches of a white pine sapling in my old potato-field, I see a large hornet's nest, close to the ground.

I have been surveying most of the time for a month past and have associated with various characters:—

First there was Staples, quick, clear, downright, and on the whole a good fellow, especially good to treat with

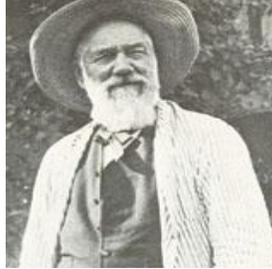
[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

rougher and slower men than himself, always meaning well.



An Irishman, rather slow and dull but well-meaning.

A rustic innkeeper, evidently rather close-fisted.

George Heywood, a quiet, efficient man, very gentlemanly and agreeable to deal with; no pretense nor bluster, but simple, direct, and even sweet.

——, a crooked stick, not readily apprehending your drift, referring to old deeds or places which he can't find, thinking he is entitled to many more acres than belong to him, but never leaving his work or his cattle to attend to you. To be found commonly in his barn, if you come upon him suddenly before he can hide. Has some complaint or injury which deforms him somewhat, —has crooked his body, so that when you meet him in the street he looks as if he was going across the road. Another Irishman, one of the worst of his race, full of blarney, one of the would-be gentlemen, who, when treated according to his deserts, having complained unreasonably of my price, apologizes by saying that he meant nothing. "What's the use of having a tongue in your head if you don't use it?"

A common specimen of the Yankee, who commonly answers me with "exactly" or "just so."

——, who was so afraid he should lose some land belonging to him that, though he had employed Rice to survey his small wood-lot of three acres, within a year, he working two or three days at it and setting at least fifty stakes about it, having also two plans of it, yet, seeing that I had by chance set a stake a foot or two one side of his line, thought there was some mistake and would have me measure his lot anew. It was but little labor, the lines were so open, —for a path was actually worn round the whole lot. He appears to go round it every day or two. When I wanted a straight pole, he was very scrupulous not to cut it from his neighbor's side of the line. He did not seem able to understand a plan or deed, and had sold some of his land because he did not know that he had a good title to it. Everything I told him about his deed and plan seemed to surprise him infinitely and make him laugh with excess of interest. When I pointed out anything in the plan, he did not look at it, only at my finger and at me, and took my word for it. I told him that I wondered his last surveyor had not set a stake and stone in one place, according to his plan and deed, a perfectly plain case, the stump of the pitch pine referred to being left. He said he did n't want to make bounds, and asked me if I should have set it there, to which I answered, "Yes, of course," that was what I had been doing all my life, making bounds, or rather finding them, remaking what had been unmade, where they were away. He listened to me as if I were an oracle. He did not in the least understand my instrument, or "spy-glass," as he called it, but had full faith that it knew the way straight through the thickest wood to missing bounds. He was so deaf I had to shout to him, and there were two more in his house deafer than he, —and I think only one other. The passers-by commonly hear them talking to one another within. I could never communicate with him when setting a stake or-carrying the chain but by signs, and must first get his attention to the signs. This I accomplished, when he had hold of the chain, by giving it several smart jerks. When he paid me at his house, I observed that all his money was in silver. He said he told H—— that we had been cutting off some of his land, and H said, "Is that right?" H has a good deal of large old wood which he will not cut. —— says that he goes into it with his axe, and striking on an old tree says, "That's sound," and so lets it stand, though when cut it turns out to be false-hearted.

—— says that Rice worked two days on only two sides of his lot, but that he told him he would not charge him but two dollars if it took him a week. I found and used one of Rice's poles, left on the ground all planed for the purpose, for he worked not without tools.





PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY³⁰

Wearied of the world and saddened by the ruin of his fortunes, the Italian Count Maddalo turned from the street, which rang with tales of disaster and swarmed with melancholy faces, into his palace. Perplexed and anxious, he passed through the stately rooms in which hung the portraits of generations of ancestors. The day was hot; his blood was feverish, but the pictures seemed to him cool and remote in a holy calm. He looked at them earnestly; he remembered the long history of which his fathers were parts, he recalled their valor and their patience, and asked himself whether, after all, their manhood was not their patent of nobility; and stretching out his hands towards them, exclaimed: "Let me feel that I am indeed your son by sharing that manhood which made you noble."

We Americans laugh at ancestors; and if the best of them came back again, we should be as likely to laugh at his wig as listen to his wisdom. And in our evanescent houses and uneasy life we would no more have ancient ranges of family pictures than Arabs in their tents. Yet we are constantly building and visiting the greatest portrait gallery of all in the histories we write and read; and the hour is never lost which we give to it. It may teach a maid humility to know that her mother was fairer. It may make a youth more modest to know that his grandsire was braver. For if the pictures of history show us that deformity is as old as grace, and that virtue was always martyred, they also show that crime, however prosperous for a time, is at last disastrous, and that there can be no permanent peace without justice and freedom.

Those pictures teach us also that character is inherited like name and treasure, and that all of us may have famous or infamous ancestors perhaps without knowing it. The melancholy poet, eating his own heart out in a city garret, is the child of Tasso. Grinding Ralph Nickleby, the usurer, is Shylock's grandson. The unjust judge, who declares that some men have no rights which others are bound to respect, is a later Jeffries on his bloody assizes, or dooming Algernon Sidney to the block once more for loving liberty; while he whose dull heart among the new duties of another time is never quickened with public spirit, and who as a citizen aims only at his own selfish advantage, is a later Benedict Arnold whom every generous heart despises.

From this lineage of character arises this great convenience—that as it is bad manners to criticise our neighbors by name, we may hit them many a sly rap over the shoulders of their ancestors who wore turbans, or helmets, or bagwigs, and lived long ago in other countries. The Church especially finds great comfort in this resource, and the backs of the whole Hebrew race must be sore with the scorings they get for the sins of Christian congregations. The timid Peter, the foolish Virgins, the wicked

30. [George William Curtis](#), SIR PHILIP SIDNEY, Vol. I, written during 1857, printed in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Herod, are pilloried every Sunday in the pulpit, to the great satisfaction of the Peters, Virgins, and Herods dozing in the pews. But when some ardent preacher, heading out of his metaphors, and jumping from Judea and the first century into the United States and the nineteenth, disturbs Peter's enjoyment of his ancestor's castigation by saying vehemently to his face with all the lightning of the law in his eye, and its thunders in his voice, "Thou art the man!" Peter recoils with decorous horror, begs his pastor to remember that he and Herod are sheep who were to be led by still waters; warns him not to bring politics into the pulpit, to talk not of living people, but of old pictures. So the poor shepherd is driven back to his pictures, and cudgels Peter once more from behind a metaphor.

But the fairest use of these old pictures is to make us feel our common humanity, and to discover that what seems to us a hopelessly romantic ideal of character is a familiar fact of every day. Heroism is always the same, however the fashion of a hero's clothes may alter. Every hero in history is as near to a man as his neighbor, and if we should tell the simple truth of some of our neighbors, it would sound like poetry. Sir Philip Sidney wore doublet and hose, and died in Flanders three hundred years ago. His name is the synonym of manly honor, of generous scholarship, of the finest nobility, of the spiritual light that most irradiates human nature. Look at his portrait closely; it is no stranger that you see; it is no far-off Englishman. It is your friend, your son, your brother, your lover. Whoever knew Wendell Phillips knew Philip Sidney. It is the same spirit in a thousand forms; a perpetual presence, a constant benediction: Look at his portrait and

"The night shall be filled with music, And the cares
that infest the day Shall fold their tents like the
Arabs, And as silently steal away."

The gray walls, the red and peaked roof of the old house of Penshurst, stand in the pleasant English valley of the Medway, in soft and showery Kent. Kent is all garden, and there, in November, 1554, Philip Sidney was born. His father, Sir Henry Sidney, was a wise and honest man. Bred at court, his sturdy honor was never corrupted. King Edward died in his arms, and Queen Mary confirmed all his honors and offices three weeks before the birth of his oldest son, whom, in gratitude, he named Philip, for the queen's new Spanish husband. Philip's mother was Mary Dudley, daughter of the Duke of Northumberland, sister of the famous Earl of Leicester, sister also of Lord Guildford Dudley and sister-in-law of Lady Jane Grey. The little Philip was born into a sad household. Within fifteen months his grandfather and uncle had been beheaded for treason; and his sorrowing mother, a truly noble and tender woman, had been the victim of small-pox, and hid her grieving heart and poor scarred face in the silence and seclusion of Penshurst. On the south side of the house was the old garden or plaisance, sloping down to the Medway, where, in those English summers of three hundred



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

years ago, when the cruel fires of Mary were busily burning at Smithfield, the lovely boy Philip, fair-featured, with a high forehead and ruddy brown hair, almost red—the same color as that of his nephew Algernon—walked with his shy mother, picking daisies and chasing butterflies, and calling to her in a soft, musical voice; while within the house the grave father, when he was not away in Wales, of which he was lord-president, mused upon great events that were stirring in Europe—the abdication of Charles V., the fall of Calais, and the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne of England. The lordly banqueting-hall, in which the politics of three centuries ago were discussed at Penshurst, is still standing. You may still sit upon the wooden benches where Burleigh, Spenser, Ben Jonson, James I., and his son Prince Charles have sat, and where, a little later, the victim of Prince Charles's cruel son, Algernon Sidney, dreamed of noble manhood and went forth a noble man; while in those shady avenues of beech and oak outside, smooth Edmund Waller bowed and smirked, and sighed compliments to his Sacharissa, as he called Dorothy Sidney, Algernon's sister.

At the age of eleven Master Sidney was put to school at Shrewsbury, on the borders of Wales, of which country his father was lord-president. His fond friend, Fulke Greville, who was here at school with him, and afterwards wrote his life, says that even the masters found something in him to observe and learn. Study probably cost him little effort and few tears. We may be sure he stood at the head of his class, and was a grave, good boy—not good as calves and blanc-mange are, but like wine and oak saplings. "My little Philip," as his mother tenderly calls him, was no Miss Nancy. When he was older he wrote to his brother Robert, then upon his travels, that "if there were any good wars he should go to them". So, at Shrewsbury he doubtless went to all the good wars among his school-mates, while during the short intervals of peace he mastered his humanities, and at last, when not yet fifteen years old, he was entered at Christ Church, Oxford.

Great good-fortune is the most searching test of character. If a man have fine friends, fine family, fine talents, and fine prospects, they are very likely to be the sirens in whose sweet singing he forgets everything but the pleasure of listening to it. If most of us had come of famous ancestry—if our father were a vice-regal governor—if the sovereign's favorite were our uncle, who intended us for his heir—if a marriage were proposed with the beautiful daughter of the prime-minister, and we were ourselves young, handsome, and accomplished—and all this were three hundred years ago, before the rights of men and the dignity of labor had been much discussed, we should probably have come up to Oxford, of which our famous uncle was chancellor, in a state of what would be called at Oxford to-day extreme bumpiousness. But Philip Sidney was too true a gentleman not to be a simple-hearted man; and although he was even then one of the most accomplished as well as fortunate youths in England, he writes to Lord Burleigh to confess with "heavy grief" that



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in scholarship he can neither satisfy Burleigh's expectation nor his own desire.

In the month of May, 1572, Philip Sidney left Oxford, and after staying a short time with his parents, following the fashion of young gentlemen of rank, he crossed over into France in the train of the Earl of Lincoln, who was Queen Elizabeth's extraordinary ambassador upon the subject of her marriage with the brother of Charles IX. of France. The young king immediately made Sidney a gentleman of the bedchamber, and Henry of Navarre found him a fit companion for a future king. The Paris that Sidney saw had then twice as many inhabitants as Boston has to-day. Montaigne called it the most beautiful city in the world, and it had a delusive air of peace. But the witch Catherine de' Medici sat in the smooth-tongued court like a spider in its web, spinning and spinning the meshes in which the hope of liberty was to be entangled. The gay city filled and glittered with the wedding guests of Henry and the king's sister Margaret—among others, the hero of St. Quentin,

Admiral Coligny. Gayer and gayer grew the city—smoother and smoother the court—faster and faster spun the black Italian spider—until on the 23d of August, the Eve of St. Bartholomew, the bloodiest deed in all the red annals of that metropolis was done, and the young Sidney looked shuddering from Walsingham House upon the streets reeking with the blood of his fellow Huguenots.

That night made Philip Sidney a man. He heard the applause of the Romish party ring through Europe—he heard the commendation of Philip of Spain—he knew that the most eloquent orator of the Church, Muretus, had congratulated the pope upon this signal victory of the truth. He knew that medals were stamped in commemoration of the brutal massacre, and he remembered that the same spirit that had struck at the gray head of Coligny had also murdered Egmont and Home in the Netherlands; had calmly gazed in the person of Philip upon De Sezo perishing in the fire, and by the hand of Philip had denounced death against all who wrote, sold, or read Protestant books; and he knew that the same spirit, in the most thriving and intelligent country of Europe, the Netherlands, was blotting out prosperity in blood, and had driven at least a hundred thousand exiles into England.

Pondering these things, Sidney left Paris, and at Frankfort met Hubert Languet. Languet was not only a Protestant, but, at heart, a Republican. He was the friend of Melanethon and of William of Orange, in whose service he died. One of the most accomplished scholars and shrewdest statesmen in Europe, honored and trusted by all the Protestant leaders, this wise man of fifty-four was so enamoured of the English youth of eighteen that they became life-long friends with the ardor of lovers, and Languet left his employment, as Fulke Greville says, "to become a nurse of knowledge to this hopeful young gentleman".

As they travelled by easy stages across Germany, where the campaign of Protestantism had begun, they knew that the decisive battle was yet to be fought. Europe was silent. The tumult of

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Charles V.'s reign was over, and that great monarch marched and countermarched no more from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. Charles had been victorious so long as he fought kings with words of steel. But the monk Martin Luther drew the sword of the spirit, and the conqueror quailed. Luther challenged the Church of Rome at its own door. The Vatican rained anathemas. It might as well have tried to blow out the stars; and all the fires of the furious popes who followed Leo were not sharp enough to consume the colossal heresy of free thought. But king and emperor and pope fed the fire. The reign of terror blasted the Netherlands, and when it had succeeded there, when Italy, Austria, and Holland surrounded the states of Germany, Philip knew it would be the smothering coil of the serpent around the cradle of religious liberty. But the young Hercules of free thought throttled the serpent, and leaped forth to win his victorious and immortal race.

We can see it now, but Sidney could not know it. To him the future was as inscrutable as our own to the eyes of thirty years ago. Yet he and Languet must have discussed the time with curious earnestness as they passed through Germany until they reached Vienna. There Sidney devoted himself to knightly games, to tennis, to music, and especially to horsemanship, which he studied with Paglione, who, in praise of the horse, became such a poet that in the DEFENCE OF POESY Sidney says that if he had not been a piece of a logician before he came to him, Paglione would have persuaded him to wish himself a horse.

At Vienna Philip parted with Languet, and arrived in Venice in the year 1573. The great modern days of Italy were passed. The golden age of the Medici was gone. Lorenzo the Magnificent had died nearly a century before, in the same year that Columbus had discovered America. His son, Pope Leo X., had eaten his last ortolan, had flown his last falcon, had listened to his last comedy, and hummed his last tune, in the frescoed corridors of the Vatican. Upon its shining walls the fatal finger of Martin Luther, stretching out of Germany, had written "Mene, Mene." Beneath the terrible spell the walls were cracking and the earth was shaking, but the splendid pope, in his scarlet cloud of cardinals, saw only the wild beauty of Raphael's Madonnas and the pleasant pages of the recovered literature of pagan Greece. When Sidney stepped for the first time into his gondola at Venice, the famous Italian cathedrals and stately palaces were already built, and the great architects were gone. Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, who had created Italian literature, lived about as long before Sidney as we live after him. Cimabue and Giotto had begun; Raphael and Michel Angelo had perfected that art in which they have had no rivals—and they were gone. Andrea Doria steered the galleys of Genoa no more, and since the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the West Indies, the spices of the Indian sea were brought by Portuguese ships into the Baltic instead of the Adriatic. The glory of the Lombards, who were the first merchants of Europe, had passed away to the descendants of their old correspondents of Bruges and Ghent,

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

until, with its five hundred ships daily coming and going, and on market days eight and nine hundred; with its two thousand heavy wagons creaking every week through the gates from France and Germany and Lorraine, Antwerp reigned in the place of Venice, and the long twilight that has never been broken was settling upon the Italy that Sidney saw.

But the soft splendor of its decline was worthy its prime. The universities of Bologna and Padua, of Salerno and Pisa, had fallen from the days when at Bologna alone there were twenty thousand students; but they were still thronged with pupils, and taught by renowned professors. When the young Sidney came to Venice, Titian was just tottering into the grave, nearly a hundred years old, but still holding the pencil which Charles V. had picked up and handed to him in his studio. Galileo was a youth of twenty, studying mathematics at Pisa. The melancholy Tasso was completing his *JERUSALEM DELIVERED* under the cypress trees of the Villa d'Este. Palestrina was composing the masses which reformed church music, and the Christian charity of Charles Borromeo was making him a saint before he was canonized. Clad in the silk and velvet of Genoa, the young Englishman went to study geometry at Padua, where twenty years later Galileo would have been his teacher, and Sidney writes to Languet that he was perplexed whether to sit to Paul Veronese or to Tintoretto for his portrait.

But he had a shrewd eye for the follies of travellers, and speaks of their tendency to come home "full of disguisements not only of apparel but of our countenances, as though the credit of a traveller stood all upon his outside". He then adds a curious prophecy, which Shakespeare made haste to fulfil to the very letter. Sidney says, writing in 1578, "I think, ere it be long, like the mountebanks in Italy, we travellers shall be made sport of in comedies." Twenty years afterwards, Shakespeare makes Rosalind say in "As You Like It", "Farewell, Monsieur Traveller. Look you; lisp, and wear strange suits. Disable all the benefits of your own country. Be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola."

But in all the gayeties and graces of his travel, Philip Sidney was not content to be merely an elegant loungeur. He never forgot for a moment that all his gifts and accomplishments were only weapons to be kept burnished for his country's service. He was a boy of twenty, but his boy's warmth was tempered by the man's wisdom. "You are not over cheerful by nature," Languet writes to him; and when Sidney sat to Paul Veronese, and sent his friend the portrait, Languet replies: "The painter has represented you sad and thoughtful."

He had reason to be so. He had seen the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, as many a young Sidney among ourselves saw the horrors of Kansas thirty years ago. He did not believe that a little timely patting on the back was statesmanship. If Spain were crushing the Netherlands, and hung upon the southern horizon of Europe a black and threatening cloud, he did not

HDTWHAT?INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

believe that the danger would be averted by gagging those who said the storm was coming. He did not hold the thermometer responsible for the weather. "I cannot think," he wrote in May, 1574, "there is any man possessed of common understanding who does not see to what these rough storms are driving by which all Christendom has been agitated now these many years." He did not suppose, as so many of us in our ignoble days, that while men were the same, the tragical differences which had been washed out with blood in all other ages could be drowned in milk and water in his own.

In 1575 Sidney returned to England. Every author who writes of this period breaks out into the most glowing praises of him. Indeed, he is the choice darling of English history. The only discordant note in the chorus of praise came long afterwards in the voice of the pedantic dandy Horace Walpole, who called Goldsmith "an inspired idiot". This is not surprising, for the earnestness and heroic simplicity of Sidney were as incomprehensible to the affected trifler of Strawberry Hill as the fresh enthusiasm of his nephew Arthur to Major Pendennis. The Earl of Leicester, who seemed to love his nephew more than anything except his own ambition, presented his brilliant young relative to the queen, who made him her cup-bearer. Sidney was now twenty-one years old—the finest gentleman, and one of the most accomplished scholars in England. His learning was mainly in the classics and in languages; yet he confesses that he could never learn German, which was then hardly worth learning, and in his correspondence with Languet is very distrustful of the Latin, in which language they wrote. But in urging him to grapple with the German, Languet says to him, and it is a striking proof of the exquisite finish of Sidney's accomplishment, "I have watched you closely when speaking my own language (he was a Burgundian), but I hardly ever detected you pronouncing a single syllable wrongly."

In Sidney's time the classics had few rivals. After reading Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Boccaccio, with Sanazzaro's *ARCADIA*, in Italian; Rabelais, Froissart, and Comines, in French; Chaucer, Gower, and the *MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES* in English, what remained for an ardent young student to devour? When Sidney came home, Montaigne—whom he probably saw at the French court—was just writing his *ESSAYS* at his chateau in the Gironde. The Portuguese Camoëns had only just published his great poem, to which his own country would not listen, and of which no other had heard. The Italian Tasso's *JERUSALEM* was still in manuscript, and the Spanish Ponce de Leon was little known to Europe. All was yet to come. In Spain, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Calderon; in France, Corneille and Racine and Molière, Fenelon and Bossuet, Rousseau and Voltaire; in Germany, everything except the *Nibelungen* and Hans Sachs's rhymes. When Philip Sidney kissed Elizabeth's hand as her cup-bearer, William Shakespeare, a boy of eleven, was grinding out his trousers on the restless seats of the free grammar-school at Stratford; young Francis Bacon, a youth of sixteen, was studying in France; a poor scholar at Cambridge,

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Edmund Spenser was just finishing his studies, and the younger brother of an old Devonshire family, Walter Raleigh, had just returned from campaigning in France; indeed, all the literature of modern times was subsequent to Philip Sidney. The young man shone at court, fascinating men and women, courtiers, scholars, and divines; and in a few months was made special ambassador to condole with the Austrian emperor upon the death of his father. Upon this embassy he departed in great state. His mission, was supposed to be purely complimentary; but he was really the beautiful eye with which England and Elizabeth, becoming the head of the Protestant movement, watched the disposition of the Protestant princes. On his way home, Sidney passed into the Low Countries to see William of Orange. He came, resplendent with chivalric magnificence, accompanied by the flower of English nobility, and met the grave William, who had been the richest citizen in the Netherlands, clad in an old serge cloak, and surrounded by plain Dutch burghers. But it was a meeting of men of one mind and heart in the great cause, and neither was disturbed by the tailoring of the other. The interview was the beginning of a faithful friendship, and among all the compliments Sidney received, none is so lofty and touching as that of William, the greatest man in Europe, who called him in their correspondence, "Philip, my master."

In 1577 Sidney was home again. He had a right to expect conspicuous advancement, but he got nothing. This was the more disagreeable, because living at Elizabeth's court was an expensive luxury for a poor gentleman's son who had magnificent tastes. His father, Lord Henry Sidney, was lord-deputy of Ireland, but he was also an honest man, and, like most honest men in high public office, he was not rich. He wrote to Philip, begging him to remember whose son, not whose nephew, he was; for Philip's companions, the golden youth of the court, blazed in silks and velvets and jewels, until the government had to impose laws, as the subjects had brought luxury from Venice, and Elizabeth, who died the happy owner of three thousand dresses, issued a solemn proclamation against extravagance in dress.

At such a time, the brilliant nephew of Uncle Leicester would have been a quickly ruined man if he had not been Philip Sidney. He bowed and flirted at court, but he chafed under inaction. A marriage was planned for him with Penelope Devereux, sister of the famous Earl of Essex, one of the thousand fair and unfortunate women who flit across the page of history leaving only a name, and that written in tears. But Philip's father grew cool in the negotiation, and Philip himself was perfectly passive. Yet when a few years afterwards the lady was married to Lord Rich, who abused her, Sidney loved her, and wrote the sonnets to Stella, which are his best poetry, and which Charles Lamb so affectionately praised.

But while he loitered at court, beating all the courtiers with their own weapons in wit, in riding, in games, at tournament, the tales of American discovery shed a wondrous glamour upon the new continent. Nothing was too beautiful for belief, and the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

fiery feet of youth burned the English soil with eagerness to tread the unutterable Tropics. Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth to follow Magellan around the world, and he went in a manner consonant with the popular fancy of the countless riches that rewarded such adventures. His cooking-vessels were of silver; his table-plate of exquisite workmanship. The queen knighted him, gave him a sword, and said, "Whoever striketh at you, Drake, striketh at us." A band of musicians accompanied the fleet, and the English sailor went to circumnavigate the globe with the same nonchalant magnificence with which in other days the gorgeous Alcibiades, with flutes and soft recorders blowing under silken sails, came idling home from victory.

Philip Sidney, his heart alive to all romance, and longing to be his companion, saw him sail away. But he turned and saw the black Italian spider, whose sting he had seen on Bartholomew's Eve in Paris, still weaving her stealthy web, and seeking to entangle Elizabeth into a match with the Duke of Anjou. The queen was forty-six, and Mounseer, as the English called him, twenty-three; and while she was coaxing herself to say the most fatal yes that ever woman said—when Burleigh, Leicester, Walsingham, all the safe, sound, conservative old gentlemen and counsellors were just ceasing to dissuade her—Philip Sidney, a youth of twenty-five, who knew that he had a country as well as a queen, that the hope of that country lay in the triumph of Protestantism, and that to marry Mounseer was to abandon that hope, and for the time betray mankind—Philip Sidney, a youth who did not believe that he could write gravely of sober things because he had written gayly of ladies' eyebrows, knowing as the true-hearted gentleman always knows that to-day it may be a man's turn to sit at a desk in an office, or bend over a book in college, or fashion a horseshoe at the forge, or toss flowers to some beauty at her window, and to-morrow to stand firm against a cruel church or a despotic court, a brutal snob or an ignorant public opinion—this youth, this immortal gentleman, wrote the letter which dissuaded her from the marriage, and which was as noble a triumph for Protestantism and human liberty as the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

I cannot follow this lovely life in detail, nor linger, as I would, upon his literary retirement.

The very name of Sidney's ARCADIA is aromatic in the imagination, and its traditional place in our literature is unquestioned. In our day it is very little read, nor is it a very interesting story. But under its quaint and courtly conceit its tone is so pure and lofty, its courtesy and appreciation of women so hearty and honorable; it has so fine a moral atmosphere, such noble thoughts, such stately and beautiful descriptions, that to read it is like conversing with a hero. So there is no better reading than the DEFENCE OF POESY, that noble hymn of loyalty to intellectual beauty. Hallam well calls Sidney "the first good prose writer" in our language, and scarcely had he finished in his DEFENCE an exquisite criticism of English poetry to that time

HDTWHAT?INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

than the full choir of Elizabethan poets burst into

"the songs that fill The spacious times of great
Elizabeth With sounds that echo still."

In 1582 Philip Sidney married the daughter of Walsingham, but in his retirement, whether steadfastly watching the great struggle upon the Continent or listening to the alluring music of far-off seas, he knew that the choice days of his life were passing, and if a career were not opened for him by the queen, he must make one for himself. William of Orange had been murdered; Elizabeth promptly succeeded him as the active head of the Protestant world; Philip of Spain was the great enemy. Strike him at home, said Sidney; strike him at sea, but strike him everywhere; and he arranged with Drake a descent upon Spanish America. He hurried privately to Plymouth to embark, but at the last moment a peer of the realm arrived from the queen forbidding his departure. The loyal gentleman bowed and obeyed. But two months after his fleet sailed, on the 7th of November, 1585 (about the time that William Shakespeare first came to London), Elizabeth appointed Sidney governor of Flushing, in the Netherlands. He went thither gladly on the 18th, with three thousand men, to strike for the cause in which he believed. He had already told the queen that the spirit of the Netherlands was the spirit of God, and was invincible. His uncle, the Earl of Leicester, followed him as commander-in-chief. The earl was handsome at tournaments, but not fit for battle-fields, and Sidney was annoyed by his uncle's conduct; but he writes to his father-in-law, Walsingham, in a strain full of the music of a noble soul, and fitly precluding his end: "I think a wise and constant man ought never to grieve while he doth play, as a man may say, his own part truly."

For that he was always ready. In the misty dawn of the 22d of September, 1586, a force of three thousand Spaniards stole silently along to the relief of Zutphen, on the river Isel. Sidney, at the head of five hundred cavalry, rode forward to meet them. In the obscurity the battle was sharp and confused. Seeing his friend Lord Willoughby in special danger, Sidney spurred to the rescue. His horse was shot under him and fell. Springing upon another, he dashed forward again and succored his friend, but at the instant a shot struck him below the knee, glancing upward. His furious horse became unmanageable, and Sir Philip was obliged to leave the field. But as he passed slowly along to the rear of the soldiers, he felt faint with bleeding, and called for water. A cup was brought to him, but as he was lifting it to his mouth he saw a dying soldier staring at it with burning eyes. Philip Sidney paused before tasting it, leaned from the saddle, and handed it to the soldier, saying to him in the same soft, musical voice with which the boy called to his mother in the sunny garden at Penshurst, "Friend, thy necessity is yet greater than mine."

He was borne on to Araheim, and lived in suffering for twenty-six days. He conversed pleasantly and called for music, and said

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

at last to his brother, whom he had loved as brothers seldom love: "Love my memory; cherish my friends. Their faith to me may assure you they are honest. But, above all, govern your will and affections by the will and word of your Creator, in me beholding the end of this world with all her vanities." "And so," says old Stowe, with fond particularity, "he died, the 17th day of October, between two and three of the clock in the afternoon."

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave, Await alike the inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

This is the story of Philip Sidney. A letter, a book, a battle. How little to justify his unique fame! How invisible his performance among the illustrious events of his prodigious age! Yet is not the instinct of the human heart true; and in the stately society of his time, if Bacon were the philosopher, Shakespeare the poet, Burleigh the counsellor, Raleigh the soldier, Drake the sailor, Hooker the theologian, Essex the courtier, and Gresham the merchant, was not Philip Sidney as distinctively the gentleman? Heroes stood beside him in clusters, poets in constellations; all the illustrious men of the age achieved more tangible results than he, yet none of them has carved his name upon history more permanently and with a more diamond point; for he had that happy harmony of mind and temper, of enthusiasm and good sense, of accomplishment and capacity, which is described by that most exquisite and most abused word, gentleman. His guitar hung by a ribbon at his side, but his sword hung upon leather beneath it. His knee bent gallantly to the queen, but it knelt reverently also to his Maker. And it was the crown of the gentleman that he was neither ashamed of the guitar nor of the sword; neither of the loyalty nor the prayer. For a gentleman is not an idler, a trifler, a dandy; he is not a scholar only, a soldier, a mechanic, a merchant; he is the flower of men, in whom the accomplishment of the scholar, the bravery of the soldier, the skill of the mechanic, the sagacity of the merchant, all have their part and appreciation. A sense of duty is his main-spring, and like a watch crusted with precious stones, his function is not to look prettily, but to tell the time of day. Philip Sidney was not a gentleman because his grandfather was the Duke of Northumberland and his father lord-deputy of Ireland, but because he was himself generous, simple, truthful, noble, refined. He was born with a gold spoon in his mouth, but the gold is only the test. In the mouths of the base it becomes brass and iron. George IV., called with bitter irony the first gentleman in Europe, was born with the gold spoon, but his acrid humors turned it to the basest metal, betraying his mean soul. George Stephenson was born with the pewter spoon in his mouth, but the true temper of his soul turned it into pure gold. The test of a gentleman is his use, not his uselessness; whether that use be direct or indirect, whether it be actual service or only inspiring and aiding

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

action. "To what purpose should our thoughts be directed to various kinds of knowledge," wrote Philip Sidney in 1578, "unless room be afforded for putting it into practice so that public advantage may be the result?" And Algernon Sidney said, nearly a century later: "I have ever had it in my mind that when God cast me into such a condition as that I cannot save my life but by doing an indecent thing, he shows me the time has come wherein I should resign it." And when that time came he did resign it; for every gentleman instinctively serves justice and liberty. He feels himself personally disgraced by an insult to humanity, for he, too, is only a man; and however stately his house may be and murmurous with music, however glowing with pictures and graceful with statues and reverend with books—however his horses may out-trot other horses, and his yachts outsail all yachts—the gentleman is king and master of these and not their servant; he wears them for ornament, like the ring upon his finger or the flower in his button-hole, and if they go the gentleman remains. He knows that all their worth came from human genius and human training; and loving man more than the works of man, he instinctively shuns whatever in the shape of man is degraded, outraged, and forsaken. He does not make the poverty of others the reason for robbing them; he does not make the oppression of others the reason for oppressing them, for his gentility is his religion; and therefore with simple truth and tender audacity the old English dramatist Dekkar calls Him who gave the name to our religion, and who destroyed the plea that might makes right, "the first true gentleman, that ever breathed".

But not only is Philip Sidney's story the poem of a gentleman, it is that of a young man. It was the age of young men. No man was thought flippant, whatever his years, who could say a good thing well, or do a brave thing successfully, or give the right advice at the right moment. The great men of the day were all young. At sixteen Bacon had already sketched his PHILOSOPHY. At seventeen Walter Raleigh had gone to find some good wars. At seventeen Edmund Spenser had first published. Before he was twenty, Alexander Farnese, Prince of Parma, and the greatest general of Sidney's time, had revealed his masterly genius. At twenty-one Don John of Austria had been commander-in-chief against the Moors. The Prince of Cond and Henry of Navarre were leaders while they were yet boys. At twenty Francis Drake sailed, a captain, with John Hawkins; and at twenty-one the Washington of European history, to whom an American has for the first time paid just homage with an enthusiasm and eloquence of Sidney describing his friend—at twenty-one William of Orange commanded an army of Charles V.

When England wanted leaders in those tremendous days that shaped her destiny, it did just what America did in those recent perilous hours that determined hers—she sent young men with faith in their hearts and fire in their veins—not old men with feathers in their hats; and everywhere it is the young men who have made history. At thirty-two Alexander wept for another



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

world to conquer. On his thirty-seventh birthday Raphael lay dead beneath his last picture. At thirty-six Mozart had sung his swan-song. At twenty-five Hannibal was commander-in-chief of the Carthaginian armies. At thirty-three Turenne was marshal of France. At twenty-seven Bonaparte was triumphant in Italy. At forty-five Wellington had conquered Bonaparte, and at forty-eight retired from active military service. At forty-three Washington was chief of the Continental army. On his forty-fifth birthday Sherman was piercing the heart of the American Rebellion; and before he was forty-three Grant had "fought it out on this line" to perfect victory. Young men! Of course they were young men. Youth is the main-spring of the world. The experience of age is wise in action only when it is electrified by the enthusiasm of youth. Show me a land in which the young men are cold and sceptical and prematurely wise; which in polite indifference is called political wisdom, contempt for ideas common-sense, and honesty in politics Sunday-school statesmanship—show me a land in which the young men are more anxious about doing well than about doing right—and I will show you a country in which public corruption and ruin overtakes private infidelity and cowardice, and in which, if there were originally a hope for mankind, a faith in principle, and a conquering enthusiasm, that faith, hope, and enthusiasm are expiring like the deserted camp-fires of a retiring army. "Woe to a man when his heart grows old! Woe to a nation when its young men shuffle in the gouty shoes and limp on the untimely crutches of age, instead of leaping along the course of life with the jubilant spring of their years and the sturdy play of their own muscles!" Sir Philip Sidney's was the age of young men: and wherever there are self-reliance, universal human sympathy, and confidence in God, there is the age of youth and national triumph; just as whenever Joan of Arc leads the army, or Molly Stark dares to be a widow, or Rosa Bonheur paints, or Hattie Hosmer carves, or Jenny Lind sings, or Mrs. Patten steers the wrecked ship to port, or Florence Nightingale walks the midnight hospital—these are the age and the sphere of woman. Queen Elizabeth's was the age of young men; but so it is always when there are young men who can make an age.

And ours is such an age. We live in a country which has been saved by its young men. Before us opens a future which is to be secured by the young men. I have not held up Sir Philip Sidney as a reproach, but only for his brothers to admire—only that we may scatter the glamour of the past and of history, and understand that we do not live in the lees of time and the world's decrepitude. There is no country so fair that ours is not fairer; there is no age so heroic that ours is not as noble; there is no youth in history so romantic and beloved that in a thousand American homes you may not find his peer to-day. It is the Sidneys we have known who interpret this Philip of three hundred years ago. Dear, noble gentleman! he does not move alone in our imaginations, for our own memories supply his splendid society. We too have seen, how often and how often, the bitter



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

fight of the misty morning on the Isel –the ringing charge, the fatal fall. A thousand times we saw the same true Sidney heart that, dying, gave the cup of cold water to a fellow-soldier. And we, for whom the Sidneys died, let us thank God for showing us in our own experience, as in history, that the noblest traits of human character are still spanned by the rainbow of perfect beauty; and that human love and faith and fidelity, like day and night, like seed-time and harvest, shall never, never fail.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

LONGFELLOW³¹

In the school readers of half a century ago there were two poems which every boy and girl read and declaimed and remembered. How much of that old literature has disappeared! How much that stirred the hearts and touched the fancies of those boys and girls, their children have never heard of! Willis's "Saturday Afternoon" and "Burial of Arnold" have floated away, almost out of sight, with Pierpont's "Bunker Hill" and Sprague's Fourth-of-July oration. The relentless winds of oblivion incessantly blow. Scraps of verse and rhetoric once so familiar are caught up, wafted noiselessly away, and lodged in neglected books and in the dark corners of fading memories, gradually vanish from familiar knowledge. But the two little poems of which we speak have survived. One of them was Bryant's "March", and the other was Longfellow's "April", and the names of the two poets singing of spring were thus associated in the spring-time of our poetry, as the fathers of which they will be always honored.

Both poems originally appeared in the United States Literary Gazette, and were included in the modest volume of selections from that journal which was published in Boston in 1826. The chief names in this little book are those of Bryant, Longfellow, Percival, Mellen, Dawes, and Jones. Percival has already become a name only; Dawes, and Greenville Mellen, who, like Longfellow, was a son of Maine, are hardly known to this generation, and Jones does not even appear in Duyckinck's Cyclopaedia. But in turning over the pages it is evident that Time has dealt justly with the youthful bards, and that the laurel rests upon the heads of the singers whose earliest strains fitly precluded the music of their prime. Longfellow was nineteen years old when the book was published. He had graduated at Bowdoin College the year before, and the verses had been written and printed in the Gazette while he was still a student.

The glimpses of the boy that we catch through the recollections of his old professor, Packard, and of his college mates, are of the same character as at every period of his life. They reveal a modest, refined, manly youth, devoted to study, of great personal charm and gentle manners. It is the boy that the older man suggested. To look back upon him is to trace the broad and clear and beautiful river far up the green meadows to the limpid rill.

His poetic taste and faculty were already apparent, and it is related that a version of an ode of Horace which he wrote in his Sophomore year so impressed one of the members of the examining board that when afterwards a chair of modern languages was established in the college, he proposed as its incumbent the young Sophomore whose fluent verse he remembered. The impression made by the young Longfellow is doubtlessly accurately described

31. George William Curtis, LONGFELLOW, Harper's Magazine, Vol. LXV., 1882, reprinted in 1895 in LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

by one of his famous classmates, Hawthorne, for the class of '25 is a proud tradition of Bowdoin. In "P.'s Correspondence", one of the *MOSESSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*, a quaint fancy of a letter from "my unfortunate friend P.", whose wits were a little disordered, there are grotesque hints of the fate of famous persons. P. talks with Burns at eighty-seven; Byron, grown old and fat, wears a wig and spectacles; Shelley is reconciled to the Church of England; Coleridge finishes "Christabel"; Keats writes a religious epic on the millennium; and George Canning is a peer. On our side of the sea, Dr. Channing had just published a volume of verses; Whittier had been lynched ten years before in South Carolina; and, continues P., "I remember, too, a lad just from college, Longfellow by name, who scattered some delicate verses to the winds, and went to Germany, and perished, I think, of intense application, at the University of Göttingen." Longfellow, in turn, recalled his classmate Hawthorne—a shy, dark-haired youth flitting across the college grounds in a coat with bright buttons.

Among these delicate verses was the poem to "An April Day". As the work of a very young man it is singularly restrained and finished. It has the characteristic elegance and flowing melody of his later verse, and its half-pensive tone is not excessive nor immature. It is not, however, for this that it is most interesting, but because, with Bryant's "March", it is the fresh and simple note of a truly American strain. Perhaps the curious reader, enlightened by the observation of subsequent years, may find in the "March" a more vigorous love of nature, and in the "April" a tenderer tone of tranquil sentiment. But neither of the poems is the echo of a foreign music, nor an exercise of remembered reading. They both deal with the sights and sounds and suggestions of the American, landscape in the early spring. In Longfellow's "April" there are none of the bishops' caps and foreign ornament of illustration to which Margaret Fuller afterwards objected in his verse. But these early associated poems, both of the younger and of the older singer, show an original movement of American literary genius, and, like the months which they celebrate, they foretold a summer.

That summer had been long awaited. In 1809, Buckminster said in his Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard College: "Oar poets and historians, our critics and orators, the men of whom posterity are to stand in awe, and by whom they are to be instructed, are yet to appear among us." Happily, however, the orator thought that he beheld the promise of their coming, although he does not say where. But even as he spoke they were at hand. Irving's *KNICKERBOCKER* was published in 1809, and Bryant's "Thanatopsis" was written in 1812. The *North American Review*, an enterprise of literary men in Boston and Cambridge, was begun in 1815, and Bryant and Longfellow were both contributors. But it was in the year 1821, the year in which Longfellow entered college, that the beginning of a distinctive American literature became most evident. There were signs of an independent intellectual movement both in the choice of subjects and in the character of



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

treatment. This was the year of the publication of Bryant's first slim volume, and of Cooper's *SPY*, and of Dana's *IDLE MAN*. Irving's *SKETCH BOOK* was already finished, Miss Sedgwick's *HOPE LESLIE* and Percival's first volume had been issued, and Halleck's and Drake's "Croakers" were already popular. In these works, as in all others of that time, there was indeed no evidence of great creative genius.

The poet and historian whom Buckminster foresaw, and who were to strike posterity with awe, had not yet appeared, but in the same year the voice of the orator whom he anticipated was heard upon Plymouth Rock in cadences massive and sonorous as the voice of the sea. In the year 1821 there was the plain evidence of an awakening original literary activity.

Longfellow was the youngest of the group in which he first appeared. His work was graceful, tender, pensive, gentle, melodious, the strain of a troubadour. When he went to Europe in 1826 to fit himself more fully for his professorship, he had but "scattered some delicate verses to the winds". When he returned, and published in 1833 his translations of "Coplas de Manrique" and other Spanish poems, he had apparently done no more. There was plainly shown an exquisite literary artist, a very Benvenuto of grace and skill. But he would hardly have been selected as the poet who was to take the strongest hold of the hearts of his countrymen, the singer whose sweet and hallowing spell was to be so deep and universal that at last it would be said in another country that to it also his death was a national loss.

The qualities of these early verses, however, were never lost. The genius of the poet steadily and beautifully developed, flowering according to its nature. The most urbane and sympathetic of men, never aggressive, nor vehement, nor self-asserting, he was yet thoroughly independent, and the individuality of his genius held its tranquil way as surely as the river Charles, whose placid beauty he so often sang, wound through the meadows calm and free. When Longfellow came to Cambridge, the impulse of Transcendentalism in New England was deeply affecting scholarship and literature. It was represented by the most original of American thinkers and the typical American scholar, Emerson, and its elevating, purifying, and emancipating influences are memorable in our moral and intellectual history. Longfellow lived in the very heart of the movement. Its leaders were his cherished friends. He too was a scholar and a devoted student of German literature, who had drunk deeply also of the romance of German life. Indeed, his first important works stimulated the taste for German studies and the enjoyment of its literature more than any other impulse in this country. But he remained without the charmed Transcendental circle, serene and friendly and attentive. There are those whose career was wholly moulded by the intellectual revival of that time. But Longfellow was untouched by it, except as his sympathies were attracted by the vigor and purity of its influence. His tastes, his interests, his activities, his



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

career, would have been the same had that great light never shone. If he had been the ductile, echoing, imitative nature that the more ardent disciples of the faith supposed him to be, he would have been absorbed and swept away by the flood. But he was as untouched by it as Charles Lamb by the wars of Napoleon. It was in the first flush of the Transcendental epoch that Longfellow's first important works appeared. In 1839, his prose romance of *HYPERION* was published, following the sketches of travel called *OUTRE-MER*. He was living in Cambridge, in the famous house in which he died, and in which *HYPERION* and all of his familiar books were written. Under the form of a slight love tale, *HYPERION* is the diary of a poet's wandering in a storied and picturesque land, the hearty, home-like genius of whose life and literature is peculiarly akin to his own. The book bubbles and sings with snatches of the songs of the country; it reproduces the tone and feeling of the landscape, the grandeur of Switzerland, the rich romance of the Rhine; it decorates itself with a quaint scholarship, and is so steeped in the spirit of the country, so glowing with the palpitating tenderness of passion, that it is still eagerly bought at the chief points which it commemorates, and is cherished by young hearts as no prose romance was ever cherished before.

HYPERION, indeed, is a poet's and lover's romance. It is full of deep feeling, of that intense and delighted appreciation of nature in her grander forms, and of scenes consecrated by poetic tradition, which belongs to a singularly fine, sensitive, and receptive nature, when exalted by pure and lofty affection; and it has the fulness and swing of youth, saddened by experience indeed, yet rising with renewed hope, like a field of springing grain in May bowed by the west wind, and touched with the shadow of a cloud, but presently lifting itself again to heaven. A clear sweet humor and blitheness of heart blend in this romance. What is called its artificial tone is not insincerity; it is the play of an artist conscious of his skill and revelling in it, even while his hand and his heart are deeply in earnest. *WERTHER* is a romance, [Disraeli's](#) *WONDRIOUS TALE OF ALROY* is a romance, but they belong to the realm of Beverley and Julia in Sheridan's *RIVALS*. In *HYPERION*, with all its elaborate picturesqueness, its spicy literary atmosphere, and imaginative outline, there is a breezy freshness and simplicity and healthiness of feeling which leaves it still unique.

In the same year with *HYPERION* came the *VOICES OF THE NIGHT*, a volume of poems which contained the "Coplas de Manrique" and the translations, with a selection from the verses of the Literary Gazette, which the author playfully reclaims in a note from their vagabond and precarious existence in the corners of newspapers -gathering his children from wanderings in lanes and alleys, and introducing them decorously to the world. A few later poems were added, and these, with the *HYPERION*, showed a new and distinctive literary talent. In both of these volumes there is the purity of spirit, the elegance of form, the romantic tone, the airy grace, which were already associated with



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Longfellow's name. But there are other qualities. The boy of nineteen, the poet of Bowdoin, has become a scholar and a traveller. The teeming hours, the ample opportunities of youth, have not been neglected or squandered, but, like a golden-banded bee, humming as he sails, the young poet has drained all the flowers of literature of their nectar, and has built for himself a hive of sweetness. More than this, he had proved in his own experience the truth of Irving's tender remark, that an early sorrow is often the truest benediction for the poet.

Through all the romantic grace and elegance of the VOICES OF THE NIGHT and HYPERION, however, there is a moral earnestness which is even more remarkable in the poems than in the romance. No volume of poems ever published in the country was so popular. Severe critics indeed, while acknowledging its melody and charm, thought it too morally didactic, the work of a student too fondly enamoured of foreign literatures. But while they conceded taste and facility, two of the poems at least—the "Psalm of Life" and the "Footsteps of Angels"—penetrated the common heart at once, and have held it ever since. A young Scotchman saw them reprinted in some paper or magazine, and, meeting a literary lady in London, repeated them to her, and then to a literary assembly at her house; and the presence of a new poet was at once acknowledged. If the "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year" in its form and phrase and conception recalled a land of cathedrals and a historic religious ritual, and had but a vague and remote charm for the woodman in the pine forests of Maine and the farmer on the Illinois prairie, yet the "Psalm of Life" was the very heart-beat of the American conscience, and the "Footsteps of Angels" was a hymn of the fond yearning of every loving heart.

During the period of more than forty years from the publication of the VOICES OF THE NIGHT to his death, the fame of Longfellow constantly increased. It was not because his genius, like that of another scholarly poet, Gray, seldom blossomed in song, so that his renown rested upon a few gem-like verses. He was not intimidated by his own fame. During those forty years he wrote and published constantly. Other great fames arose around him. New poets began to sing. Popular historians took their places. But still with Bryant the name of Longfellow was always associated at the head of American singers, and far beyond that of any other American author was his name known through all the reading world. The volume of VOICES OF THE NIGHT was followed by similar collections, then by THE SPANISH STUDENT, EVANGELINE, THE GOLDEN LEGEND, HIAWATHA, THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH, THE TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN, THE NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDIES, THE MASQUE OF PANDORA, THE HANGING OF THE CRANE, the MORITURI SALUTARNUS, the KRAMOS. But all of these, like stately birds

"Sailing with supreme dominion Through the upper realms
of air,"

were attended by shorter poems, sonnets, "birds of passage", as the poet called his swallow flights of song. In all these larger poems, while the characteristics of the earlier volumes were



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

more amply developed and illustrated, and the subtle beauty of the skill became even more exquisite, the essential qualities of the work remain unchanged, and the charm of a poet and his significance in the literature and development of his country were never more readily defined.

Child of New England, and trained by her best influences; of a temperament singularly sweet and serene, and with the sturdy rectitude of his race; refined and softened by wide contact with other lands and many men; born in prosperity, accomplished in all literatures, and himself a literary artist of consummate elegance, he was the fine flower of the Puritan stock under its changed modern conditions. Out of strength had come forth sweetness. The grim iconoclast, "humming a surly hymn", had issued in the Christian gentleman. Captain Miles Standish had risen into Sir Philip Sidney. The austere morality that relentlessly ruled the elder New England reappeared in the genius of this singer in the most gracious and captivating form. The grave nature of Bryant in his early secluded life among the solitary hills of Western Massachusetts had been tinged by them with their own sobriety. There was something of the sombre forest, of the gray rocky face of stern New England in his granitic verse. But what delicate wild-flowers nodded in the clefts! What scent of the pine-tree, what music of gurgling water, filled the cool air! What bird high poised upon its solitary way through heaven-taught faith to him who pursued his way alone!

But while the same moral tone in the poetry both of Bryant and of Longfellow shows them to be children of the same soil and tradition, and shows also that they saw plainly, what poets of the greatest genius have often not seen at all, that in the morality of human life lies its true beauty, the different aspect of Puritan development which they displayed was due to difference of temperament and circumstance. The foundations of our distinctive literature were largely laid in New England, and they rest upon morality. Literary New England had never a trace of literary Bohemia. The most illustrious group, and the earliest, of American authors and scholars and literary men, the Boston and Cambridge group of the last generation—Channing, the two Danas, Sparks, Everett, Bancroft, Ticknor, Prescott, Norton, Ripley, Palfrey, Emerson, Parker, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Agassiz, Lowell, Motley—have been all sober and industrious citizens of whom Judge Sewall would have approved. Their lives as well as their works have ennobled literature. They have illustrated the moral sanity of genius. Longfellow shares this trait with them all. It is the moral purity of his verse which at once charms the heart, and in his first most famous poem, the "Psalm of Life", it is the direct inculcation of a moral purpose. Those who insist that literary art, like all other art, should not concern itself positively with morality, must reflect that the heart of this age has been touched as truly by Longfellow, however differently, as that of any time by its master-poet. This, indeed, is his peculiar



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

distinction. Among the great poetic names of the century in English literature, Burns, in a general way, is the poet of love; Wordsworth, of lofty contemplation of nature; Byron, of passion; Shelley, of aspiration; Keats, of romance; Scott, of heroic legend; and not less, and quite as distinctively, Longfellow, of the domestic affections. He is the poet of the household, of the fireside, of the universal home feeling. The infinite tenderness and patience, the pathos, and the beauty of daily life, of familiar emotion, and the common scene, these are the significance of that verse whose beautiful and simple melody, softly murmuring for more than forty years, made the singer the most widely beloved of living men.

Longfellow's genius was not a great creative force. It burst into no tempests of mighty passion. It did not wrestle with the haughtily veiled problems of fate and free-will absolute. It had no dramatic movement and variety, no eccentricity and grotesqueness and unexpectedness. It was not Lear, nor Faust, nor Manfred, nor Romeo. A carnation is not a passion-flower. Indeed, no poet of so universal and sincere a popularity ever sang so little of love as a passion. None of his smaller poems are love poems; and EVANGELINE is a tale, not of fiery romance, but of affection "that hopes and endures and is patient", of the unwasting "beauty and strength of woman's devotion", of the constantly tried and tested virtue that makes up the happiness of daily life. No one has described so well as Longfellow himself the character and influence of his own poetry:

"Come read to me some poem, Some simple and heart-felt lay, That shall soothe this restless feeling, And banish the thoughts of day.

"Hot from the grand old masters, Not from the bards sublime, Whose distant footsteps echo Through the corridors of Time.

* * * * *

"Such songs have power to quiet The restless pulse of care, And come like the benediction That follows after prayer."

This was the office of Longfellow in literature, and how perfectly it was fulfilled! It was not a wilful purpose, but he carefully guarded the fountain of his song from contamination or diversion, and this was its natural overflow. During the long period of his literary activity there were many "schools" and styles and fashions of poetry. The influence first of Byron, then of Keats, is manifest in the poetry of the last generation, and in later days a voluptuous vagueness and barbaric splendor, as of the lower empire in literature, have corroded the vigor of much modern verse. But no perfumed blandishment of doubtful goddesses won Longfellow from his sweet and domestic Muse. The clear thought, the true feeling, the pure aspiration, is



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

expressed with limpid simplicity:

"Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full."

The most delightful picture in Goldsmith's life is that of the youth wandering through rural Europe, stopping at the little villages in the peaceful summer sunset, and sweetly playing melodies upon his flute for the lads and lasses to dance upon the green. Who that reads "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" does not hear in their pensive music the far-away fluting of that kind-hearted wanderer, and see the lovely idyl of that simple life? So sings this poet to the young men and maidens in the soft summer air. They follow his measures with fascinated hearts, for they hear in them their own hearts singing; they catch the music of their dearest hope, of their best endeavor; they hear the voices of the peaceful joy that hallows faithful affection, of the benediction that belongs to self-sacrifice and devotion. And now that the singer is gone, and his voice is silent, those hushed hearts recall the words of Father Felicien, Evangeline's pastor:

"Forty years of my life have I labored among you, and taught you Not in word alone, but in deed, to love one another."

It is this fidelity of his genius to itself, the universal feeling to which he gives expression, and the perfection of his literary workmanship, which is sure to give Longfellow a permanent place in literature. His poems are apples of gold in pictures of silver. There is nothing in them excessive, nothing overwrought, nothing strained into turgidity, obscurity, and nonsense. There is sometimes, indeed, a fine stateliness, as in the "Arsenal at Springfield", and even a resounding splendor of diction, as in "Sandalphon". But when the melody is most delicate it is simple. The poet throws nothing into the mist to make it large. How purely melodious his verse can be without losing the thought or its most transparent expression is seen in "The Evening Star" and "Snow-Flakes".

The literary decoration of his style, the aroma and color and richness, so to speak, which it derives from his ample accomplishment in literature, are incomparable. His verse is embroidered with allusions and names and illustrations wrought with a taste so true and a skill so rare that the robe, though it be cloth of gold, is as finely flexible as linen, and still beautifully reveals, not conceals, the living form.

This scholarly allusion and literary tone were at one time criticised as showing that Longfellow's genius was really an exotic grown under glass, or a smooth-throated mocking-bird warbling a foreign melody. A recent admirable paper in the Evening Post intimates that the kindly poet took the suggestion in good part, and modified his strain. But there was never any interruption or change in the continuity of his work. EVANGELINE and HIAWATHA and THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH blossom as naturally out of his evident and characteristic taste and tendency as THE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

GOLDEN LEGEND or the MASQUE OF PANDORA. In the TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN the "Ride of Paul Revere" is as natural a play of his power as "King Robert of Sicily". The various aspect and character of nature upon the American continent is nowhere so fully, beautifully, and accurately portrayed as in EVANGELINE. The scenery of the poem is the vast American landscape, boundless prairie and wooded hill, brimming river and green valley, sparkling savanna and broad bayou, city and village, camp and wigwam, peopled with the children of many races, and all the blended panorama seen in the magic light of imagination. So, too, the poetic character of the Indian legend is preserved with conscientious care and fit monotony of rippling music in HIAWATHA. But this is an accident and an incident. It is not the theme which determines the poet. All Scotland, indeed, sings and glows in the verse of Burns, but very little of England is seen or heard in that of Byron.

In no other conspicuous figure in literary history are the man and the poet more indissolubly blended than in Longfellow. The poet was the man, and the man the poet. What he was to the stranger reading in distant lands, by

"The long wash of Australasian seas,"

that he was to the most intimate of his friends. His life and character were perfectly reflected in his books. There is no purity or grace or feeling or spotless charm in his verse which did not belong to the man. There was never an explanation to be offered for him; no allowance was necessary for the eccentricity or grotesqueness or wilfulness or humor of genius. Simple, modest, frank, manly, he was the good citizen, the self-respecting gentleman, the symmetrical man.

He lived in an interesting historic house in a venerable university town, itself the suburb of a great city; the highway running by his gate and dividing the smooth grass and modest green terraces about the house from the fields and meadows that sloped gently to the placid Charles, and the low range of distant hills that made the horizon. Through the little gate passed an endless procession of pilgrims of every degree and from every country to pay homage to their American friend. Every morning came the letters of those who could not come in person, and with infinite urbanity and sympathy and patience the master of the house received them all, and his gracious hospitality but deepened the admiration and affection of the guests. His nearer friends sometimes remonstrated at his sweet courtesy to such annoying "devastators of the day". But to an urgent complaint of his endless favor to a flagrant offender, Longfellow only answered, good-humoredly, "If I did not speak kindly to him, there is not a man in the world who would." On the day that he was taken ill, six days only before his death, three schoolboys came out from Boston on their Saturday holiday to ask his autograph. The benign lover of children welcomed them heartily, showed them a hundred interesting objects in his house, then wrote his name for them, and for the last time.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Few men had known deeper sorrow. But no man ever mounted upon his sorrow more surely to higher things. Blessed and beloved, the singer is gone, but his song remains, and its pure and imperishable melody is the song of the lark in the morning of our literature:

"Type of the wise who soar but never roam, True to the kindred points of heaven and home."



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES³²

In 1817 Bryant's "Thanatopsis" was published in the North American Review. Richard Henry Dana, the elder, who was then one of the editors, said that it could not be an American poem, for there was no American who could have written it. But it does not seem to have produced a remarkable impression upon the public mind. The planet rose silently and unobserved. Ten years afterwards, in 1827, Dana's own "Buccaneer" was published, and Christopher North, in Blackwood, saluted it as "by far the most original and powerful of American poetical compositions". But it produced in this country no general effect which is remembered. Nine years later, in 1836, Holmes's "Metrical Essay" was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard College, and was as distinct an event in literary circles as Edward Everett's oration before the same society in 1824, or Ralph Waldo Emerson's in 1837, or Horace Bushnell's in 1848, or Wendell Phillips's in 1881. Holmes was then twenty-seven years old, and had just returned from his professional studies in Europe, where, as in his college days at Cambridge, where he was born, he had toyed with many Muses, yet still, with native Yankee prudence, held fast the hand of Æsculapius. His poem, like the address of Emerson in the next year, showed how completely the modern spirit of refined and exquisite literary cultivation and of free and undaunted thought had superseded the uncouth literary form and stern and rigid Calvinism of the Mathers and early Boston.

The melody and grace of Goldsmith's line, but with a fresh local spirit, have not been more perfectly reproduced, nor with a more distinct revelation of a new spirit, than in this poem. It is retrospective and contemplative, but it is also full of the buoyancy of youth, of the consciousness of poetic skill, and of blithe anticipation. Its tender reminiscence and occasional fond elegiac strain are but clouds of the morning. Its literary form is exquisite, and its general impression is that of bright, elastic, confident power. It was by no means, however, a first work, nor was the poet unknown in his own home. But the "Metrical Essay" introduced him to a larger public, while the fugitive pieces already known were the assurance that the more important poem was not a happy chance, but the development of a quality already proved. Seven years before, in 1829, the year he graduated at Harvard, Holmes began to contribute to The Collegian, a college magazine. Two years later, in 1831, appeared the New England Magazine, in which the young writer, as he might himself say, took the road with his double team of verse and prose, holding the ribbons with unsurpassed lightness and grace and skill, now for two generations guiding those fleet and well-groomed coursers, which still show their heels to

32. George William Curtis, OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, Harper's Magazine, Vol. LXXXIII., 1882, reprinted in 1895 in LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

panting rivals, the prancing team behind which we have all driven and are still driving with constant and undiminished delight.

Mr. F. B. Sanborn, whose tribute to Holmes on his eightieth birthday shows how thorough was his research for that labor of love, tells us that his first contribution to the New England Magazine was published in the third or September number of the first year, 1831. It was a copy of verses of an unpromising title— "To an Insect". But that particular insect, seemingly the creature of a day, proved to be immortal, for it was the katydid, whose voice is perennial:

"Thou sayest an undisputed thing In such a solemn way."

In the contributions of the young graduate the high spirits of a frolicsome fancy effervesce and sparkle. But their quality of a new literary tone and spirit is very evident. The ease and fun of these bright prolusions, without impudence or coarseness, the poetic touch and refinement, were as unmistakable as the brisk pungency of the gibe. The stately and scholarly Boston of Channing, Dana, Everett, and Ticknor might indeed have looked askance at the literary claims of such lines as these "Thoughts in Dejection" of a poet wondering if the path to Parnassus lay over Charlestown or Chelsea bridge:

"What is a poet's fame? Sad hints about his reason, And sadder praise from gazetteers, To be returned in season.

"For him the future holds No civic wreath above him; Nor slated roof nor varnished chair, Nor wife nor child to love him.

"Maid of the village inn, Who workest woe on satin, The grass in black, the graves in green, The epitaph in Latin,

"Trust not to them who say In stanzas they adore thee; Oh, rather sleep in church-yard clay, With maudlin cherubs o'er thee!"

The lines to the katydid, with "L'Inconnue"—

"Is thy name Mary, maiden fair?"—

published in the magazine at about the same time, disclose Holmes's natural melody and his fine instinct for literary form. But his lyrical fervor finds its most jubilant expression at this time in "Old Ironsides", written at the turning-point in the poet's life, when he had renounced the study of the law, and was deciding upon medicine as his profession. The proposal to destroy the frigate Constitution, fondly and familiarly known as "Old Ironsides", kindled a patriotic frenzy in the sensitive Boston boy, which burst forth into the noble lyric,

"Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!"

There had been no American poetry with a truer lilt of song than these early verses, and there has been none since. Two years later, in 1833, Holmes went to complete his medical studies in



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Paris, and the lines to a grisette—

“Ah, Clemence, when I saw thee last Trip down the Rue de Seine!”—

published upon his return in his first volume of verse, are a charming illustration of his lyrical genius. His limpid line never flowed more clearly than in this poem. It has the pensive tone of all his best poems of the kind, but it is the half-happy sadness of youth.

All these early verses have an assured literary form. The scope and strain were new, but their most significant quality was not melody nor pensive grace, but humor. This was ingrained and genuine. Sometimes it was rollicking, as in “The Height of the Ridiculous” and “The September Gale”. Sometimes it was drolly meditative, as in “Evening, by a Tailor”. Sometimes it was a tearful smile of the deepest feeling, as in the most charming and perfect of these poems, “The Last Leaf”, in which delicate and searching pathos is exquisitely fused with tender gayety. The haunting music and meaning of the lines,

“The mossy marbles rest On the lips that he has pressed
In their bloom, And the names he loved to hear Have been
carved for many a year On the tomb”,

lingered always in the memory of Lincoln, whose simple sincerity and native melancholy would instinctively have rejected any false note. It is in such melody as that of the “Last Leaf” that we feel how truly the grim old Puritan strength has become sweetness.

To this poetic grace and humor and music, which at that time were unrivalled, although the early notes of a tuneful choir of awakening songsters were already heard, the young Holmes added the brisk and crisp and sparkling charm of his prose. From the beginning his coursers were paired, and with equal pace they have constantly held the road. In the New England Magazine for November in the same year, 1831, a short paper was published called the “Autocrat of the Breakfast Table”. The tone of placid dogmatism and infallible finality with which the bulls of the domestic pope are delivered is delightfully familiar. This earliest one has perhaps more of the cardinal’s preliminary scarlet than of the mature papal white, but in its first note the voice of the Autocrat is unmistakable:

“Somebody was rigmarolling the other day about the artificial distinctions of society. ‘Madam,’ said I, ‘society is the same in all large places. I divide it thus: 1. People of cultivation who live in large houses. 2. People of cultivation who live in small houses. 3. People without cultivation who live in large houses. 4. People without cultivation who live in small houses. 5. Scrubs.’ An individual at the upper end of the table turned pale and left the room as I finished with the monosyllable.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

"'Tis sixty years since", but that drop is of the same characteristic transparency and sparkle as in the latest Tea-Cup.

The time in which the New England Magazine was published, and these firstlings of Holmes's muse appeared, was one of prophetic literary stir in New England. There were other signs than those in letters of the breaking-up of the long Puritan winter. A more striking and extreme reaction from the New England tradition could not well be imagined than that which was offered by Nathaniel Parker Willis, of whom Holmes himself says "that he was at the time something between a remembrance of Count D'Orsay and an anticipation of Oscar Wilde". Willis was a kindly saunterer, the first Boston dandy, who began his literary career with grotesque propriety as a sentimentalizer of Bible stories, a performance which Lowell gayly called inspiration and water. In what now seems a languid, Byronic way, he figured as a Yankee Pelham or Vivian Grey. Yet in his prose and verse there was a tacit protest against the old order, and that it was felt is shown by the bitterness of ridicule and taunt and insult with which, both publicly and privately, this most amiable youth was attacked, who, at that time, had never said an ill-natured word of anybody, and who was always most generous in his treatment of his fellow authors.

The epoch of Willis and the New England Magazine is very notable in the history of American literature. The traditions of that literature were grave and even sombre. Irving, indeed, in his Knickerbocker and Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane, and in the general gayety of his literary touch, had emancipated it from strict allegiance to the solemnity of its precedents, and had lighted it with a smile. He supplied a quality of grace and cheerfulness which it had lacked, and without unduly magnifying his charming genius, it had a natural, fresh, and smiling spirit, which, amid the funereal, theologic gloom, suggests the sweetness and brightness of morning. In its effect it is a breath of Chaucer. When Knickerbocker was published, Joel Barlow's "Hasty-Pudding" was the chief achievement of American literary humor. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner were not yet "the wits of Hartford". Those who bore that name held it by brevet. Indeed, the humor of our early literature is pathetic. In no State was the ecclesiastical dominance more absolute than in Connecticut, and nothing shows more truly how absolute and grim it was than the fact that the performances of the "wits" in that State were regarded—gravely, it must have been—as humor. For a long time there was no vital response in New England to the chord touched by Irving. Yet Boston was then unquestionably the chief seat of American letters. Dennie had established his Portfolio in Philadelphia in 1801, but in 1805 the Monthly Anthology, which was subsequently reproduced in the North American Review, appeared in Boston, and was the organ or illustration of the most important literary and intellectual life of the country at that time. The opening of the century saw the revolt against the supremacy of the old Puritan Church of



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

New England—a revolt within its own pale. This clerical protest against the austere dogmas of Calvinism in its ancient seat was coincident with the overthrow in the national government of Federalism and the political triumph of Jefferson and his party. Simultaneously also with the religious and political disturbance was felt the new intellectual and literary impulse of which the Anthology was the organ. But the religious and literary movements were not in sympathy with the political revolution, although they were all indications of emancipation from the dominance of old traditions, the mental restlessness of a people coming gradually to national consciousness.

Mr. Henry Adams, in remarking upon this situation in his history of Madison's administration, points out that leaders of the religious protest which is known as the Unitarian Secession in New England were also leaders in the intellectual and literary awakening of the time, but had no sympathy with Jefferson or admiration of France. Bryant's father was a Federalist; the club that conducted the Anthology and the North American Review was composed of Federalists; and the youth whose "Thanatopsis" is the chief distinction of the beginning of that Review, and the morning star of American poetry, was, as a boy of thirteen, the author of the "Embargo", a performance in which the valiant Jack gave the giant Jefferson no quarter. The religious secession took its definite form in Dr. Channing's sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks in Baltimore in 1819, which powerfully arraigned the dominant theology of the time. This was the year in which Irving's SKETCH BOOK was published. Bryant's first volume followed a year or two later, and our distinctive literary epoch opened.

Ten years afterwards, when Bryant had left New England, Dr. Channing was its most dignified and characteristic name in literature. But he was distinctively a preacher, and his serene and sweet genius never unbent into a frolicsome mood. As early as 1820 a volume of Robert Burns's poems fell into Whittier's hands like a spark into tinder, and the flame that has so long illuminated and cheered began to blaze. It was, however, a softened ray, not yet the tongue of lyric fire which it afterwards became. But none of the poets smiled as they sang. The Muse of New England was staid and stately—or was she, after all, not a true daughter of Jove, but a tenth Muse, an Anne Bradstreet? The rollicking laugh of Knickerbocker was a solitary sound in the American air until the blithe carol of Holmes returned a kindred echo.

Willis was the sign of the breaking spell. But his light touch could not avail. The Puritan spell could be broken only by Puritan force, and it is the lineal descendants of Puritanism, often the sons of clergymen—Emerson and Holmes and Longfellow and Hawthorne and Whittier—who emancipated our literature from its Puritan subjection. In 1829 Willis, as editor of Peter Parley's Token and the American Monthly Magazine, was aided by Longfellow and Hawthorne and Motley and Hildreth and Mrs. Child and Mrs. Sigourney, and the elder Bishop Doane, Park Benjamin



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and George B. Cheever, Albert Pike and Rufus Dawes, as contributors. Willis himself was a copious writer, and in the American Monthly first appeared the titles of "Inkling of Adventure" and "Pencilings by the Way", which he afterwards reproduced for some of his best literary work. The Monthly failed, and in 1831, the year that the New England Magazine began, it was merged in the New York Mirror, of which Willis became associate editor, leaving his native city forever, and never forgiving its injustice towards him. In the heyday of his happy social career in England he wrote to his mother, "The mines of Golconda would not tempt me to return and live in Boston." This was the literary situation when Holmes was preludeing in the magazine. The acknowledged poets in Boston were Dana, Sprague, and Pierpont. Are these names familiar to the readers of this essay? How much of their poetry can those readers repeat? No one knows more surely than he who writes of a living author how hard it is to forecast fame, and how dangerous is prophecy. When Edward Everett saluted Percival's early volume as the harbinger of literary triumphs, and Emerson greeted Walt Whitman at "the opening of a great career", they generalized a strong personal impression. They identified their own preference with the public taste. On the other hand, Hawthorne says truly of himself that he was long the most obscure man of letters in America. Yet he had already published the TWICE-TOLD TALES and the MOSSES FROM AN OLD MANSE, the two series of stories in which the character and quality of his genius are fully disclosed. But although Longfellow hailed the publication of the first collection as the rising of a new star, the tone of his comment is not that of the discoverer of a planet shining for all, but of an individual poetic pleasure. The prescience of fame is very infrequent. The village gazes in wonder at the return of the famous man who was born on the farm under the hill, and whose latent greatness nobody suspected; while the youth who printed verses in the corner of the county paper, and drew the fascinated glances of palpitating maidens in the meetinghouse, and seemed to the farmers to have associated himself at once with Shakespeare and Tupper and the great literary or "littery folks," never emerges from the poet's department in the paper in which unconsciously and forever he has been cornered. It would be a grim Puritan jest if that department had been named from the corner of the famous dead in Westminster Abbey.

If the Boston of sixty years ago had ventured to prophesy for itself literary renown, it is easy to see upon what reputations of the time it would have rested its claims. But if the most familiar names of that time are familiar no longer, if Kettell and poems from the United States Gazette seem to be cemeteries of departed reputations, the fate of the singers need not be deplored as if Fame had forgotten them. Fame never knew them. Fame does not retain the name of every minstrel who passes singing. But to say that Fame does not know them is not dispraise. They sang for the hearers of their day, as the players played. Is it nothing to please those who listen, because those



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

who are out of hearing do not stop and applaud? If we recall the names most eminent in our literature, whether they were destined for a longer or shorter date, we shall see that they are undeniably illustrations of the survival of the fittest. Turning over the noble volumes of Stedman and Miss Hutchinson, in which, as on a vast plain, the whole line of American literature is drawn up for inspection and review, and marches past like the ghostly midnight columns of Napoleon's grand army, we cannot quarrel with the verdict of time, nor feel that injustice has been done to Themis or to Cawdor. There are singers of a day, but not less singers because they are of a day. The insect that flashes in the sunbeam does not survive like the elephant. The splendor of the most gorgeous butterfly does not endure with the faint hue of the hills that gives Athens its Pindaric name. And there are singers who do not sing. What says Holmes, with eager sympathy and pity, in one of his most familiar and most beautiful lyrics?—

"We count the broken lyres that rest
Where the sweet waiting singers slumber,
But o'er their silent sister's breast
The wild flowers who will stoop to number?
A few can touch the magic string,
And noisy fame is proud to win them;
Alas, for those that never sing,
And die with all their music in them!"

But as he says also that the capacities of listeners at lectures differ widely, some holding a gallon, others a quart, and others only a pint or a gill, so of the singers who are not voiceless, their voices differ in volume. Some are organs that fill the air with glorious and continuous music; some are trumpets blowing a ringing peal, then sinking into silence; some are harps of melancholy but faint vibration; still others are flutes and pipes, whose sweet or shrill note has a dying fall. Some are heard as the wind or sea is heard; some like the rustle of leaves; some like the chirp of birds. Some are heard long and far away; others across the field; others hardly across the street. Fame is perhaps but the term of a longer or shorter fight with oblivion; but it is the warrior who "drinks delight of battle with his peers", and holds his own in the fray, who finally commands the eye and the heart. There were poets pleasantly singing to our grandfathers whose songs we do not hear, but the unheeded voice of the youngest songster of that time is a voice we heed to-day. Holmes wrote but two "Autocrat" papers in the New England Magazine—one in November, 1831, and the other in February, 1832. The year after the publication of the second paper he went to Paris, where for three years he studied medicine, not as a poet, but as a physician, and he returned in 1836 an admirably trained and highly accomplished professional man. But the Phi Beta Kappa poem of that year, like the tender lyric to Clemence upon leaving Paris, shows not only that the poet was not dead, but that he did not even sleep. The "Metrical Essay" was the serious announcement that the poet was not lost in the man of science, an announcement which was



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

followed by the publication in the same year (1836) of his first volume of poems. This was three years before the publication of Longfellow's first volume of verses, *THE VOICES OF THE NIGHT*.

Holmes's devotion to the two Muses of science and letters was uniform and untiring, as it was also to the two literary forms of verse and prose. But although a man of letters, like the other eminent men of letters in New England, he had no trace of the Bohemian. Willis was the only noted literary figure that ever mistook Boston for a seaport in Bohemia, and he early discovered his error. The fraternity which has given to Boston its literary primacy has been always distinguished not only for propriety of life and respectability in its true sense of worthiness and respect, but for the possession of the virtues of fidelity, industry, and good sense, which have carried so far both the influence and the renown of New England. Nowhere has the Bohemian tradition been more happily and completely shattered than in the circle to which Holmes returned from his European studies to take his place. American citizenship in its most attractive aspect has been signally illustrated in that circle, and it is not without reason that the government has so often selected from it our chief American representatives in other countries.

Dr. Holmes, as he was now called, and has continued to be called, practised his profession in Boston; but whether because of some lurking popular doubt of a poet's probable skill as a physician, or from some lack of taste on his part for the details of professional practice, like his kinsman, Wendell Phillips, and innumerable other young beginners, he sometimes awaited a professional call longer than was agreeable. But he wrote medical papers, and was summoned to lecture to the medical school at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, and later at Pittsfield in Massachusetts, while his unflinching charm as an occasional poet gave him a distinctive name. Holmes's felicity in occasional poems is extraordinary. The "Metrical Essay" was the first and chief of the long series of such verses, among which the songs of '29, the poems addressed year after year to his college classmates of that year, have a delightful and endless grace, tenderness, wit, and point. Pegasus draws well in harness the triumphant chariot of '29, in which the lucky classmates of the poet move to a unique and happy renown.

As a reader, Holmes was the permanent challenge of Mrs. Browning's sighing regret that poets never read their own verses to their worth. Park Benjamin, who heard the Phi Beta Kappa poem, said of its delivery: "A brilliant, airy, and *spirituelle* manner varied with striking flexibility to the changing sentiment of the poem, now deeply impassioned, now gayly joyous and nonchalant, and anon springing up into almost an actual flight of rhapsody, rendered the delivery of this poem a rich, nearly a dramatic entertainment." This was no less true in later years when he read some of his poems in New York at Bishop Potter's, then rector of Grace Church, or of the reading of the poem at the doctors' dinner given to him by the physicians of New York



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

a little later.

Holmes's readings were like improvisations. The poems were expressed and interpreted by the whole personality of the poet. The most subtle touch of thought, the melody of fond regret, the brilliant passage of description, the culmination of latent fun exploding in a keen and resistless jest, all these were vivified in the sensitive play of manner and modulation of tone of the reader, so that a poem by Holmes at the Harvard Commencement dinner was one of the anticipated delights which never failed. This temperament implied an oratorical power which naturally drew the poet into the lecture lyceum when it was in its prime, in the decade between 1850 and 1860. During that time the popular lecture was a distinct and effective public force, and not the least of its services was its part in instructing and training the public conscience for the great contest of the Civil War.

The year 1831, in which Holmes's literary activity began, was also the year on whose first day the first number of Garrison's Liberator appeared, and the final period of the slavery controversy opened. But neither this storm of agitation nor the transcendental mist that a few years later overhung intellectual New England greatly affected the poet.

In the first number of the "Autocrat" there is a passage upon puns, which, crackling with fun, shows his sensitive scepticism. The "Autocrat" says: "In a case lately decided before Miller, J., Doe presented Roe a subscription paper, and urged the claims of suffering humanity. Roe replied by asking when charity was like a top. It was in evidence that Doe preserved a dignified silence. Roe then said, 'When it begins to hum.' There are temperaments of a refined suspiciousness to which, when the plea of reform is urged, the claims of suffering humanity at once begin to hum. The very word reform irritates a peculiar kind of sensibility, as a red flag stirs the fury of a bull. A noted party leader said, with inexpressible scorn, 'When Dr. Johnson defined the word patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, he had not learned the infinite possibilities of the word re-fa-a-r-m.'"

The acridity of this jest is wholly unknown to the "Autocrat", who has moved always with reform, if not always with reformers, and whose protest against bigotry is as searching as it is sparkling. Not only has his ear been quick to detect the hum of Mr. Honeythunder's loud appeal, but his eye to catch the often ludicrous aspect of honest whimsey. During all the early years of his literary career he flew his flashing darts at all the "isms", and he fell under the doubt and censure of those earnest children of the time whom the gay and clever sceptics derided as apostles of the newness. When Holmes appeared upon the lecture platform it was to discourse of literature or science, or to treat some text of social manners or morals with a crisp Poor Richard sense and mother wit, and a brilliancy of illustration, epigram, and humor that fascinated the most obdurate "come-outer". Holmes's lectures on the English poets at the Lowell Institute were among the most noted of that



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

distinguished platform, and everywhere the poet was one of the most popular of "attractions". There were not wanting those who maintained that his use of the platform was the correct one, and that the orators who, often by happy but incisive indirection, fought the good fight of the hour abused their opportunity.

It was while Holmes was still a professor, but still also touching the lyre and writing scientific essays and charming the great audiences of the lecture lyceum, that in the first number of the Atlantic Monthly, in November, 1857, the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" remarked, "I was just going to say, when I was interrupted," and resumed the colloquies of the New England Magazine. He had been interrupted twenty-two years before. But as he began again it was plain that it was the same voice, yet fuller, stronger, richer, and that we were listening to one of the wisest of wits and sharpest of observers. Emerson warns us that superlatives are to be avoided. But it will not be denied that the "Autocrat" belongs in the highest rank of modern magazine or periodical literature, of which the essays of "Elia" are the type. The form of the "Autocrat"—a semi-dramatic, conversational, descriptive monologue—is not peculiar to Holmes's work, but the treatment of it is absolutely original. The manner is as individual and unmistakable as that of Elia himself. It would be everywhere recognized as the Autocrat's. During the intermission of the papers the more noted Macaulay flowers of literature, as the Autocrat calls them, had bloomed; Carlyle's SARTOR RESARTUS and reviews, Christopher North's NOCTES (now fallen into ancient night), Thackeray's ROUNABOUT PAPERS, Lowell's HOSEA BIGLOW—a whole library of magazine and periodical literature of the first importance had appeared. But the Autocrat began again, after a quarter of a century, musical with so rich a chorus, and his voice was clear, penetrating, masterful, and distinctively his own.

The cadet branch of English literature—the familiar colloquial periodical essay, a comment upon men and manners and life—is a delightful branch of the family, and traces itself back to Dick Steele and Addison. Hazlitt, who belonged to it, said that he preferred the Tatler to the Spectator; and Thackeray, who consorted with it proudly, although he was of the elder branch, restored Sir Richard, whose habits had cost him a great deal of his reputation, to general favor. The familiar essay is susceptible, as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show, of great variety and charm of treatment. What would the Christian Hero, writing to his Prue that he would be with her in a pint of wine's time, have said to "Blakesmoor" and "Oxford in the Vacation"? Yet Lamb and Steele are both consummate masters of the essay, and Holmes, in the "Autocrat", has given it a new charm. The little realm of the Autocrat, his lieges of the table, the persons of the drama, are at once as definitely outlined as Sir Roger's club. Unconsciously and resistlessly we are drawn within the circle; we are admitted *ad eundem*, and become the targets of the wit, the irony, the shrewd and sharp epigram, the airy whim, the sparkling fancy, the curious and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

recondite thought, the happy allusion, the felicitous analogy, of the sovereign master of the feast.

The index of the *AUTOCRAT* is in itself a unique work. It reveals the whimsical discursiveness of the book; the restless hovering of that brilliant talk over every topic, fancy, feeling, fact; a humming-bird sipping the one honeyed drop from every flower; or a hummer, to use its own droll and capital symbol of the lyceum lecturer, the bird that never lights. There are few books that leave more distinctly the impression of a mind teeming with riches of many kinds. It is, in the Yankee phrase, thoroughly wideawake. There is no languor, and it permits none in the reader, who must move along the page warily, lest in the gay profusion of the grove, unwittingly defrauding himself of delight, he miss some flower half hidden, some gem chance-dropped, some darting bird. Howells's *LETTERS* was called a chamber-window book, a book supplying in solitude the charm of the best society. We could all name a few such in our own literature. Would any of them, or many, take precedence of the *AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST TABLE*?

It is in this book that the value of the scientific training to the man of letters is illustrated, not only in furnishing noble and strong analogies, but in precision of observation and accuracy of statement. In Holmes's style, the definiteness of form and the clearness of expression are graces and virtues which are due to his exact scientific study, as well as to the daylight quality of his mind.

The delicate apprehension of the finer and tenderer feelings which is disclosed in the little passages of narrative in the record of the Autocrat and of his legitimate brothers, the Professor and the Poet, at the Breakfast Table, gives a grace and a sweetness to the work which naturally flow into the music of the poems with which the diary of a conversation often ends. These traits in the Autocrat suggested that he would yet tell a distinct story, which indeed came while the trilogy of the Breakfast Table was yet proceeding. *ELSIE VENNER* and the *GUARDIAN ANGEL*, the two novels of Holmes's, are full of the same briskness and acuteness of observation, the same effusiveness of humor and characteristic Americanism, as the *AUTOCRAT*. Certain aspects of New England life and character are treated in these stories with incomparable vivacity and insight. Holmes's picture is of a later New England than Hawthorne's, but it is its lineal descendant. It is another facet of the Puritan diamond which flashes with different light in the genius of Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, and Judd in *MARGARET*. For, with all his lyrical instinct and rollicking humor, Holmes is essentially a New-Englander, and one of the most faithful and shrewd interpreters of New England.

The colloquial habit of the Autocrat is not lost in the stories, and it is so marked generally in Holmes's writings as to be called distinctive. It is a fascinating gift, when it is so restrained by taste and instinctive refinement as not to become what is known as bumptiousness. Thackeray, even in his novels,

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

is apt to drop into this vein, to talk about the persons of his drama with his reader, instead of leaving them to play out their part alone. This trait offends some of Thackeray's audience, to whom it seems like the manager's hand thrust into the box to help out the play of the puppets. They resent not "the damnable faces" of the actors, but the damnable sermonizing of the author, and exhort him to permit the play to begin. Thackeray frankly acknowledged his tendency to preach, as he called it. But it was part of the man. Without the private personal touch of the essayist in his stories they would not be his. This colloquial habit is very winning when governed by a natural delicacy and an exquisite literary instinct. It is the quality of all the authors who are distinctly beloved as persons by their readers, and it is to this class that Holmes especially belongs. It is not a quality which is easily analyzed, but it blends a power of sympathetic observation and appreciation both of the thing observed and the reader to whom the observation is addressed. The Autocrat, as he converses, brightens with his own clear thought, with the happy quip, the airy fancy. He is sure of your delight, not only in the thought, but in its deft expression. He in turn is delighted with your delight. He warms to the responsive mind and heart, and feels the mutual joy. The personal relation is established, and the Autocrat's audience become his friends, to whom he describes with infinite glee the effect of his remarks upon his lieges at table. No other author takes the reader into his personal confidence more closely than Holmes, and none reveals his personal temperament more clearly. This confidential relation becomes even more simple and intimate as time chastens the eagerness of youth and matures the keen brilliancy of the blossom into the softer bloom of the fruit. The colloquies of the Autocrat under the characteristic title of "Over the Tea-Cups" are full of the same shrewd sense and wise comment and tender thought. The kindly mentor takes the reader by the button or lays his hand upon his shoulder, not with the rude familiarity of the bully or the boor, but with the courtesy of Montaigne, the friendliness of John Aubrey, or the wise cheer of Selden. The reader glows with the pleasure of an individual greeting, and a wide diocese of those whom the Autocrat never saw plume themselves proudly upon his personal acquaintance.

JOHN AUBREY

In this discursive talk about one of the American authors who have vindicated the position of American letters in the literature of the language we have not mentioned all his works. It is the quality rather than the quantity with which we are concerned, the upright, honorable, pure quality of the poet, the wit, the scholar, for whom the most devoted reader is called to make no plea, no apology. The versatility of his power is obvious, but scarcely less so the uniformity of his work.

It is a power which was early mature. For many a year he has dwelt upon a high table-land where the air is equable and inspiring, yet, as we have hinted, ever softer and sweeter. The lyric of today glows with the same ardor as the fervent



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

apostrophe to "Old Ironsides" or the tripping salutation to the remembered and regretted Clemence; it is only less eager. The young Autocrat who remarked that the word "scrub" dismissed from table a fellow-boarder who turned pale, now with the same smiling acuteness remarks the imprudent politeness which tries to assure him that it is no matter if he is a little older. Did anybody say so? The easy agility with which he cleared "the seven-barred gate" has carried him over the eight bars, and we are all in hot pursuit. For just sixty years since his first gay and tender note was heard, Holmes has been fulfilling the promise of his matin song. He has become a patriarch of our literature, and all his countrymen are his lovers.



PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

WASHINGTON IRVING³³

Forty years ago, upon a pleasant afternoon, you might have seen tripping with an elastic step along Broadway, in New York, a figure which even then would have been called quaint. It was a man of about sixty-six or sixty-seven years old, of a rather solid frame, wearing a Talma, as a short cloak of the time was called, that hung from the shoulders, and low shoes, neatly tied, which were observable at a time when boots were generally worn. The head was slightly declined to one side, the face was smoothly shaven, and the eyes twinkled with kindly humor and shrewdness. There was a chirping, cheery, old-school air in the whole appearance, an undeniable Dutch aspect, which, in the streets of New Amsterdam, irresistibly recalled Diedrich Knickerbocker. The observer might easily have supposed that he saw some later descendant of the renowned Wouter Van Twiller refined into a nineteenth-century gentleman. The occasional start of interest as the figure was recognized by some one in the passing throng, the respectful bow, and the sudden turn to scan him more closely, indicated that he was not unknown. Indeed, he was the American of his time universally known. This modest and kindly man was the creator of Diedrich Knickerbocker and Rip Van Winkle. He was the father of our literature, and at that time its patriarch. He was Washington Irving.

At the same time you might have seen another man, of slight figure and rustic aspect, with an air of seriousness, if not severity, moving with the crowd, but with something remote and reserved in his air, as if in the city he bore with him another atmosphere, and were still secluded among solitary hills. In the bright and busy street of the city which was always cosmopolitan, and in which there lingers a tradition, constantly renewed, of good-natured banter of the losel Yankee, this figure passed like the grave genius of New England. By a little play of fancy the first figure might have seemed the smiling spirit of genial cheerfulness and humor, of kindly sympathy even with the foibles and weaknesses of poor human nature; and the other the mentor of its earnest endeavor and serious duty. For he was the first of our poets, whose "Thanatopsis" was the hymn of his meditations among the primeval forests of his native hills, and who, in his last years, sat at the door of his early home and looked across the valley of the Westfield to the little town of Plainfield upon the wooded heights beyond, whose chief distinction is that there he wrote the "Waterfowl"; for this graver figure was the poet Bryant.

If in the same walk you had passed those two figures, you would have seen not only the first of our famous prose writers and the first of our acknowledged poets, but also the representatives of the two fundamental and distinctive qualities of our American

33. George William Curtis, WASHINGTON IRVING, read at Ashfield, 1889, printed by the Grolier Club in 1892, reprinted in 1895 in LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

literature, as of all literature—its grave, reflective, earnest character, and its sportive, genial, and humorous genius. At the time of which I speak another figure also was familiar in Broadway, but less generally recognized as it passed than either of the others, although, perhaps, even more widely known to fame than they. This was Cooper, who gave us so many of the heroes of our childhood's delight, but who at this time was himself the hero of innumerable lawsuits, undertaken to chastise the press for what he believed to be unjust and libelous comments upon himself. Now that the uproar of that litigation is silent, and its occasion forgotten, it seems comical that a man for whom fame had already rendered a favorable judgment should be busily seeking the opinion of local courts upon transitory newspaper opinions of him-self and his writings. It is as if Dickens, when the whole English-reading world—judges on the bench and bishops in their studies, cobblers in their stalls and grooms in the stables—were all laughing over Pickwick, should have sued the Eatanswill Gazette for calling him a clown. Thackeray pronounces Cooper's Long Tom Coffin one of the prizemen of fiction. That is a final judgment by the chief-justice. But who knows what was the verdict in Cooper's lawsuits to vindicate himself, and who cares? When Cooper died there was a great commemorative meeting in New York. Daniel Webster presided, and praised the storyteller; Bryant read a discourse upon him, while Irving sat by his side. One of the triumvirate of our early literature was gone, and two remained to foresee their own future in the honors paid to him. Indeed, it was to see them, quite as much as to hear of their dead comrade, that the multitude assembled that evening; and the one who was seen with the most interest was Irving, the one in whom the city of New York naturally feels a peculiar right and pride, as the most renowned of her children. If I say that he made personally the same impression that his works make, you can easily see the man. As you read the story of his life you feel its constant gayety and cheerfulness. It was the life of a literary man and a man of society—a life without events, or only the events of all our lives, except that it lacks the great event of marriage. In place of it there is a tender and pathetic romance. Irving lived to be seventy-six years old. At twenty-six he was engaged to a beautiful girl, who died. He never married; but after his death, in a little box of which he always kept the key, was found the miniature of a lovely girl, and with it a braid of fair hair, and a slip of paper on which was written the name Matilda Hoffman, with some pages upon which the writing was long since faded. That fair face Irving kept all his life in a more secret and sacred shrine. It looks out, now and then, with unchanged loveliness from some pensive passage, which he seems to write with wistful melancholy of remembrance. That fond and immortal presence constantly renewed the gentle humanity, the tenderness of feeling, the sweet healthfulness and generous sympathy which never failed in his life and writings.

He was born in the city of New York in 1783, the year in which



HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the Revolution ended in the acknowledgment of American independence. The British army marched out of the city, and the American army, with Washington at the head, marched in. "The patriot's work is ended just as my boy is born," said the patriotic mother, "and the boy shall be named Washington". Six years later, when Washington returned to New York to be inaugurated President, he was one day going into a shop when the boy's Scotch nurse democratically stopped the new republican chief magistrate and said to him, "Please your honor, here's a bairn was named for you". The great man turned and looked kindly on his little namesake, laid his hand upon his head, and blessed his future biographer.

The name of no other American has been so curiously confused with Washington's as that of Irving. Many a young fellow puzzles over the connection which the name seems vaguely to imply, and in other lands the identity of the men is confounded. When Irving first went to Europe, a very young man, well-educated, courteous, with great geniality of manner and charm of conversation, he was received by Prince Torlonia, the banker, in Rome, with unusual and flattering civility. His travelling companion, who had been treated by the prince with entire indifference, was perplexed at the warmth of Irving's welcome. Irving laughingly said that it only proved the prince's remarkable discrimination. But the young travellers laughed still more when the prince unconsciously revealed the secret of his attentions by taking his guest aside, and asking him how nearly he was related to General Washington.

Many years afterwards, when he had become famous, an English lady and her daughter paused in an Italian gallery before a bust of Washington. "And who was Washington, mamma?" asked the daughter. "Why, my dear, I am surprised at your ignorance," answered the mother, "he was the author of the SKETCH BOOK." Long ago in Berlin I was talking with some American friends one evening at a café, and observed a German intently listening to our conversation as if trying his ability to understand the language. Presently he said to me, politely, "You are English, no?" But when I replied "No, we are Americans"— "Americans!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, grasping my hand and shaking it warmly, "Americans, ach! we all know your great General Washington Irving."

Irving's father was a Presbyterian deacon, in whose heart the sterner traditions of the Covenanters lingered. He tried hard to teach his son to contemn amusement, and to impale his youth upon the five points of Calvinism, rather than to play ball. But it was John Knox trying to curb the tricky Ariel. Perhaps from some bright maternal ancestor the boy had derived his sweet gayety of nature which nothing could repress. His airy spirits bubbled like a sunny fountain in that some-what arid household. He read at ten a translation of the ORLANDO FURIOSO, and his father's yard, doubtless trim and well kept as beseemed a deacon's yard, became at once a field of chivalry. Candles were forbidden him in his chamber, but when he made the acquaintance



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of ROBINSON CRUSOE and SINDBAD THE SAILOR, he secreted lights to illuminate his innocent revels with those immortal playmates. The amusements which were permitted were of too depressing a character to be tolerated by the healthy boy, who, like the duck taking to the water from under the wing of the astonished hen, sometimes escaped from the serious house at night by dropping from a window, and with a delight that must have torn his father's heart with anguish had he known it, tasted the forbidden fruit of the theatre. It was a Presbyterian boy who tasted it then; but in the same city many years afterwards it was a Quaker boy whom I knew who was also enamoured of the play. "John," said his grieved father, "is this dreadful thing true that I hear of thee? Has thee ever been to see the play-actress Frances Kemble?" "Yes, father," answered the heroic John. "I hope thee has not been more than once, John," said the afflicted father. "Yes, father," replied John, resolved to make a clean breast of his sins, "more than thirty times." It is useless to try to prevent blue-birds from flying in the spring. The blithe creatures made to soar and sing will not be restrained. The same kind Providence that made Calvin made Shakespeare. The sun is higher than the clouds, and smiles are as heaven-born as tears. In Emerson's poem the squirrel says to the mountain:

"You're not so small as I, And not half so spry;

* * * * *

"If I cannot carry forests on my back Neither can you crack a nut."

It was in vain to try to thwart the young Irving's genius. Yet the boy who a little later was to light with rosy cheer the air which, as Wendell Phillips said, was still black with sermons; who was to give to our literature its first distinctly humorous strain, and innocently to amuse the world, was somehow or other, as he said, "taught to feel that everything pleasant was wicked".

If that were so, what a sinner Washington Irving was! If to make life easier by making it pleasanter, if to outwit trouble by gay banter, if with satire that smiles but never stings to correct foibles and to quicken good impulses; if to deepen and strengthen human sympathy, is not to be a human benefactor, what makes one? When Dr. Johnson said of Garrick that his death eclipsed the gayety of nations, he did not mean merely that the player would no longer make men laugh, but that he could no longer make them better. "If, however," said Irving—and Willis selected the words for the motto of his second volume of verse published in 1827— "I can by a lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sadness; if I can, now and then, penetrate the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good-humor with his fellow-beings and himself, surely, surely I shall not then have written entirely in vain."



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

That cannot be said to have been the spirit of any American author before Irving. Our colonial literature was mainly political and theological. You have only to return to the early New England days in the stories of Hawthorne, the magician who restores with a shuddering spell that old, sombre life, to understand the character of its reading. The books that were not treatises upon special topics all seemed to say with one of the grim bards of Calvinism:

"My thoughts on awful subjects roll, Damnation and the dead."

Literature, in its proper sense, there was none. There was no imaginative creation, no play of fancy and humor, no subtle charm of the ideal life, no grace and delight of expression, which are essential to literature. The perpetual twilight and chill of the New England Puritan world were an arctic winter in which no flower of poesy bloomed and no bird sang. One of the French players who came to this country with Rachel says, in his journal, with a startled air, as if he had remarked in Americans a universal touch of lunacy, that he was invited to take a pleasure-drive to Greenwood Cemetery. Evidently he was not familiar with Froissart's epigram nor with the annals of the Puritan fathers, or he would have known that their favorite pleasure-ground was the graveyard. Judge Sewell's Journal, the best picture of daily New England life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a portrait framed in black and hung with thick crape. It is a register of funerals—a book which seems to require a suit of sables for its proper reading.

The early Christians dwelt so often and so long in the catacombs that when they emerged, accustomed to associate life with the tomb, they doubtless regarded the whole world as a cemetery. The American Puritans inherited the disposition from their early confessors, and so powerful was the tendency that it laid its sombre spirit upon the earliest enduring poem in our literature, and the fresh and smiling nature of the new world was first depicted by our literary art as a tomb:

"The hills, Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun;
the vales Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods; rivers that move In majesty;
and the complaining brooks That make the meadows green;
and, poured round all, Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste,
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man."

"Thanatopsis" is the swan-song of Puritanism. Indeed, when New England Puritanism could sing, as for the first time it did in the verse of Bryant, the great change was accomplished. Out of strength had come forth sweetness. I am not decrying the Puritans. They were the stern builders of the modern world, the unconscious heralds of wider liberty, and a kindlier future for mankind. But

"God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform,"

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and never more mysteriously than when he chose as the pioneers of religious liberty in the New World those who hung Quakers, and as the founders of civil equality those who permitted only members of their own Church to vote.

Irving was not a studious boy. He did not go to college. He read some law at sixteen, but he read much more literature, and sauntered in the country about New York with his gun and fishing-rod. He sailed up the Hudson, and explored for the first time the realm that was presently to be his forever by the right of eminent domain of the imagination. New York was a snug little city in those days. At the beginning of the century it was all below the present City Hall, and the young fellow, who was born a cosmopolitan, greatly enjoyed the charms of the modest society in which the Dutch and the English circles were still somewhat separated, and in which such literary cultivation as there was was necessarily foreign. But while he enjoyed he observed, and his literary instinct began to stir.

Under the name of "Jonathan Oldstyle", the young Irving printed in his brother's newspaper essays in the style of the Spectator, discussing topics of the town, and the modest theatre in John Street and its chance actors, as if it had been Drury Lane with Garrick and Mrs. Siddons. The little town kindly smiled upon the lively efforts of the Presbyterian deacon's son; and its welcome of his small essays, the provincial echo of the famous Queen Anne's men in London, is a touching revelation of our scant and spare native literary talent. The essays are forgotten now, but they were enough to bring Charles Brockden Brown to find the young author, and to tempt him, but in vain, to write for The Literary Magazine and American Register, which the novelist was just beginning in Philadelphia, a pioneer of American literary magazines, which Brown sustained for five years.

The youthful Addison of New Amsterdam was a delicate lad, and when he came of age he sailed for France and the Mediterranean, and passed two years in travelling. Napoleon Bonaparte was emperor, and at war with England, and the young American, despite his passport, was everywhere believed to be an Englishman. Travelling was hard work in those days of war, but the cheery youth proved the truth of the proverb that a light heart and a whole pair of breeches go round the world. At Messina, in Sicily, he saw Nelson's fleet pass through the strait, looking for the French ships; and before the year ended the famous battle of Trafalgar had been fought, and at Greenwich in England Irving saw the body of the great sailor lying in state, wrapped in his flag of victory. At Rome he made the acquaintance of Washington Allston, and almost resolved to be a painter. In Paris he saw Madame de Stal, who overwhelmed him with eager questions about his remote and unknown country, and in London he was enchanted by Mrs. Siddons. Some years afterwards, when the SKETCH BOOK had made him famous, he was presented to Mrs. Siddons, and the great actress said to him, in her deepest voice and with her stateliest manner, "You've made me weep." The modest young author was utterly abashed, and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

could say nothing. After the publication of his BRACEBRIDGE HALL he was once more presented to her, and again with gloomy grandeur she said to him, "You've made me weep again." This time Irving received the solemn salute with more composure, and doubtless retorted with a compliment magnificent enough even for the sovereign Queen of Tragedy, who, as her niece Mrs. Fanny Kemble said of her, never laid aside her great manner, and at the dinner-table brandished her fork and stabbed the potatoes.

Irving returned from this tour with established health—a refined, agreeable, exceedingly handsome and charming gentleman; with a confirmed taste for society, and a delightful store of interesting recollection and anecdote. With a group of cultivated and lively friends of his own age he dined and supped and enjoyed the town, and a little anecdote which he was fond of telling shows that the good old times were not unlike the good new times: One morning, after a gay dinner, Irving met one of his fellow-revellers, who told him that on the way borne, after draining the parting bumper, he had fallen through a grating in the sidewalk, which had been carelessly left open, into the vault beneath. It was impossible to climb out, and at first the solitude was rather dismal, he said; but several of the other guests fell in, in the course of the evening, and, on the whole, they had quite a pleasant time of it.

In the midst of this frolicking life, and growing out of it, Irving's real literary career began. With his brother William, and his friend James K. Paulding, who afterwards wrote the DUTCHMAN'S FIRESIDE, and was one of the recognized American authors of fifty years ago, he issued every fortnight a periodical, which ran for twenty numbers, and stopped in the midst of its success. It was modelled upon the Spectator and Goldsmith's CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, describing and criticising the manners and morals of the town with extravagant humor and pungency, and a rollicking independence which must have been both startling and stimulating.

Perhaps, also, the town was secretly pleased to discover that it was sufficiently important to be worthy of such bright raillery and humorous reproof. SALMAGUNDI was only a lively *jeu d'esprit*, and Irving was never proud of it. "I know," said Paulding, writing to him in later life, "you consider old Sal as a sort of saucy, flippant trollope, belonging to nobody, and not worth fathering." But, nevertheless, Irving's genius was trying its wings in it, and pluming itself for flight. SALMAGUNDI undoubtedly, to a later taste, is rather crude and cumbrous fun, but it is interesting as the immediate forerunner of our earliest work of sustained humor, and of the wit of Holmes and Lowell at a later date. When it was discontinued, at the beginning of 1808, Irving and his brother began the HISTORY OF NEW YORK, which was originally designed to be a parody of a particular book. But the work was interrupted by the business difficulties of the brother, and at last Irving resumed it alone, recast it entirely, and as he finished it the engagement with Matilda Hoffman ended with her death, and the long arid



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

secret romance of his life began.

Knickerbocker's HISTORY was published just before Christmas, 1809, and made a merry Christmas for our grandfathers and grandmothers eighty years ago. The fun began before the book was published. In October the curiosity of the town of eighty thousand inhabitants was awakened by a series of skilful paragraphs in the Evening Post. The art of advertising was never more ingeniously illustrated. Mr. Fulkerson himself would have paid homage to the artist. One day the quid-nuncs found this paragraph in the paper, It was headed,

"DISTRESSING.

"Left his lodgings, some time since, and has not since been heard of, a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of Knickerbocker. As there are some reasons for believing that he is not entirely in his right mind, and, as great anxiety is entertained about him, any information concerning him left either at the Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street, or at the office of this paper, will be thankfully received.

"P. S.—Printers of newspapers would be aiding the cause of humanity by giving an insertion to the above.

"OCTOBER 25TH."

This was followed within a fortnight by another ingenious lure:

"To the Editor of the Evening Post:

"Sir,—Having read in your paper of the 26th October last a paragraph respecting an old gentleman by the name of Knickerbocker, who was missing from his lodgings, if it would be any relief to his friends, or furnish them with any clue to discover where he is, you may inform them that a person answering the description was seen by the passengers of the Albany stage early in the morning, about four or five weeks ago, resting himself by the side of the road, a little above Kingsbridge. He had in his hands a small bundle, tied in a red bandana handkerchief. He appeared to be travelling northward, and was very much fatigued and exhausted.

"November 6. A Traveller."

Ten days after came a letter signed by Seth Handaside, landlord of the Independent Handaside:

"Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street.

"Sir,—You have been kind enough to publish in your paper a paragraph about Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker, who was missing so strangely from his lodgings some time since. Nothing satisfactory has been heard from the old gentleman since, but a very curious written Book has been found in his room in his own handwriting. Now, I wish you to notice him, if he is still alive, that if he does not return and pay off his bill for board and lodging, I shall have to dispose of his Book to satisfy



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

me for the same."

This is very simple jesting, but at that time it was very effective in a town that enjoyed the high spirits of SALMAGUNDI. Moreover, the book which was announced in this lively strain was as unprecedented as the announcement. It was a very serious time and country, and the work of the small elderly gentleman who carried a little bundle tied in a red bandana handkerchief appeared in the midst of the sober and dry effusions of our Puritan literature, and of an eager and energetic life still engrossed with the subjection of a continent and the establishment of a new nation. It was the work of a young man of twenty-six, who lived fifty years afterwards with constantly increasing fame, making many and admirable contributions to literature. But nothing that followed surpassed the joyous brilliancy and gay felicity of his first book, which was at once acknowledged as the wittiest book that America had produced.

Knickerbocker's HISTORY is a prolonged and elaborate and audacious burlesque of the early annals of New Amsterdam. The undaunted Goth of the legend who plucked the Roman senator by the beard was not a more ruthless iconoclast than this son of New Amsterdam, who drew its grave ancestors from venerable obscurity by flooding them with the cheerful light of blameless fun. To pass the vague and venerable traditions of the austere and heroic founders of the city through the alembic of a youth's hilarious creative humor, and to turn them out in forms resistlessly grotesque, but with their identity unimpaired, was a stroke as daring as it was successful. But the skill and power with which this is done can be best appreciated by those who are most familiar with the history which the gleeful genius burlesques.

Irving follows the actual story closely, and the characters that he develops faithfully, although with rollicking caricature, are historical. Indeed, the fidelity is so absolute that the fiction is welded with the fact. The days of the Dutch ascendancy in New York are inextricably associated with this ludicrous narrative. It is impossible not to think of the forefathers of New Amsterdam as Knickerbocker describes them. The Wouter Van Twiller, the Wilhemus Kieft, the Peter Stuyvesant, who are familiarly and popularly known, are not themselves, but the figures drawn by Diedrich Knickerbocker. In comical despair, the historian Grahame, whose COLONIAL HISTORY is still among the best, says of Knickerbocker: "If Sancho Panza had been a real governor, misrepresented by the wit of Cervantes, his future historian would have found it no easy matter to bespeak a grave attention to the annals of his administration."

The gayety of this blithe genius bursting in upon our staid literature is irresistible. Irving's temperament, his travels, his humor, gave him a cosmopolitan point of view; and his little native city, with its local sense of importance, and its droll aristocratic traditions springing from Dutch burgomasters and traders, impressed his merry genius like a complacent Cranford or Tarascon taking itself with a provincial seriousness, which,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

to his sympathetic fancy, was an exhaustless fountain of fun. Part of the fun to us, and perhaps to Irving, was the indignation with which it was received by the descendants of the Dutch families in the city and State. The excited drawing-rooms denounced it as scandalous satire and ridicule. Even Irving's friend, Gulian Verplanck, nine years afterwards, deepening the comedy of his remark by his evident unconsciousness of the drollery of his gravity, grieved that the author's exuberance of genuine humor should be wasted on a coarse caricature. Irving, who was then in Europe, saw Verplanck's strictures just as he had written RIP VAN WINKLE, and he wrote to a friend at home that he could not help laughing at Verplanck's outburst of filial feeling for his ancestors, adding, in the true Knickerbocker vein, "Remember me heartily to him, and tell him that I mean to grow wiser and better and older every day, and to lay the castigation he has given seriously to heart." The success of Knickerbocker's HISTORY was immediate, and it was the first American work of literature which arrested attention in Europe.

Sir Walter Scott, who was then the most famous of English poets, and was about to publish the first of the Waverley Novels, was delighted with a humor which he thought recalled Swift's, and a sentiment that seemed to him as tender as Sterne's. He wrote a generous acknowledgment to the American friend who had sent him the book, and in later years he welcomed Diedrich Knickerbocker at Abbotsford, and the American has given a charming and vivid picture of Scott's home and its master.

But the success of his book did not at once determine Irving's choice of a career. He was still a gilded youth who enjoyed the gay idleness of society, and who found in writing only another and pleasant recreation. He had been bred in the conservative tradition which looked upon livelihood by literature as the deliberate choice of Grub Street, and the wretchedness of Goldsmith as the necessary and natural fate of authors; but it is droll that, although he recoiled from the uncertainty of support by literary labor, he was willing to try the very doubtful chances of office-holding as a means of securing leisure for literary pursuits. He offered himself as a candidate for appointment as the clerk of a court in the city. By tradition and sympathy he was a Federalist, but he had taken no active part in politics, and his chance was slight. He went to Albany, however, and in a lively letter he paints a familiar picture of the crowd of office-hunters who, he says, "like a cloud of locusts, have descended upon the city to devour every plant and herb and every green thing." He was sick with a cold, and stifled in rooms heated by stoves, and was utterly disgusted, as he says, "by the servility and duplicity and rascality I have witnessed among the swarms of scrub politicians who crawl about the great metropolis of our State like so many vermin about the head of the body politic."

Again the good old times were apparently very much like the good new times. Thirty-nine years after Irving's discomfiture in



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

trying to get a public office, Hawthorne was turned out of one that he held, and wrote to a friend: "It seems to me that an inoffensive man of letters, having obtained a pitiful little office on no other plea than his pitiful little literature, ought not to be left at the mercy of these thick-skulled and no-hearted ruffians." The language is strong, but the epithets are singularly well-chosen. The distinctive qualities of the ringleaders, whether of high or low degree, in the degradation of public trusts into private and party spoils, have never been more accurately or effectively described than by the words "thick-skulled" and "no-hearted".

The story of the sturdy beggar who asked General Jackson to give him the mission to France, and finally came down to a request for an old coat, well illustrates a system which regards public office not as a public trust, but as private alms. The service of the State, whether military or civil, is an object of high and generous ambition, because it involves the leadership of men. But if Irving and Hawthorne thought that what is called office-seeking is disgusting, it was not because the public service is not noble and dignified, but because we choose to allow it to be so often dependant, not upon fitness and character, but upon the personal or political favor of the "thick-skulled" and "no-hearted".

But the problem of a career was soon solved. In the year 1810 Irving formed a business connection with two of his brothers, and the next five years were passed in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, forming various literary plans, looking out for his business interests, sparkling in society; and when war with England began, serving upon the governor's military staff as Colonel Washington Irving. In the spring of 1815 he sailed to roam again through Europe, but the illness of his brother compelled him to remain in England in charge of the business. "London," as a shrewd and celebrated American recently said, "was then as it is now, the social centre of the world." Irving saw famous men and women, and his charming sweetness and humor opened all doors and hearts. But the business fell into distress, then into disaster, and in the beginning of 1818 the house failed. He was now thrown wholly upon his literary resources, which did not fail, and in the spring of 1819, when he was thirty-six years old, the first number of the SKETCH BOOK was issued in New York.

The merry, exuberant, satirical Diedrich Knickerbocker was transformed into the genial, urbane, and tender-hearted Geoffrey Crayon. Our fathers and grandfathers knew him well. They had been bred upon Addison and Goldsmith, the essayists and the poets of the eighteenth century, and in Geoffrey Crayon they recognized and welcomed another member of that delightful literary society. He was all the more welcome that he was an American—one of themselves. The bland and courteous Geoffrey, indeed, had few rivals among his countrymen. In our little American world of letters at that time he came and conquered. Bryant's "Thanatopsis", had been published only two years



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

before; Halleck's and Drake's lively but strictly local "Croakers" were still appearing, and Edward Everett had just hailed Percival's first volume as authorizing great expectations.

But prophecy is always dangerous. The year before, Sydney Smith had said, in the Edinburgh Review, "Literature the Americans have none—no native literature we mean. It is all imported. They had a Franklin, indeed, and may afford to live half a century on his fame. There is, or was, a Mr. Dwight, who wrote some poems, and his baptismal name was Timothy. There is also a small account of Virginia by Jefferson, and an epic poem by Mr. Joel Barlow, and some pieces of pleasantries by Mr. Irving. But why should Americans write books, when a six weeks' passage brings them, in their own tongue, our sense, science, and genius, on bales and hogsheads? Prairies, steamboats, grist-mills are their natural objects for centuries to come. Then, when they have got to the Pacific Ocean, epic poems, plays, pleasures of memory, and all the elegant gratifications of an ancient people who have tamed the wild earth, and sat down to amuse themselves. This is the natural march of human affairs." As the sarcastic Yorkshire canon, sitting on the Edinburgh Olympus, wiped his pen, the SKETCH BOOK was published. The good canon was right as to our small literary product, but even an Edinburgh Review could not wisely play the prophet.

This Mr. Everett also discovered, for his "great expectations" of Percival were not fulfilled. A desponding student of our poetry recently sighs that Percival is a forgotten poet, and then, seizing a promiscuous assortment of names, exclaims that Charles Sprague, William Wirt, Washington Irving, and Jack Downing may be referred to as forgotten authors. But this is the luxury of woe. Why should not Percival be a forgotten poet? That is to say, what is there in the verse of Percival that should command interest and attention to-day? He was a remarkably accomplished man and a most excellent gentleman, and his name is very familiar in the reading-books of the time when grandfathers of to-day were going to school. But he was a noted poet not because he took rank with his contemporaries—with Byron and Scott and Keats and Shelley and Coleridge and Wordsworth—but because there were very few Americans who wrote verses, and our fathers patriotically stood by them.

Yet because the note of a singer of another day is not heard by us, it does not follow that he did not touch the heart of his time. Grenville Mellen is a forgotten poet also, and Rufus Dawes and John Neal and James G. Eastburn. If the gentle reader will turn to the pages of Kettell, or any early American anthology, he will seem to himself to be walking among tombs. Upon each page might be suitably inscribed, "Sacred to the memory" of almost every one of the singers. But can we say with honest reproach, "forgotten poets"? The loiterer in the wood hears the song of the wood-thrush, but is the hermit-bird wronged, or is his song less sweet, because it is not echoed round the world? Is Fame to be held responsible for not retaining the name of



HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

every minstrel who loiters by and touches his harp lightly, and sings a sweet song as he passes on? Is it a hard fate to give pleasure to those who listen because those out of hearing do not applaud?

Many an author may have a tone and a touch which please the ear and taste of his own day, and which, as characteristic of a time, may be only curious to a later taste, like the costumes and dances of our great-grandmothers. But young America, sauntering at the club and at Newport, would not willingly wear the boots of Beau Nash, nor even the cloak of Beau Brummel. The law which provides that nothing shall be lost is equally observable in the realm of literary fame. Is anything of literature lost that deserves longer remembrance? or, more properly, can it be lost? A fair answer to the question can be found in the reply to another, whether delving in Kettell, or in any other anthology, reveals treasures dropped by Fame as precious as those she carries.

There are two ways in which authors survive: one by the constant reading of his works, the other by his name. Is Milton a forgotten author? But how much is he read, compared with the contemporary singers? Is Plato forgotten? Yet how many know him except by name? Irving thus far holds both. Time, like a thrifty husbandman, winnows its wheat, blowing away much chaff, but the golden grain remains. This is true not only of the whole multitude of authors, but of the works of each author. How many of them really survive in the anthology only? ASTORIA and CAPTAIN BONNEVILLE and MAHOMET and other books of Irving will disappear; but KNICKERBOCKER and RIP VAN WINKLE still buffet the relentless wave of oblivion, and their buoyancy is undiminished.

As for Sprague—a mild, genial, charming gentleman, who carried his simple freshness of nature and of manner to the end, and about whose venerable head in State Street always shone the faint halo of early poetic renown—his literary talent was essentially for a day, not for all time. But what then? On Christmas Eve we hear the passing music in the street that supplies for us the song of the waits. Distant and melodious, it pensively recalls the days and the faces and the voices that are no more. But the singers are not the same waits that we heard long ago; still less are they those that the youth of a century ago heard with the same musing melancholy. But the substance of the song, and the emotion which it awakens, and the tender pathos of association—these are all the same. Sprague was a wait of yesterday, of last year, of fifty years ago. Others sing in the street the song that he sang, and, singing, they pass on, and the sweet strain grows fainter, softer, and fainter and fainter, and the echoes answer, "Dying, dying, dying," and it is gone. See how tenderly Mr. Stedman speaks of the troubadours who are singing for us now, whose names are familiar, who trill and twitter in the magazines, and in tasteful and delicate volumes, which seem to tempt the stream of time to suffer such light and graceful barks to slip along unnoted to future ages. But the kindly critic's tone forecasts the fate of the sparkling



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ventures.

Moore tells us of the Indian maids upon the banks of the Ganges who light a tiny taper, and, on a frail little chip, set it afloat upon the river. It twinkles and dwindles, and flashes and expires. Mr. Stedman watches the minor poets trimming their tapers and carefully launching their chips upon the brimming river. "Pleasant journey," he cries cheerily from the shore, as if he were speaking to hearty Captain Cook going up the side of his great ship, and shaking out his mighty canvas to circumnavigate the globe. "Pleasant journey," cries the cheery critic; but there is a wistful something in his tone that betrays a consciousness of the swift extinction of the pretty perfumed flickering flame.

So scant, indeed, was the blossom of our literature when the SKETCH BOOK was published, that even twenty years later, when Emerson described the college Commencement Day as the only tribute of a country too busy to give to letters any more, Geoffrey Crayon, with the exception of Cooper, had really no American competitors. Long afterwards I met Mr. Irving one morning at the office of Mr. Putnam, his publisher, and in his cordial way, with a twinkle in his eye, and in his pleasant husky voice, he said, "You young literary fellows to-day have a harder time than we old fellows had. You trip over each other's heels; there are so many of you. We had it all our own way. But the account is square, for you can make as much by a lecture as we made by a book." Then, laughing slyly, he added, "A pretty figure I should make lecturing in this voice." Indeed, his modesty forbade him to risk that voice in public addresses.

Irving, I think, made but one speech. It was at the dinner given to him upon his return from Europe in 1832, after his absence of seventeen years. Like other distinguished Americans who have felt the fascination of the old home of their ancestors, and who have not thought that a narrow heart and a barbaric disdain of everything foreign attested the truest patriotism, he was suspected of some alienation from his country. His speech was full of emotion, and his protestation of love for his native land was received with boundless acclamation. But he could not overcome his aversion to speech-making. When Dickens came, and the great dinner was given to him in New York, Irving was predestined to preside. Nobody else could be even mentioned. He was himself conscious of it, and was filled with melancholy forebodings. Professor Felton, of Harvard, compared Irving's haunting terror and dismay at the prospect of this speech to that of Mr. Pickwick at the prospect of leading that dreadful horse all day.

Poor Irving went about muttering, "I shall certainly break down. I know I shall break down." At last the day, the hour, and the very moment itself arrived, and he rose to propose the health of Dickens. He began pleasantly and smoothly in two or three sentences, then hesitated, stammered, smiled, and stopped; tried in vain to begin again, then gracefully gave it up, announced the toast— "Charles Dickens, the guest of the nation"—then sank

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

into his chair amid immense applause, whispering to his neighbor, "There, I told you I should break down, and I've done it."

When Thackeray came, Irving consented to preside at a dinner if speeches were absolutely forbidden. The condition was faithfully observed, but it was the most extraordinary instance of American self-command on record. Whenever two or three Americans are gathered together, somebody must make a speech; and no wonder, because somebody always speaks so well. The custom is now so confirmed that it is foolish and useless to oppose it.

I remember a few years since that a dinner was given to a famous American artist long resident abroad, and, as the condition of the attendance of a distinguished guest whose presence was greatly desired, the same agreement was made that Irving required at the Thackeray dinner. It was a company of exceedingly clever and brilliant men, but the gayety of the feast was extinguished by the general consciousness that the situation was abnormal. It was a fruit without flavor, a flower without fragrance, a symphony without melody, a dinner without speeches. But the dinner of which I speak, when the condition of Irving's presence was that there should be no speeches, was the great exception. It was the only dinner of the kind that I have ever known. But Irving's cheery anecdote and gayety, the songs and banter of the company, the happy chat and sparkling wit, took the place of eloquence, and I recall no dinner more delightful.

However scant was our literature when the SKETCH BOOK appeared, it is a mistake to suppose that Irving owes his success to English admiration. That was, undoubtedly, very agreeable to him and to his countrymen. But it is well to correct a misapprehension which is still cherished. Many years ago an English critic said that Irving was much more relished and admired in England than in his own country, and added: "It is only recently critics on the lookout for a literature have elevated him to his proper and almost more than his proper place. This docility to English guidance in the case of their best, or almost their best, prose writer, may perhaps be followed by a similar docility in the case of their best, or almost their best, poet, Poe, whom also England had preceded the United States in recognizing." This comical patron is all the more amusing from his comparative estimate of Poe.

If it were true that Irving's countrymen had not recognized and honored him from the first, it might be suspected that it was because they were descendants of the people who showed little contemporaneous appreciation of Shakespeare. But it is certainly creditable to the literary England which was busy idolizing Scott and Byron, that it recognized also the charming genius of Irving, and that Leslie, the painter, could truly write of him, "Geoffrey Crayon is the most fashionable fellow of the day."

But while the English appreciation of Irving is very creditable to England, English conceit must not go so far as to suppose that it was that appreciation which commended him to his own



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

countrymen. At the time when Sydney Smith wrote the article from which we have quoted there was apparently an almost literary sterility in this country, and the professional critics of the critical journals were, as Professor Lounsbury says in his admirable *LIFE OF COOPER*, undoubtedly greatly affected by English opinion. But there was an American reading public independent of the few literary periodicals, as was shown when Cooper's *SPY* was published at the end of 1821, the year in which Bryant's first volume of poems and Dana's *IDLE MAN* appeared. Cooper had published his *PRECAUTION* in 1819, a book which Professor Lounsbury is one of the very few men who are known to have read. He was an unknown author. But the *SPY* was instantly successful. Some of the timid English journals awaited the English opinion, for Murray had declined, upon Gifford's advice, to publish the book. But a publisher was found, and England and Europe followed America in their approval. Cooper always said, and truly, that it was to his countrymen alone that he owed his first success, and his biographer concedes that the success of the *SPY* was determined before the opinion of Europe was known.

Nearly three years before, in May, 1819, the first number of Irving's *SKETCH BOOK* was published. He sent the manuscript to his brother, who had regretted Irving's refusal of a government place in the Navy Board, and to whom he wrote, "My talents are merely literary, and all my habits of thinking, reading, etc., have been in a different direction from that required for the active politician.... In fact, I consider myself at present as making a literary experiment, in the course of which I only care to be kept in bread and cheese. Should it not succeed—should my writings not acquire critical applause—I am content to throw up the pen, and that to any commonplace employment. But if they should succeed, it would repay me for a world of care and privation to be placed among the established authors of my country, and to win the affection of my countrymen."

The first number of the *SKETCH BOOK* was published simultaneously in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Its success was immediate. In September, 1819, Irving wrote: "The manner in which the work has been received, and the eulogiums that have been passed upon it in the American papers and periodical works, have quite overwhelmed me ... I feel almost appalled by such success." The echo of the acclamation reached England. Murray at first declined to publish it, as he had at first declined Cooper's *SPY*. But when England ascertained that the American judgment was correct, and that it was a popular work, Murray was willing to publish it.

The delightful genius which his country had recognized with joy it never ceased proudly and tenderly to honor. When, in 1832, he returned to his native land, as his latest biographer, Mr. Warner, records, "America greeted her most famous literary man with a spontaneous outburst of love and admiration." It was in his own country that he had published his works. It was his own countrymen whose applause apprised England of the charm of the new author; and it is a humorous mentor who now teaches us that



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

it was our happy docility to English guidance which enabled us to recognize and honor him.

Was it docility to the same beneficent guidance which enabled us to perceive the genius of Carlyle, whose works we first collected, and taught England to read and admire? Did it enable us, also, to inform England that in Robert Browning she had another poet? Was it the same docility which enabled us to reveal to England one of her most philosophic observers in Herbert Spencer, and to offer to Darwin his most appreciative correspondents and interpreters in Chauncey Wright, John Fiske, and Professors Gray and Wyman? There are many offences to be scored against us, but failure to know our own literary genius is not one of them.

Indeed, there is not one great literary fame in America that was not first recognized here. Not to one of them has docility to English literary opinion conducted us, as is often believed. Bryant and Cooper and Irving, Bancroft and Prescott and Motley, Emerson and Channing, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, Whittier, and Holmes were authors whom we were content to admire and love without knowing or asking whether England had heard of them, or what she thought of them. The "greatness" of Poe England may have preceded us in recognizing. That is an assertion which we are not disposed to dispute. But Walter Scott was not more immediately popular and beloved in England than was Washington Irving in America; and American guidance led England to Scott quite as much as English guidance drew America to Irving.

The first number of the SKETCH BOOK contained the tale of RIP VAN WINKLE, one of the most charming and suggestive of legends, whose hero is an exceedingly pathetic creation. It is, indeed, a mere sketch, a hint, a suggestion; but the imagination readily completes it. It is the more remarkable and interesting because, although the first American literary creation, it is not in the least characteristic of American life, but, on the contrary, is a quiet and delicate satire upon it. The kindly vagabond asserts the charm of loitering idleness in the sweet leisure of woods and fields against the characteristic American excitement of the overflowing crowd and crushing competition of the city, its tremendous energy and incessant devotion to money-getting.

It is not necessary to defend poor Rip, or to justify the morality of his example. It is the imagination that interprets him; and how soothing to those who give their lives to the furious accumulation of the means of living to behold that figure stretched by the brook, or finding nuts with the children, or sauntering homeward at sunset! Later figures of our literature allure us—Hester Prynne, wrapped in her cloak of Nersus, the Scarlet Letter, Hosea Biglow, Evangeline, Uncle Tom, and Topsy—but the charm of this figure is unfading. The new writers introduce us to their worlds, and with pleasure we make the acquaintance of new friends. The new standards of another literary spirit are raised, a fresh literary impulse surrounds us; but it is not thunder that we hear in the Kaatskills on a still summer afternoon it is the distant game of Hendrick Hudson



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and his men; and on the shore of our river, rattling and roaring with the frenzied haste and endless activity of prosperous industry, still Rip Van Winkle lounges idly by, an unwasted figure of the imagination, the constant and unconscious satirist of American life.

He seems to me peculiarly congenial with the temperament of Irving. He, too, was essentially a loiterer. He had the same freshness of sympathy, the same gentleness of nature, the same taste for leisure and repose. His genius was reminiscent, and, as with all humorists, its climate was that of April. The sun and the shower chased each other. Irving's intellectual habit was emotional rather than thoughtful. In politics and public affairs he took no part, although office was often urged upon him, as when the friends of General Jackson wished him to go as representative to Congress, or President Van Buren offered him the secretaryship of the navy, or Tammany Hall, in New York, unanimously and vociferously nominated him for mayor, an incident in the later annals of the city which transcends the most humorous touch in KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY. He was appointed secretary of legation in England in 1829, and in 1842, when Daniel Webster was secretary of state, minister to Spain.

But what we call practical politics was always distasteful to him. The spirit which I once heard laugh at a young man new in politics because he treated "the boys" with his own good cigars instead of buying bad ones at the saloon—the spirit which I once heard assure a man of public ability and fitness that he could never reach political office unless he pushed himself, and paid agents to buy votes, because no man could expect an office to be handed to him on a gold plate—the spirit which, to my knowledge, displayed a handful of bank-notes in the anteroom of a legislature, and exclaimed, "That's what makes the laws!"—this was a spirit which, like other honorable men and patriotic Americans, Irving despised.

He was a gentleman of manly feeling and of moral refinement, who had had glimpses of what is called "the inside" of politics; and, as he believed these qualities would make participation in politics uncomfortable, he abstained. To those of us who are wiser than he, who know that simple honesty and public spirit and self-respect and contempt of sneaking and fawning and bribery and crawling are the conditions of political preferment, Irving, in not perceiving this, must naturally seem to be a queer, wrong-headed, and rather super-celestial American, who had lived too much in the heated atmosphere of European aristocracies and altogether too little in the pure and bracing air of American ward politics and caucuses and conventions. To use an old New York phrase, Irving preferred to stroll and fish and chat with Rip Van Winkle rather than to "run wid der machine".

THE SKETCH BOOK made Irving famous, and with its predecessor, KNICKERBOCKER, and its successor, BRACEBRIDGE HALL, disclosed the essential quality of his genius. But all these books performed another and greater service than that of winning the world to



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

read an American book: this was the restoration of a kindlier feeling between the two countries which, by all ties, should be the two most friendly countries on the globe. The books were written when our old bitterness of feeling against England had been renewed by the later war. In the thirty years since the Revolution ended we had patriotically fostered the quarrel with John Bull. Our domestic politics had turned largely upon that feeling, and the game of French and English was played almost as fiercely upon our side of the ocean as upon their own.

The great epoch of our extraordinary material development and prosperity had not opened, and, even had John Bull been friendlier than he was, it would have been the very flattery of falsehood had he complimented our literature, our science, our art. Sydney Smith's question, "Who reads an American book?" was contemptuous and exasperating. But here was an American who wrote books which John Bull was delighted to read, and was compelled to confess that they depicted the most characteristic and attractive aspects of his own life with more delicate grace than that of any living Englishman.

It was Irving who recalled the old English Christmas. It was his cordial and picturesque description of the great holiday of Christendom which preceded and stimulated Dickens's CHRISTMAS CAROLS and Thackeray's HOLIDAY TALES. It was the genial spirit of Christmas, native to his gentle heart and his happy temperament, which made Irving, as Thackeray called him, a peacemaker between the mother-country and her proud and sensitive offspring of the West. He showed John Bull that England is ours as well as his. "Old fellow," he said, "you cannot help yourself. It is the same blood that flows in our veins, the same language that we speak, the same traditions that we cherish. If you love liberty, so do we; if you will see fair play, so will we. It is natural to you, so it is to us. We cannot escape our blood. Shakespeare is not your poet more than ours. If your ancestors danced round the Maypole, so did our ancestors in your ancestors' shoes. If Old England cherished Christmas and New England did not, Bradford and Endicott and Cotton were Englishmen, not Americans. If old English life and customs and traditions are dear to you, listen to my story, and judge whether they are less dear to us." Then, with a merry smile, the young stranger holds out his hand to John Bull, and exclaims, "Behold, here is my arm! I bare it before your eyes, and here it is—it is the strawberry-mark; come to my bosom, I am your long-lost brother."

It was an incalculable service which Irving rendered in renewing a common feeling between England and America. It was involuntary, because in writing he had no such purpose. He was only following the bent of his own taste, and his works reflected only his individual sympathies. But it was this very fact—it was the English instinct in the American, the appreciation native in the heart of the Western stranger of the true poetic charm of England—which was the spell of the magician. Irving had the same imaginative enthusiasm for traditional and poetic England that Burke had for political England. Indeed, it is an England



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

which never actually existed except in the English and American imagination. The coarse, mercenary, material England which Lecky photographs in his history of the eighteenth century was the same England in which Burke lived, and which his glowing imagination exalted into the magnificent image of constitutional liberty before which he bowed his great head. So with the old England that Irving drew. He saw with poetic fancy a rural Arcadia, and reproduced the vision with airy grace and called it England. No wonder that John Bull was delighted with an artist who could paint so fascinating a picture, and write under it John Bull's portrait.

To change a word in Marvell's noble lines, when Irving was in England

"He nothing common saw or mean Upon that memorable scene."

Only an American could have seen England as he described it, and invested it with an enchantment which the mass of Englishmen had neither suspected nor perceived. Irving's instinct was that of Hawthorne afterwards, who called England "Our Old Home". There is a foolish American habit growing patriotically out of our old contentions with England, and politically out of our desire to conciliate the Irish vote in this country, of branding as servile and un-American the natural susceptibility of people of English descent, but natives of another land, to the charm of their ancestral country. But the American is greatly to be pitied who thinks to prove the purity of his patriotism by flouting the land in which he has a legitimate right, the land of Alfred and Runnymede, of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton, of Hampden and Cromwell, of Newton and Bunyan, of Somers and Chatham and Edmund Burke, the cradle of constitutional liberty and parliamentary government. If the great body of the literature of our language in which we delight, if the sources of our law and politics, if the great exploits of contemporary scholarship and science, are largely beyond our boundaries, yet are legitimately ours as well as all that we have ourselves achieved, why should we spurn any of our just and hereditary share in the great English traditions of civilization and freedom?

Irving returned to America in 1832, and here he afterwards remained, except during his absence as minister in Spain. In an earlier visit to that country he had felt the spell of its romantic history, and had written the LIFE OF COLUMBUS, the CONQUEST OF GRANADA, and the CHRONICLES OF THE ALHAMBRA. During all his later years he was busy with his pen, and, while the modest author had risen to the chief place in American literature, its later constellation was rising into the heavens.

But his intrinsic modesty never disappeared either from the works or the character of the benign writer. In the height of his renown there was no kind of presumption or conceit in his simple and generous breast. Some time after his return from his long absence in Europe, and before Putnam became his publisher,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Irving found some disinclination upon the part of publishers to issue new editions of his books, and he expressed, with entire good humor, the belief that he had had his day.

It is doubtless true, as BLACKWOOD remarked, with what we may call BLACKWOOD courtesy, when Mr. Lowell was American minister in England, that Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Pope, and so many more "will not be replaced by Mr. Washington Irving and Mr. Lowell". But it is equally true that, since Swift, BLACKWOOD cannot find in English literature political satire more trenchant, humorous, forcible, and effective than the BIGLOW PAPERS, and nothing in Swift more original. It is said that it is ludicrous to compare the mild humor of Rip Van Winkle with the "robustious fun of Swift". But this is a curious "derangement of epitaphs". Swift has wit, and satiric power, and burning invective, and ribaldry, and caustic, scornful humor; but fun, in any just sense, he has not. He is too fierce to be funny. The tender and imaginative play of Rip Van Winkle are wholly beyond the reach of Swift.

Irving and other American writers are not the rivals of their British associates in the literature of the English language—they are worthy comrades. Wordsworth and Byron are not Shakespeare and Milton, but they are nevertheless Wordsworth and Byron, and their place is secure. So the brows of Irving and Cooper, of Bryant and Longfellow, and of Lowell, of Emerson and Hawthorne do not crave the laurels of any other master. The perturbed spirit of BLACKWOOD may rest in the confident assurance that no generous and intelligent student of our literature admires Gibbon less because he enjoys Macaulay, or depreciates Bacon because he delights in Emerson, or denies the sting of Gulliver because he feels the light touch of Knickerbocker. It is with good fame as with true love:

"True love in this differs from gold and clay, That to divide is not to take away."

In the year that Irving published the SKETCH BOOK, Cooper published his first novel, and two years before Bryant's *Thanatopsis* had been published. When, forty years afterwards, in the last year of his life, the last volume of the LIFE OF WASHINGTON was issued, Irving and Bryant and Cooper were no longer the solitary chiefs of our literature. An illustrious company had received the torch unextinguished from their hands—Whittier, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, Mrs. Stowe, had all taken their places, yet all gladly and proudly acknowledged Irving as the patriarch. It is our happy fortune that these names, of which we are all proud, are not those of men of letters only, but of typical American citizens. The old traditions of the literary life, the mad roystering, the dissipation, Grub Street, the sponging-house, the bailiff, the garret, and the jail, genius that fawns for place and flatters for hire, the golden talent wrapped in a napkin, and often a dirty and ragged napkin, have vanished in our American annals of letters. Pure, upright,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

faithful, industrious, honorable, and honored, there is scarcely one American author of eminence who may not be counted as a good and useful citizen of the Republic of the Union, and a shining light of the Republic of Letters.

Of Washington Irving, as of so many of this noble company, it is especially true that the author was the man. The healthy fun and merry satire of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the sweet humor and quick sympathy and simple pathos of Geoffrey Crayon, were those of the modest master of Sunnyside. Every literary man of Irving's time, whether old or young, had nothing but affectionate praise of his artless urbanity and exhaustless good-nature. These qualities are delightfully reflected in Thackeray's stories of him in the ROUNDAABOUT PAPERS upon Irving and Macaulay, "the Goldsmith and the Gibbon of our time".

"He came to one of my lectures in Washington," Thackeray says, "and the retiring President, Mr. Fillmore, and his successor, Mr. Pierce, were present. 'Two kings of Brentford smelling at one rose,' said Irving, with his good-natured smile. In his little bower of a home at Sunnyside he was always accessible. One English newspaper man came and introduced himself, and partook of luncheon with the family, and, while the host fell into a little doze, as was his habit, the wary Englishman took a swift inventory of everything in the house, and served up the description to the British public, including the nap of his entertainer. At another time, Irving said, 'Two persons came to me, and one held me in conversation while the other miscreant took my portrait.'" Thackeray tells these little stories with admiring sympathy. His manly heart always grew tender over his fellow-authors who had no acrid drop in their humor, and Irving's was as sweet as dew.

It is late for a fresh compliment to be paid to him, but the London Spectator paid it in 1883, the year of his centenary, by saying, "Since the time of Pope more than one hundred essayists have attempted to excel or to equal the Tatler and Spectator. One alone, in a few of his best efforts, may be said to have rivalled them, and he is Washington Irving." The Spectator adds that one has surpassed them, "the incomparable Elia".

Irving's temperament, however, was much more congenial with that of the early essayists than Charles Lamb's, and his pictures of English country life in BRACEBRIDGE HALL have just the delicate, imaginative touch of the sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley. But in treating distinctively English topics, however airy and vivid his touch may be, Irving is manifestly enthralled by his admiration for the literary masters of the Anne time, and by the spirit of their writing. It is in the Knickerbocker world that he is characteristically at home. Indeed, it is his humorous and graphic fancy more than the sober veracity of history which has given popular and perpetual form to the early life of New York, and it is Irving who has enriched it with romantic tradition such as suffuses the story of no other State.

The bay, the river, the city, the Kaatskill Mountains, as Choate said of Faneuil Hall and Webster, breathe and burn of him. He



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

has charmed the Hudson with a peculiar spell. The quaint life of its old Dutch villages, the droll legend of Sleepy Hollow, the pathetic fate of Rip Van Winkle, the drowsy wisdom of Communi-paw, the marvellous municipality of New Amsterdam, and the Nose of Anthony guarding the Highlands, with the myriad sly and graphic allusions and descriptions strewn all through his books, have made the river Irving's river, and the state Irving's state, and the city Irving's city, so that the first instinctive question of every lover of Irving from beyond the state, as he enters Central Park and beholds its memorial statues, is, "Where is the statue of Irving?"

Unhappily, echo, and not the park guide-book, answers. There is, indeed, a bust, and, in a general sense, "Si monumentum" may serve for a reply. From that point of view, indeed, Westminster Abbey, as the monument of English heroes in letters and arms, in the Church and the State, would be superfluous. But the abbey is a shrine of pilgrimage because of the very fact that it is the burial-place of famous Englishmen. The Central Park, in New York, is already a Walhalla of famous men, and the statue that would first suggest itself as peculiarly fitting for the Park is of the New-Yorker who first made New York distinctively famous in literature—the New-Yorker whose kindly genius first made American literature respected by the world.

Reversing the question, "Where be the bad people buried?" the wondering pilgrim in the Park asks, "Where be Irving and Bryant and Cooper?" They were not Americans only, but, by birth or choice, New-Yorkers, and the three distinctive figures of our early literature. It was very touching to see the venerable Bryant, in the soft May sunshine, when the statue of Halleck was unveiled, standing with bare head and speaking of his old friend and comrade. But who that listened could not see, through tender mists of years, the grave and reverend form of the speaker himself, transformed to marble or bronze, sitting serene forever beneath the shadowing trees, side by side with the poet of Faust and the worshipper of Highland Mary?

But Bryant would have been the first to name Washington Irving as the most renowned distinctively American man of letters whose figure, reproduced characteristically and with simple quaintness, should decorate the Park. To a statue of Washington Irving all the gates should open, as every heart would open, in welcome. That half-humorous turn of the head and almost the twinkling eye, that brisk and jaunty air, that springing step, that modest and gentle and benign presence, all these could be suggested by the artist, and in their happy combination the pleased loiterer would perceive old Diedrich Knickerbocker and the summer dreamer of the Hudson legends, the charming biographer of Columbus and of Goldsmith, the cheerful gossip of Wolfert's Roost, and the mellow and courteous Geoffrey Crayon, who first taught incredulous Europe that beyond the sea there were men also, and that at last all the world must read an American book.

Irving was seventy-six years old when he died, late in 1859.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Born in the year in which the Revolution ended, he died on the eve of the civil war. His life exactly covered the period during which the American republic was an experiment. It ended just as the invincible power of free institutions was to be finally demonstrated. His life had been one of singular happiness, both of temperament and circumstance. His nature was too simple and gentle to breed rivalries or to tolerate animosities. Through the sharpest struggles of our politics he passed without bitterness of feeling and with universal respect, and his eyes happily closed before seeing a civil war which, although the most righteous of all wars, would have broken his heart. The country was proud of him: the older authors knew in him not a rival, but a friend, the younger loved him as a father. Such love, I think, is better than fame. On the day of his burial in the ground overlooking the Hudson and the valley of Sleepy Hollow, unable to reach Tarrytown in time for the funeral, I came down the shore of the river which he loved and immortalized. As the train hastened and wound along, I saw the Catskills draped in autumnal mist, not concealing, but irradiating them with lingering and pathetic splendor. Far away towards the south the river-bank on which his home lay was Sunnyside still, for the sky was cloudless and soft with serene sunshine. I could not but remember his last words to me, more than a year before, when his book was finished and his health was failing: "I am getting ready to go; I am shutting up my doors and windows", and I could not but feel that they were all open now, and bright with the light of eternal morning.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1858

John B. Murray purchased the wooden [press](#) used by [James Franklin](#) and [Benjamin Franklin](#).



[George William Curtis](#)'s novel TRUMPS was serialized in [Harper's Weekly](#).

IT GOES ON AND ON AND ON

August 18, Wednesday: The remainder of the Queen's cablegram was delivered to President Buchanan:

... THE QUEEN IS CONVINCED THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL JOIN WITH HER IN FERVENTLY HOPING THAT THE ELECTRIC CABLE, WHICH NOW ALREADY CONNECTS GREAT BRITAIN WITH THE UNITED STATES, WILL PROVE AN ADDITIONAL LINK BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS, WHOSE FRIENDSHIP IS FOUNDED UPON THEIR COMMON INTERESTS AND RECIPROCAL ESTEEM. THE QUEEN HAS MUCH PLEASURE IN THUS DIRECTLY COMMUNICATING WITH THE PRESIDENT, AND IN RENEWING TO HIM HER BEST WISHES FOR THE PROSPERITY OF THE UNITED STATES.³⁴

The President responded with

THE PRESIDENT CORDIALLY RECIPROCATES THE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

CONGRATULATIONS OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN ON THE SUCCESS OF THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL ENTERPRISE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE SKILL, SCIENCE AND INDOMITABLE ENERGY OF THE TWO COUNTRIES. IT IS A TRIUMPH MORE GLORIOUS BECAUSE FAR MORE USEFUL TO MANKIND THAN WAS EVER WON BY A CONQUEROR ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE. MAY THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH UNDER THE BLESSING OF HEAVEN PROVE TO BE A BOND OF PERPETUAL PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE KINDRED NATIONS AND AN INSTRUMENT DESTINED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO PURSUE ITS RELIGION, CIVILIZATION, LIBERTY AND LAW THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. IN THIS VIEW WILL NOT ALL THE NATIONS OF CHRISTENDOM SPONTANEOUSLY UNITE IN THE DECLARATION THAT IT SHALL BE FOREVER NEUTRAL AND THAT ITS COMMUNICATIONS SHALL BE HELD SACRED IN PASSING TO THE PLACE OF THEIR DESTINATION EVEN IN THE MIDST OF HOSTILITIES?

Plans were initiated for a great national celebration of triumph, to be held on September 1st.

[Henry Thoreau](#) wrote to [George William Curtis](#) mentioning William Henry Seward: “As for the Presidency, I cannot speak for my neighbors, but, for my own part, I am politically so benighted (or belighted?) that I do not know what Seward’s qualifications are. I know, however, that no one in whom I could feel much interest would stand any chance of being elected. But the nail which is hard to drive is hard to draw.”

Concord Aug. 18th ’58

Dear Sir,

Channings’ poem “Near Home” was printed (if not published) by James Munroe & C^o. Boston. C. brought it to me some seven weeks ago, with the remark— “Knowing your objection to manuscript, I got it printed—” and I do not know that he presented it to anyone else. I have not been to the city of late, but Emerson told me that he found a small pile of them at Munroe’s, and bought two or three; though Munroe said that he was forbidden to advertise it. Of course this is equivalent to dedicating it “to whom it may concern.” Others also have bought it, for fifty cents; but C. still persists, in his way, in saying that it is not published. Ought not a poem to publish itself?

I am glad if you are not weary of the Maine Woods, partly because I have another and a larger slice to come.

As for the Presidency, – I cannot speak for my neighbors, but, for my own part, I am politically so benighted (or belighted?) that I do not know what Seward’s qual-

34. Test messages had been being exchanged for ten days. This ceremonial message came across the Atlantic to Newfoundland by submarine cable, then across Newfoundland by overhead wire supported on poles, then across Cabot Strait to Aspy Bay (Dingwall), Cape Breton again by submarine cable, then across Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Maine, to Boston and New-York, again by overhead wire supported on poles. The number of characters transmissible per minute over such a cable at the time was inversely proportional to the square of the cable’s length, so the Queen’s 99 words consisting of 509 letters commenced transmission at 10:50AM on August 16th and was not completely recorded in Newfoundland until 4:30AM the next day, requiring 17 hours and 40 minutes, an average of about two minutes and five seconds for each letter. The cable would be operational for less than a month. For the first few messages, 600 volts would be applied at the sending end, but then they increased the sending-end battery to 2,000 volts in an effort to increase the transmission speed. This higher voltage overstressed the cable insulation, and it would go completely dead on September 3, 1858. It would then be six years before telegraph messages would again be sent across the Atlantic.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ifications are. I know, however, that no one in whom I could feel much interest would stand any chance of being elected. But the nail which is hard to drive is hard to draw.

Yrs truly

Henry D. Thoreau



August 18: P.M.—To Fair Haven Hill. Miss Caroline Pratt saw the white bobolink yesterday where Channing saw it the day before, in the midst of a large flock. I go by the place this afternoon and see very large flocks of them, certainly several hundreds in all, and one has a little white on his back, but I do not see the white one. Almost every bush along this brook is now alive with these birds. You wonder where they were all hatched, for you may have failed to find a single nest. I know eight or ten active boys who have been searching for these nests the past season quite busily, and they have found but two at most. Surely but a small fraction of these birds will ever return from the South. Have they so many foes there? Hawks must fare well at present. They go off in a straggling flock, and it is a long time before the last loiterer has left the bushes near you.

I also see large flocks of blackbirds, blackish birds with chattering notes. It is a fine sight when you can look down on them just as they are settling on the ground with outspread wings,—a hovering flock.

Having left my note-book at home, I strip off a piece of birch bark for paper. It begins at once to curl up, yellow side out, but I hold that side to the sun, and as soon as it is dry it gives me no more trouble.

I I hear also of a swallow (probably barn swallow), perfectly white, killed by John Flint's son this year and set up by some one in the North Quarter. I sit under the oaks at the east end of Hubbard's Grove, and hear two wood pewees singing close by. They are perched on dead oak twigs four or five rods apart, and their notes are so exactly alike that at first I thought there was but one. One appeared to answer the other, and sometimes they both sung together,—even as if the old were teaching her young. It was not the usual spring note of this bird, but a simple, clear pe-e-eef, rising steadily with one impulse to the end. They were undistinguishable in tone and rhythm, though one which I thought might be the young wa~ feebler. In the meanwhile, as it was perched on the twig, it was incessantly turning its head about, looking for insects, and suddenly would dart aside or downward a rod or two, and I could hear its bill snap as it caught one. Then it returned to the same or another perch.

Heard a nuthatch.³⁵

Last evening one of our neighbors, who has just completed a costly house and front yard, the most showy in the village, illuminated in honor of the Atlantic telegraph. I read in great letters before the house the sentence "Glory to God in the highest." But it seemed to me that that was not a sentiment to be illuminated, but to keep dark about. A simple and genuine sentiment of reverence would not emblazon these words as on a signboard in the streets. They were exploding countless crackers beneath it, and gay company, passing in and out, made it a kind of housewarming. I felt a kind of shame for [it], and was inclined to pass quickly by, the ideas of indecent exposure and cant being suggested. What is religion? That which is never spoken.

35. Not heard for a long time, October 15, 1859. And a week later. Not heard since spring.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1859

During this year or the following one [George William Curtis](#) would become chairman of the Richmond County Republican Party Committee (a post he would retain until 1879).

February 28, Monday: [George William Curtis](#) wrote from the north shore of Staten Island to Charles Wesley Slack agreeing to read on December 11th a lecture that he had prepared for Philadelphia and elsewhere on "The Recent Aspect of the Slavery Question." In a postscript he made reference to the Reverend [Theodore Parker](#).

Sallie Holley wrote to Mrs. Porter about having attended [Henry Thoreau](#)'s Worcester lectures in H.G.O. Blake's parlor on "AUTUMNAL TINTS":

The last two evenings we had in Worcester, we were at two parlour lectures given by Mr. Henry D. Thoreau, the author of that odd book, Walden, or Life in the Woods. The first lecture was upon "Autumnal Tints," and was a beautiful and, I doubt not, a faithful report of the colours of leaves in October. Some of you may have read his "Chesuncook," in The Atlantic Monthly; if so you can fancy how quaint and observing, and humorous withal, he is as traveller – or excursionist-companion in wild solitudes. Several gentlemen, friends of his, tell us much of their tour with him to the White Mountains last summer, of his grand talk with their guide in "Tuckerman's Ravine," where they had their camp. He paid us the compliment of a nice long morning call after we heard him read his "Autumnal Tints," and remembered our being once at his mother's to tea, and Miss Putnam's looking over his herbarium with his sister.

SOPHIA E. THOREAU

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

"AUTUMNAL TINTS": Europeans coming to America are surprised by the brilliancy of our autumnal foliage. There is no account of such a phenomenon in English poetry, because the trees acquire but few bright colors there. The most that Thomson says on this subject in his "Autumn" is contained in the lines –

"But see the fading many-colored woods,
Shade deepening over shade, the country round
Imbrown; a crowded umbrage, dusk and dun,
Of every hue, from wan declining green
To sooty dark."

And the line in which he speaks

"Of Autumn beaming o'er the yellow woods."

The autumnal change of our woods has not made a deep impression on our own literature yet. October has hardly tinged our poetry.

JAMES THOMSON

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

[Thoreau](#) checked out, from [Harvard Library](#), the two volumes of Sir [Alexander Mackenzie](#)'s VOYAGES FROM MONTREAL, ON THE RIVER ST. LAURENCE, THROUGH THE CONTINENT OF NORTH AMERICA TO THE FROZEN AND PACIFIC OCEANS IN THE YEARS 1789 AND 1793. WITH A PRELIMINARY ACCOUNT OF THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT STATE OF THE FUR TRADE OF THAT COUNTRY. WITH ORIGINAL NOTES BY BOUGAINVILLE, AND VOLNEY. ILLUSTRATED WITH MAPS. (London: Printed for T. Cadell; Jun. and W. Davies; and W. Creech by R. Noble; Edinburgh, W. Creech, 1802).



VOYAGES FROM MONTREAL

“A YANKEE IN CANADA”: I got home this Thursday evening, having spent just one week in Canada and travelled eleven hundred miles. The whole expense of this journey, including two guidebooks and a map, which cost one dollar twelve and a half cents, was twelve dollars seventy five cents. I do not suppose that I have seen all British America; that could not be done by a cheap excursion, unless it were a cheap excursion to the Icy Sea, as seen by Hearne or McKenzie, and then, no doubt, some interesting features would be omitted. I wished to go a little way behind that word *Canadense*, of which naturalists make such frequent use; and I should like still right well to make a longer excursion on foot through the wilder parts of Canada, which perhaps might be called *Iter Canadense*.

SAMUEL HEARNE

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Thoreau also checked out John Halkett, Esq.'s HISTORICAL NOTES RESPECTING THE INDIANS OF NORTH AMERICA: WITH REMARKS ON THE ATTEMPTS MADE TO CONVERT AND CIVILIZE THEM (London: Printed for Archibald Constable and Co. Edinburgh; and Hurst, Robinson, and Co. 90, Cheapside, and 8, Pall Mall, 1825).³⁶



RESPECTING THE INDIANS

Thoreau also checked out Lionel Wafer (1640-1705)'s A NEW VOYAGE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE ISTHMUS OF AMERICA, GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF THE AUTHOR'S ABODE THERE, THE FORM AND MAKE OF THE COUNTRY, THE COASTS, HILLS, RIVERS, &C. WOODS, SOIL, WEATHER, &C. TREES, FRUIT, BEASTS, BIRDS, FISH, &C. (London: Printed for J. Knapton, 1699).

<http://web.princeton.edu/sites/english/eng321/WAFER.HTM>



"There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away"

— Emily Dickinson

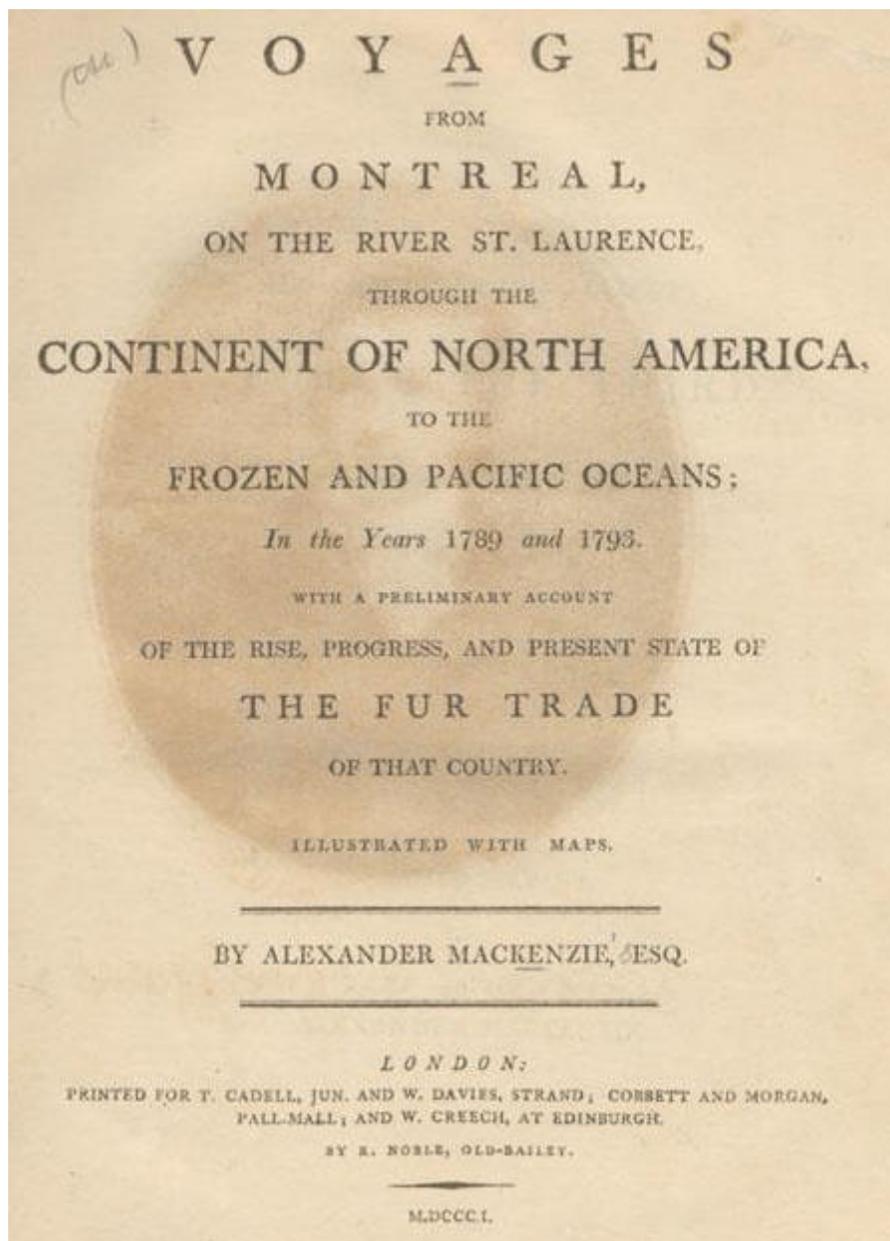
36. He would put his notes on this reading into his Indian Notebook #12. He would also, in about 1861, read a review of this book by Lewis Cass and put his notes on this reading of this review into that same Indian Notebook.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

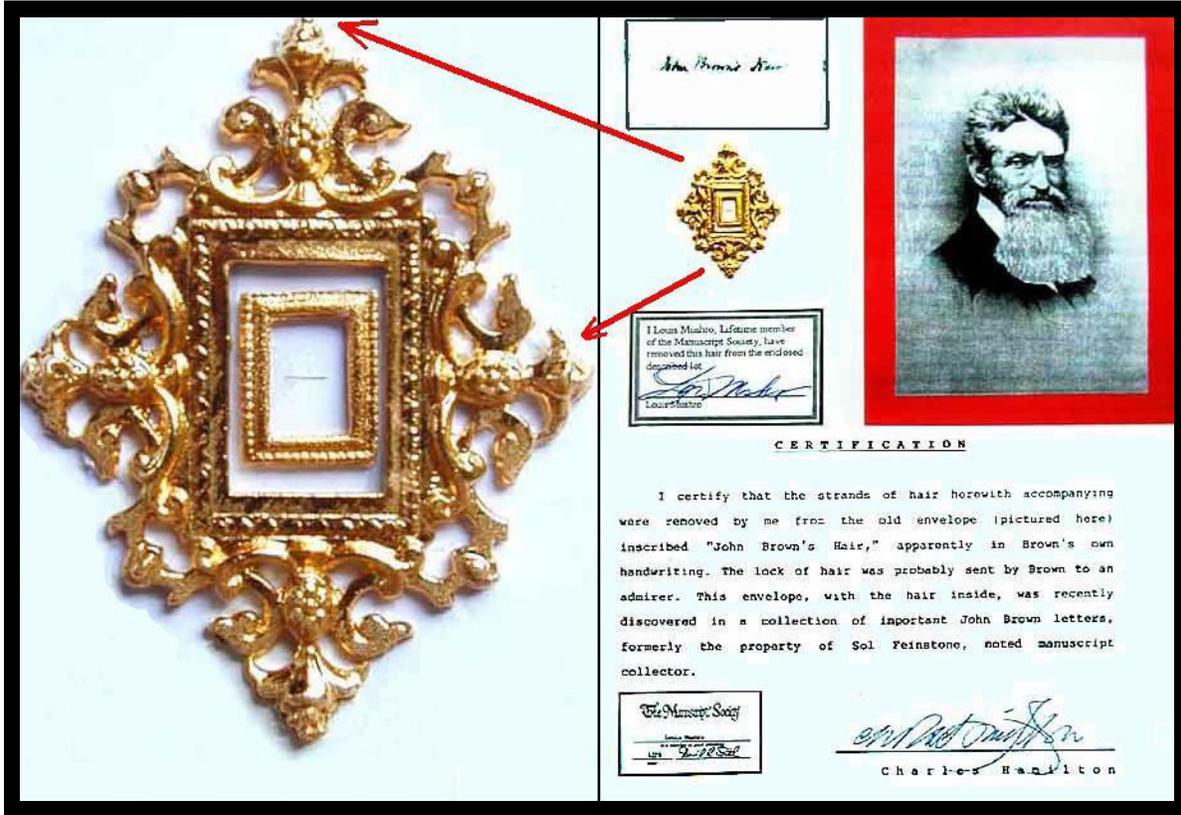


February 28. To Cambridge and Boston.

Saw a mackerel in the market. The upper half of its sides is mottled blue and white like the mackerel sky, as stated January 19th, 1858.

December 12, Monday: [George William Curtis](#) lectured in Rochester, New York that “John Brown was not buried but planted. He will spring up hundredfold.”

(Curtis was right, of course. Eventually, certified hairs from Brown’s head, or, who knows, from his beard, would be being chopped into pieces and offered for sale on Ebay.)



THE MARKET FOR HUMAN BODY PARTS



December 12. P. M.—To Pine Hill and round Walden.

Seeing a little hole in the side of a dead white birch, about six feet from the ground, I broke it off and found it to be made where a rotten limb had broken off. The hole was about an inch over and was of quite irregular and probably natural outline, and, within, the rotten wood had been removed to the depth of two or three inches, and on one side of this cavity, under the hole, was quite a pile of bird-droppings. The diameter of the birch was little more than two inches,—if at all. Probably it was the roosting-place of a chickadee. The bottom was an irregular surface of the rotten wood, and there was nothing like a nest.

There is a certain Irish woodchopper who, when I come across him at his work in the woods in the winter, never fails to ask me what time it is, as if he were in haste to take his dinner-pail and go home. This is not as it should



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

be. Every man, and the woodchopper among the rest, should love his work as much as the poet does his. All good political arrangements proceed on this supposition. If labor mainly, or to any considerable degree, serves the purpose of a police, to keep men out of mischief, it indicates a rottenness at the foundation of our community.

The night comes on early these days, and I soon see the pine tree tops distinctly outlined against the dun (or amber) but cold western sky.

The snow having come, we see where is the path of the partridge,—his comings and goings from copse to copse,—and now first, as it were, we have the fox for our nightly neighbor, and countless tiny deer mice. So, perchance, if a still finer substance should fall from heaven (iodine?), something delicate enough to receive the trace of their footsteps, we should see where unsuspected spirits and faery visitors had hourly crossed our steps, had held conventions and transacted their affairs in our midst. No doubt such subtle spirits transact their affairs in our midst, and we may perhaps invent some sufficiently delicate surface to catch the impression of them.

If in the winter there are fewer men in the fields and woods,—as in the country generally,—you see the tracks of those who had preceded you, and so are more reminded of them than in summer.

As I talked with the woodchopper who had just cleared the top of Emerson's I got a new view of the mountains over his pile of wood in the foreground. They were very grand in their snowy mantle, which had a slight tinge of purple. But when afterward I looked at them from a higher hill, where there was no wood-pile in the foreground, they affected me less. It is now that these mountains, in color as well as form, most resemble the clouds.

I am inclined to think of late that as much depends on the state of the bowels as of the stars. As are your bowels, so are the stars.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1860

May: Informed of the death of his 10-year-old, Annie, the runaway Frederick Douglass risked returning from England to the United States of America, thus facing possible arrest and execution for treasonous complicity in the raid on Harper's Ferry — that is, hanging for having neglected to betray a co-conspirator in servile insurrection to the federal authorities.



[George William Curtis](#) was nominated as a delegate to the National Convention in Chicago where he asked the Republican Party to endorse the principle “that all men are created equal.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1861

April 15: On this day Thoreau made no entry in his journal.

Elizabeth Burrill Curtis was born, 1st child of [George William Curtis](#) and Anna Shaw Curtis.



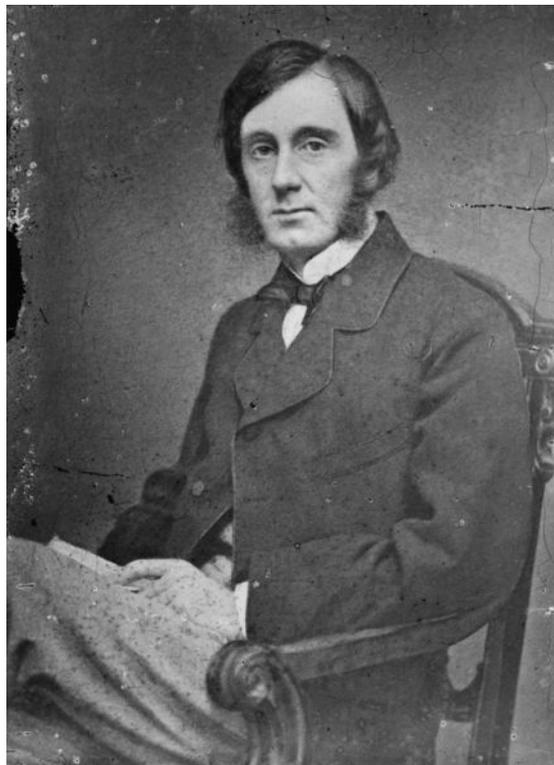
April 16, Tuesday. Horace Mann says that he killed a bullfrog in Walden Pond which had swallowed and contained a common striped snake which measured one foot and eight inches in length.

Says he saw two blue herons (?) go over a fortnight ago.

He brought me some days ago the contents of a stakedriver's stomach or crop. It is apparently a perch (?), some seven inches long originally, with three or four pebble-shaped, compact masses of the fur of some very small quadruped, as a meadow mouse, some one fourth inch thick by three fourths in diameter, also several wing-cases of black beetles such as I see on the meadow flood.

He brought me also some time ago the contents of a black duck's crop (killed at Goose Pond),—green gobbets of fine grass (?) or weeds (?), apparently from the bottom of the pond (just then begun to spring up), but I have not yet examined these out of the bottle.

November 5, Tuesday: [George William Curtis](#) wrote from North Shore, New York to James M. Stone, agreeing to express his opinion on emancipation in an article for [Harper's Weekly](#).





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1862

[George William Curtis](#) declined the position of consul-general to [Egypt](#), offered by President Lincoln.



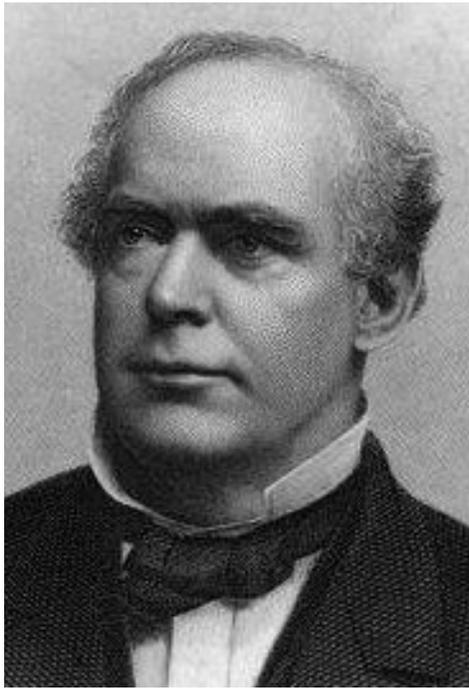
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1863

Treasury Secretary Salmon Portland Chase attempted to replace President Abraham Lincoln on the Republican ticket.



[George William Curtis](#) became the Political Editor of [Harper's Weekly](#).

Anna Haining Swan, a teenager of Scottish descent from Nova Scotia, went to work at Barnum's American Museum in New-York under the billing "The Tallest Woman in the World." Two years earlier, at the age of 15,

HDT

WHAT?

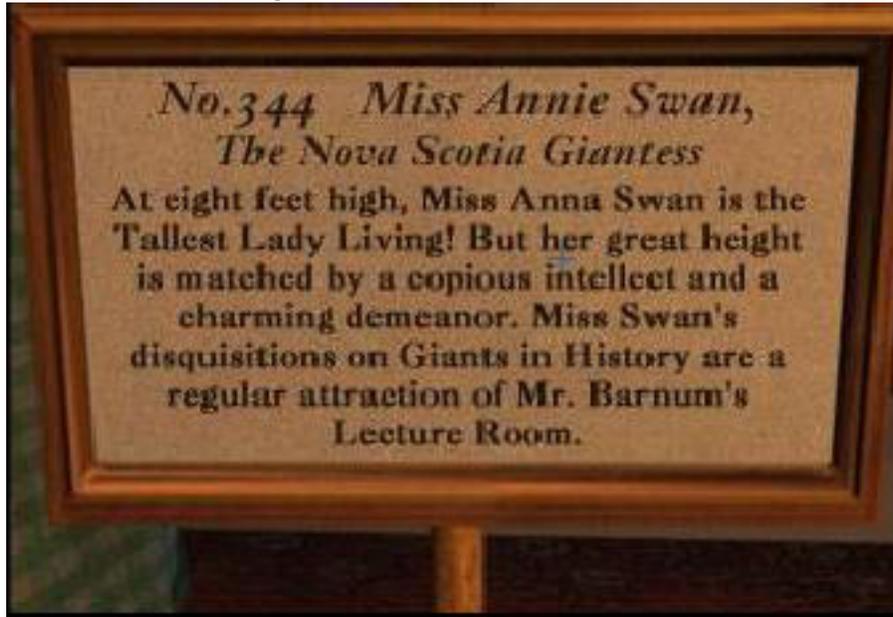
INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

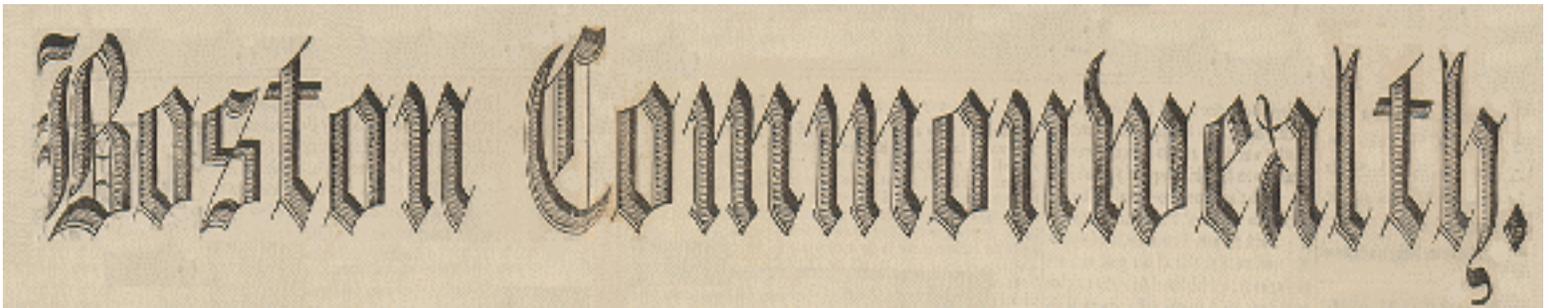
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

she had reached her full adult height of 7 feet 11 inches.



After working as a journalist for the Boston Journal and in various other printing and publishing enterprises, Charles Wesley Slack acquired the weekly Boston Commonwealth. He would edit and publish this for the remainder of his life.



May 17, Sunday: Sarah Shaw Curtis was born, 2d child of [George William Curtis](#) and Anna Shaw Curtis.

There was fighting at Big Black River Bridge.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1864

PANSIE, a fragment, was [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#)'s last literary effort.

[George William Curtis](#) published an essay about the literary productions of [Hawthorne](#). (This would be reprinted in 1895 in Curtis's LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)



In this year Curtis became a regent of the University of the State of New York. He was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Baltimore, Maryland. An ardent supporter of Lincoln, he wrote the letter officially notifying Lincoln of his renomination. He would be active in the campaign that would follow. Nominated for Congress from Staten Island, he would be defeated as he had expected.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

THE WORKS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE³⁷

The traveller by the Eastern Railroad, from Boston, reaches in less than an hour the old town of Salem, Massachusetts. It is chiefly composed of plain wooden houses, but it has a quaint air of past provincial grandeur, and has indeed been an important commercial town. The first American ship for Calcutta and China sailed from this port; and Salem ships opened our trade with New Holland and the South Seas. But its glory has long since departed, with that of its stately and respectable neighbors, Newburyport and Portsmouth. There is still, however, a custom-house in Salem, there are wharves and chandlers' shops and a faint show of shipping and an air of marine capacity which no apparent result justifies. It sits upon the shore like an antiquated sea-captain, grave and silent, in tarpaulin and duck trousers, idly watching the ocean upon which he will never sail again.

But this touching aspect of age and lost prosperity merely serves to deepen the peculiar impression of the old city, which is not derived from its former commercial importance, but from other associations. Salem village was a famous place in the Puritan annals. The tragedy of the witchcraft tortures and murders has cast upon it a ghostly spell, from which it seems never to have escaped; and even the sojourner of to-day, as he loiters along the shore in the sunniest morning of June, will sometimes feel an icy breath in the air, chilling the very marrow of his bones. Nor is he consoled by being told that it is only the east wind; for he cannot help believing that an invisible host of Puritan spectres have breathed upon him, revengeful, as he poached upon their ancient haunts.

The Puritan spirit was neither gracious nor lovely, but nothing softer than its iron hand could have done its necessary work. The Puritan character was narrow, intolerant, and exasperating. The forefathers were very "sour" in the estimation of Morton and his merry company at Mount Wollaston. But for all that, Bradstreet and Carver and Winthrop were better forefathers than the gay Morton, and the Puritan spirit is doubtless the moral influence of modern civilization, both in Old and New England. By the fruit let the seed be judged. The State to whose rough coast the *Mayflower* came, and in which the Pilgrim spirit has been most active, is to-day the chief of all human societies, politically, morally, and socially. It is the community in which the average of well-being is higher than in any State we know in history. Puritan though it be, it is more truly liberal and free than any large community in the world. But it had bleak beginnings. The icy shore, the sombre pines, the stealthy savages, the hard soil, the unbending religious austerity, the Scriptural severity, the arrogant virtues, the angry intolerance

37. [George William Curtis](#), THE WORKS OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE, [North American Review](#), Vol. XCIX., 1864, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of contradiction—they all made a narrow strip of sad civilization between the pitiless sea and the remorseless forests. The moral and physical tenacity which is wrestling with the Rebellion was toughened among these flinty and forbidding rocks. The fig, the pomegranate, and the almond would not grow there, nor the nightingale sing; but nobler men than its children the sun never shone upon, nor has the heart of man heard sweeter music than the voices of James Otis and Samuel Adams. Think of Plymouth in 1620, and of Massachusetts to-day! Out of strength came forth sweetness.

With some of the darkest passages in Puritan history this old town of Salem, which dozes apparently with the most peaceful conscience in the world, is identified, and while its Fourth of July bells were joyfully ringing sixty years ago Nathaniel Hathorne was born. He subsequently chose to write the name Hawthorne, because he thought he had discovered that it was the original spelling. In the introduction to *THE SCARLET LETTER*, Hawthorne speaks of his ancestors as coming from Europe in the seventeenth century, and establishing themselves in Salem, where they served the State and propitiated Heaven by joining in the persecution of Quakers and witches. The house known as the Witch House is still standing on the corner of Summer and Essex streets. It was built in 1642 by Captain George Corwin, and here in 1692 many of the unfortunates who were palpably guilty of age and ugliness were examined by the Honorable Jonathan Curwin, Major Gedney, Captain John Higginson, and John Hathorn, Esquire. The name of this last worthy occurs in one of the first and most famous of the witch trials, that of "Goodwife Gory", in March, 1692, only a month after the beginning of the delusion at the house of the minister Parris. Goodwife Gory was accused by ten children, of whom Elizabeth Parris was one; they declared that they were pinched by her and strangled, and that she brought them a book to sign. "Mr. Hathorn, a magistrate of Salem", says Robert Calef, in *MORE WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD*, "asked her why she afflicted these children. She said she did not afflict them. He asked her who did then. She said, I do not know; how should I know? She said they were poor, distracted creatures, and no heed ought to be given to what they said. Mr. Hathorn and Mr. Noyes replied, that it was the judgment of all that were there present that they were bewitched, and only she (the accused) said they were distracted. She was accused by them that the *black man* whispered to her in her ear now (while she was upon examination), and that she had a yellow bird that did use to suck between her fingers, and that the said bird did suck now in the assembly." John Hathorn and Jonathan Curwin were "the Assistants" of Salem village, and held most of the examinations and issued the warrants. Justice Hathorn was very swift in judgment, holding every accused person guilty in every particular. When poor Jonathan Gary of Charlestown attended his wife charged with witchcraft before Justice Hathorn, he requested that he might hold one of her hands, "but it was denied me. Then she desired me to wipe the tears from her eyes and the

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

sweat from her face, which I did; then she desired that she might lean herself on me, saying she should faint. Justice Hathorn replied, she had strength enough to torment these persons, and she should have strength enough to stand. I speaking something against their cruel proceedings, they commanded me to be silent, or else I should be turned out of the room". What a piteous picture of the awful colonial inquisition and the village Torquemada! What a grim portrait of an ancestor to hang in your memory, and to trace your kindred to!

Hawthorne's description of his ancestors in the Introduction to THE SCARLET LETTER is very delightful. As their representative, he declares that he takes shame to himself for their sake, on account of these relentless persecutions; but he thinks them earnest and energetic. "From father to son, for above a hundred years, they followed the sea; a gray-headed ship-master, in each generation, retiring from the quarter-deck to the homestead, while a boy of fourteen took the hereditary place before the mast, confronting the salt spray and the gale, which had blustered against his sire and grand-sire. The boy also, in due time, passed from the forecabin to the cabin, spent a tempestuous manhood, and returned from his world-wanderings, to grow old, and die, and mingle his dust with the natal earth." Not all, however, for the last of the line of sailors, Captain Nathaniel Hathorne, who married Elizabeth Clarke Manning, died at Calcutta after the birth of three children, a boy and two girls. The house in which the boy was born is still standing upon Union Street, which leads to the Long Wharf, the chief seat of the old foreign trade of Salem. The next house, with a back entrance on Union Street, is the Manning house, where many years of the young Hawthorne's life were spent in the care of his uncle, Robert Manning. He lived often upon an estate belonging to his mother's family, in the town of Raymond, near Sebago Lake, in Maine. The huge house there was called Manning's Folly, and is now said to be used as a meeting-house. His uncle sent Hawthorne to Bowdoin College, where he graduated in 1825. A correspondent of the Boston Daily Advertiser, writing from Bowdoin at the late commencement, says that he had recently found "in an old drawer" some papers which proved to be the manuscript "parts" of the students at the Junior exhibition of 1824; among them was Hawthorne's "De Patribus Conscriptis Romanorum". "It is quite brief," writes the correspondent, "but is really curious as perhaps the only college exercise in existence of the great tragic writer of our day (has there been a greater since Shakespeare?). The last sentence is as follows (note the words which I put in italics): 'Augustus equidem antiquam magnificentiam patribus reddidit, *sed fulgor tantum fuit sine fervore*. Nunquam in republica senatoribus potestas recuperata, postremum species etiam amissa est.' On the same occasion Longfellow had the salutatory oration in Latin- 'Oratio Latina; Anglici Poetae.'"

Hawthorne has given us a charming glimpse of himself as a college boy in the letter to his fellow-student, Horatio Bridge, of the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Navy, whose JOURNAL OF AN AFRICAN CRUISER he afterwards edited. "I know not whence your faith came; but while we were lads together at a country college, gathering blueberries, in study-hours, under those tall academic pines; or watching the great logs as they tumbled along the current of the Androscoggin; or shooting pigeons and gray squirrels in the woods; or bat-fowling in the summer twilight; or catching trouts in that shadowy little stream which, I suppose, is still wandering riverward through the forest—though you and I will never cast a line in it again—two idle lads, in short (as we need not fear to acknowledge now), doing a hundred things that the faculty never heard of, or else it had been the worse for us,—still it was your prognostic of your friend's destiny that he was to be a writer of fiction." From this sylvan university Hawthorne came home to Salem; "as if," he wrote later, "Salem were for me the inevitable centre of the universe."

The old witch-hanging city had no weirder product than this dark-haired son. He has certainly given it an interest which it must otherwise have lacked; but he speaks of it with small affection, considering that his family had lived there for two centuries. "An unjoyous attachment," he calls it. And, to tell the truth, there was evidently little love lost between the little city and its most famous citizen. Stories still float in the social gossip of the town, which represent the shy author as inaccessible to all invitations to dinner and tea; and while the pleasant circle awaited his coming in the drawing-room, the impracticable man was—at least so runs the tale—quietly hobnobbing with companions to whom his fame was unknown. Those who coveted him as a phoenix could never get him, while he gave himself freely to those who saw in him only a placid barn-door fowl. The sensitive youth was a recluse, upon whose imagination had fallen the gloomy mystery of Puritan life and character. Salem was the inevitable centre of his universe more truly than he thought. The mind of Justice Hathorn's descendant was bewitched by the fascination of a certain devilish subtlety working under the comeliest aspects in human affairs. It overcame him with strange sympathy. It colored and controlled his intellectual life.

Devoted all day to lonely reverie and musing upon the obscurer spiritual passages of the life whose monuments he constantly encountered, that musing became inevitably morbid. With the creative instinct of the artist, he wrote the wild fancies into form as stories, many of which, when written, he threw into the fire. Then, after nightfall, stealing out from his room into the silent streets of Salem, and shadowy as the ghosts with which to his susceptible imagination the dusky town was thronged, he glided beneath the house in which the witch-trials were held, or across the moonlit hill upon which the witches were hung, until the spell was complete. Nor can we help fancying that, after the murder of old Mr. White in Salem, which happened within a few years after his return from college, which drew from Mr. Webster his most famous criminal plea, and filled a shadowy

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

corner of every museum in New England, as every shivering little man of that time remembers, with an awful reproduction of the scene in wax-figures, with real sheets on the bed, and the murderer, in a glazed cap, stooping over to deal the fatal blow—we cannot help fancying that the young recluse who walked by night, the wizard whom as yet none knew, hovered about the house, gazing at the windows of the fatal chamber, and listening in horror for the faint whistle of the confederate in another street.

Three years after he graduated, in 1828, he published anonymously a slight romance with the motto from Southey, "Wilt thou go with me?" Hawthorne never acknowledged the book, and it is now seldom found; but it shows plainly the natural bent of his mind. It is a dim, dreamy tale, such as a Byron-struck youth of the time might have written, except for that startling self-possession of style and cold analysis of passion, rather than sympathy with it, which showed no imitation, but remarkable original power. The same lurid gloom overhangs it that shadows all his works. It is uncanny; the figures of the romance are not persons, they are passions, emotions, spiritual speculations. So the TWICE-TOLD TALES that seem at first but the pleasant fancies of a mild recluse, gradually hold the mind with a Lamia-like fascination; and the author says truly of them, in the Preface of 1851, "Even in what purport to be pictures of actual life, we have allegory not always so warmly dressed in its habiliments of flesh and blood as to be taken into the reader's mind without a shiver." There are sunny gleams upon the pages, but a strange, melancholy chill pervades the book. In "The Wedding Knell", "The Minister's Black Veil", "The Gentle Boy", "Wakefield", "The Prophetic Pictures", "The Hollow of the Three Hills", "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment", "The Ambitious Guest", "The White Old Maid", "Edward Fane's Rose-bud", "The Lily's Quest"—or in the "Legends of the Province House", where the courtly provincial state of governors and ladies glitters across the small, sad New England world, whose very baldness jeers it to scorn—there is the same fateful atmosphere in which Goody Cloyse might at any moment whisk by upon her broomstick, and in which the startled heart stands still with unspeakable terror.

The spell of mysterious horror which kindled Hawthorne's imagination was a test of the character of his genius. The mind of this child of witch-haunted Salem loved to hover between the natural and the supernatural, and sought to tread the almost imperceptible and doubtful line of contact. He instinctively sketched the phantoms that have the figures of men, but are not human; the elusive, shadowy scenery which, like that of Gustave Doré's pictures, is Nature sympathizing in her forms and aspects with the emotions of terror or awe which the tale excites. His genius broods entranced over the evanescent phantasmagoria of the vague debatable land in which the realities of experience blend with ghostly doubts and wonders.

But from its poisonous flowers what a wondrous perfume he distilled! Through his magic reed, into what penetrating melody

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

he blew that deathly air! His relentless fancy seemed to seek a sin that was hopeless, a cruel despair that no faith could throw off. Yet his nave and well-poised genius hung over the gulf of blackness, and peered into the pit with the steady nerve and simple face of a boy. The mind of the reader follows him with an aching wonder and admiration, as the bewildered old mother forester watched Undine's gambols. As Hawthorne describes Miriam in *THE MARBLE FAUN*, so may the character of his genius be most truly indicated. Miriam, the reader will remember, turns to Hilda and Kenyon for sympathy. "Yet it was to little purpose that she approached the edge of the voiceless gulf between herself and them. Standing on the utmost verge of that dark chasm, she might stretch out her hand and never clasp a hand of theirs; she might strive to call out 'Help, friends! help!' but, as with dreamers when they shout, her voice would perish inaudibly in the remoteness that seemed such a little way. This perception of an infinite, shivering solitude, amid which we cannot come close enough to human beings to be warmed by them, and where they turn to cold, chilly shapes of mist, is one of the most forlorn results of any accident, misfortune, crime, or peculiarity of character, that puts an individual ajar with the world."

Thus it was because the early New England life made so much larger account of the supernatural element than any other modern civilized society, that the man whose blood had run in its veins instinctively turned to it. But beyond this alluring spell of its darker and obscurer individual experience, it seems neither to have touched his imagination nor even to have aroused his interest. To Walter Scott the romance of feudalism was precious for the sake of feudalism itself, in which he believed with all his soul, and for that of the heroic old feudal figures which he honored. He was a Tory in every particle of his frame, and his genius made him the poet of Toryism. But Hawthorne had apparently no especial political, religious, or patriotic affinity with the spirit which inspired him. It was solely a fascination of the intellect. And although he is distinctively the poet of the Puritans, although it is to his genius that we shall always owe that image of them which the power of *The Scarlet Letter* has imprinted upon literature, and doubtless henceforth upon historical interpretation, yet what an imperfect picture of that life it is! All its stern and melancholy romance is there—its picturesque gloom and intense passion; but upon those quivering pages, as in every passage of his stories drawn from that spirit, there seems to be wanting a deep, complete, sympathetic appreciation of the fine moral heroism, the spiritual grandeur, which overhung that gloomy life, as a delicate purple mist suffuses in summer twilights the bald crags of the crystal hills. It is the glare of the scarlet letter itself, and all that it luridly reveals and weirdly implies, which produced the tale. It was not beauty in itself nor deformity, not virtue nor vice, which engaged the author's deepest sympathy. It was the occult relation between the two.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Thus while the Puritans were of all men pious, it was the instinct of Hawthorne's genius to search out and trace with terrible tenacity the dark and devious thread of sin in their lives.

Human life and character, whether in New England two hundred years ago or in Italy to-day, interested him only as they were touched by this glamour of sombre spiritual mystery; and the attraction pursued him in every form in which it appeared. It is as apparent in the most perfect of his smaller tales, RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER, as in THE SCARLET LETTER, THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE, THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES, and THE MARBLE FAUN. You may open almost at random, and you are as sure to find it as to hear the ripple in Mozart's music, or the pathetic minor in a Neapolitan melody. Take, for instance, The BIRTH-MARK, which we might call the best of the smaller stories, if we had not just said the same thing of RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER—for so even and complete is Hawthorne's power, that, with few exceptions, each work of his, like Benvenuto's, seems the most characteristic and felicitous. In this story, a scholar marries a beautiful woman, upon whose face is a mark which has hitherto seemed to be only a greater charm. Yet in one so lovely the husband declares that, although it is the slightest possible defect, it is yet the mark of earthly imperfection, and he proceeds to lavish all the resources of science to procure its removal. But it will not disappear; and at last he tells her that the crimson hand "has clutched its grasp" into her very being, and that there is mortal danger in trying the only means of removal that remains. She insists that it shall be tried. It succeeds; but it removes the stain and her life together. So in RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER. The old philosopher nourishes his beautiful child upon the poisonous breath of a flower. She loves, and her lover is likewise bewitched. In trying to break the spell, she drinks an antidote which kills her. The point of interest in both stories is the subtle connection, in the first, between the beauty of Georgiana and the taint of the birth-mark; and, in the second, the loveliness of Beatrice and the poison of the blossom.

This, also, is the key of his last romance, THE MARBLE FAUN, one of the most perfect works of art in literature, whose marvellous spell begins with the very opening words: "Four individuals, in whose fortunes we should be glad to interest the reader, happened to be standing in one of the saloons of the sculpture-gallery in the Capitol at Rome." When these words are read, the mind familiar with Hawthorne is already enthralled. "What a journey is beginning, not a step of which is trodden, and yet the heart palpitates with apprehension! Through what delicate, rosy lights of love, and soft, shimmering humor, and hopes and doubts and vanishing delights, that journey will proceed, on and on into utter gloom." And it does so, although "Hilda had a hopeful soul, and saw sunlight on the mountain-tops". It does so, because Miriam and Donatello are the figures which interest us most profoundly, and they are both lost in the shadow. Donatello, indeed, is the true centre of interest, as he is one



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of the most striking creations of genius. But the perplexing charm of Donatello, what is it but the doubt that does not dare to breathe itself, the appalled wonder whether, if the breeze should lift those clustering locks a little higher, he would prove to be faun or man? It never does lift them; the doubt is never solved, but it is always suggested. The mystery of a partial humanity, morally irresponsible but humanly conscious, haunts the entrancing page. It draws us irresistibly on. But as the cloud closes around the lithe figure of Donatello, we hear again from its hidden folds the words of "The Birth-Mark": "Thus ever does the gross fatality of earth exult in its invariable triumph over the immortal essence, which, in this dim sphere of half-development, demands the completeness of a higher state". Or still more sadly, the mysterious youth, half vanishing from our sympathy, seems to murmur, with Beatrice Rappaccini, "And still as she spoke, she kept her hand upon her heart,— 'Wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?'"

We have left the story of Hawthorne's life sadly behind. But his life had no more remarkable events than holding office in the Boston Customhouse under Mr. Bancroft as collector; working for some time with the Brook-Farmers, from whom he soon separated, not altogether amicably; marrying and living in the Old Manse at Concord; returning to the Custom-house in Salem as surveyor; then going to Lenox, in Berkshire, where he lived in what he called "the ugliest little old red farm-house that you ever saw", and where the story is told of his shyness, that, if he saw anybody coming along the road whom he must probably pass, he would jump over the wall into the pasture, and so give the stranger a wide berth; back again to Concord; then to Liverpool as consul; travelling in Europe afterwards, and home at last and forever, to "The Wayside" under the Concord hill. "The hillside," he wrote to a friend in 1852, "is covered chiefly with locust-trees, which come into luxuriant blossom in the month of June, and look and smell very sweetly, intermixed with a few young elms and some white-pines and infant oaks, the whole forming rather a thicket than a wood. Nevertheless, there is some very good shade to be found there; I spend delectable hours there in the hottest part of the day, stretched out at my lazy length with a book in my hand or an unwritten book in my thoughts. There is almost always a breeze stirring along the side or the brow of the hill."

It is not strange, certainly, that a man such as has been described, of a morbid shyness, the path of whose genius diverged always out of the sun into the darkest shade, and to whom human beings were merely psychological phenomena, should have been accounted ungenial, and sometimes even hard, cold, and perverse. From the bent of his intellectual temperament it happens that in his simplest and sweetest passages he still seems to be studying and curiously observing, rather than sympathizing. You cannot help feeling constantly that the author is looking askance both at his characters and you, the reader; and many a young and fresh mind is troubled strangely by his



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

books, as if it were aware of a half-Mephistophelean smile upon the page. Nor is this impression altogether removed by the remarkable familiarity of his personal disclosures. There was never a man more shrinkingly retiring, yet surely never was an author more naively frank. He is willing that you should know all that a man may fairly reveal of himself. The great interior story he does not tell, of course, but the Introduction to the *MOSSSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*, the opening chapter of *THE SCARLET LETTER*, and the *CONSULAR EXPERIENCES*, with much of the rest of *OUR OLD HOME*, are as intimate and explicit chapters of autobiography as can be found. Nor would it be easy to find anywhere a more perfect idyl than that introductory chapter of the *MOSSSES*. Its charm is perennial and indescribable; and why should it not be, since it was written at a time in which, as he says, "I was happy?" It is, perhaps, the most softly-hued and exquisite work of his pen. So the sketch of "The Custom-house", although prefatory to that most tragically powerful of romances,

THE SCARLET LETTER, is an incessant play of the shyest and most airy humor. It is like the warbling of bobolinks before a thunder-burst. How many other men, however unreserved with the pen, would be likely to dare to paint, with the fidelity of Teniers and the simplicity of Fra Angelico, a picture of the office and the companions in which and with whom they did their daily work? The surveyor of customs in the port of Salem treated the town of Salem, in which he lived and discharged his daily task, as if it had been, with all its people, as vague and remote a spot as the town of which he was about to treat in the story. He commented upon the place and the people as modern travellers in Pompeii discuss the ancient town. It made a great scandal. He was accused of depicting with unpardonable severity worthy folks, whose friends were sorely pained and indignant. But he wrote such sketches as he wrote his stories. He treated his companions as he treated himself and all the personages in history or experience with which he dealt, merely as phenomena to be analyzed and described, with no more private malice or personal emotion than the sun, which would have photographed them, warts and all.

Thus it was that the great currents of human sympathy never swept him away. The character of his genius isolated him, and he stood aloof from the common interests. Intent upon studying men in certain aspects, he cared little for man; and the high tides of collective emotion among his fellows left him dry and untouched. So he beholds and describes the generous impulse of humanity with sceptical courtesy rather than with hopeful cordiality. He does not chide you if you spend effort and life itself in the ardent van of progress, but he asks simply, "Is six so much better than half a dozen?" He will not quarrel with you if you expect the millennium to-morrow. He only says, with that glimmering smile, "So soon?" Yet in all this there was no shadow of spiritual pride. Nay, so far from this, that the tranquil and pervasive sadness of all Hawthorne's writings, the kind of heartache that they leave behind, seem to spring from the fact



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

that his nature was related to the moral world, as his own Donatello was to the human. "So alert, so alluring, so noble", muses the heart as we climb the Apennines towards the tower of Monte Beni; "alas! is he human?" it whispers, with a pang of doubt.

How this directed his choice of subjects, and affected his treatment of them, when drawn from early history, we have already seen. It is not, therefore, surprising, that the history into which he was born interested him only in the same way.

When he went to Europe as consul, UNCLE TOM'S CABIN was already published, and the country shook with the fierce debate which involved its life. Yet eight years later Hawthorne wrote with calm ennui, "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land." Is crime never romantic, then, until distance ennobles it? Or were the tragedies of Puritan life so terrible that the imagination could not help kindling, while the pangs of the plantation are superficial and commonplace? Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, and Thackeray were able to find a shadow even in "merrie England". But our great romancer looked at the American life of his time with these marvellous eyes, and could see only monotonous sunshine. That the devil, in the form of an elderly man clad in grave and decent attire, should lead astray the saints of Salem village, two centuries ago, and confuse right and wrong in the mind of Goodman Brown, was something that excited his imagination, and produced one of his weirdest stories. But that the same devil, clad in a sombre sophism, was confusing the sentiment of right and wrong in the mind of his own countrymen he did not even guess. The monotonous sunshine disappeared in the blackest storm. The commonplace prosperity ended in tremendous war. What other man of equal power, who was not intellectually constituted precisely as Hawthorne was, could have stood merely perplexed and bewildered, harassed by the inability of positive sympathy, in the vast conflict which tosses us all in its terrible vortex?

In political theories and in an abstract view of war men may differ. But this war is not to be dismissed as a political difference. Here is an attempt to destroy the government of a country, not because it oppressed any man, but because its evident tendency was to secure universal justice under law. It is, therefore, a conspiracy against human nature. Civilization itself is at stake; and the warm blood of the noblest youth is everywhere flowing in as sacred a cause as history records—flowing not merely to maintain a certain form of government, but to vindicate the rights of human nature. Shall there not be sorrow and pain, if a friend is merely impatient or confounded by it—if he sees in it only danger or doubt, and not hope for the right—or if he seem to insinuate that it would have been better if the war had been avoided, even at that countless cost



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

to human welfare by which alone the avoidance was possible? Yet, if the view of Hawthorne's mental constitution which has been suggested be correct, this attitude of his, however deeply it may be regretted, can hardly deserve moral condemnation. He knew perfectly well that if a man has no ear for music he had better not try to sing. But the danger with such men is that they are apt to doubt if music itself be not a vain delusion. This danger Hawthorne escaped. There is none of the shallow persiflage of the sceptic in his tone, nor any affectation of cosmopolitan superiority. Mr. Edward Dicey, in his interesting reminiscences of Hawthorne, published in Macmillan's Magazine, illustrates this very happily.

"To make his position intelligible, let me repeat an anecdote which was told me by a very near friend of his and mine, who had heard it from President Pierce himself. Frank Pierce had been, and was to the day of Hawthorne's death, one of the oldest of his friends. At the time of the Presidential election of 1856, Hawthorne, for once, took part in politics, wrote a pamphlet in favor of his friend, and took a most unusual interest in his success. When the result of the nomination was known, and Pierce was President-elect, Hawthorne was among the first to come and wish him joy. He sat down in the room moodily and silently, as he was wont when anything troubled him; then, without speaking a word, he shook Pierce warmly by the hand, and at last remarked, 'Ah, Frank, what a pity!' The moment the victory was won, that timid, hesitating mind saw the evils of the successful course—the advantages of the one which had not been followed. So it was always. Of two lines of action, he was perpetually in doubt which was the best; and so, between the two, he always inclined to letting things remain as they are.

"Nobody disliked slavery more cordially than he did; and yet the difficulty of what was to be done with the slaves weighed constantly upon his mind. He told me once that, while he had been consul at Liverpool, a vessel arrived there with a number of negro sailors, who had been brought from slave States, and would, of course, be enslaved again on their return. He fancied that he ought to inform the men of the fact, but then he was stopped by the reflection—who was to provide for them if they became free? and, as he said, with a sigh, 'while I was thinking, the vessel sailed.' So, I recollect, on the old battle-field of Manassas, in which I strolled in company with Hawthorne, meeting a batch of runaway slaves—worn, foot-sore, wretched, and helpless beyond conception; we gave them food and wine, some small sums of money, and got them a lift upon a train going northward; but not long afterwards Hawthorne turned to me with the remark, 'I am not sure we were doing right after all. How can these poor beings

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

find food and shelter away from home?' Thus this ingrained and inherent doubt incapacitated him from following any course vigorously. He thought, on the whole, that Wendell Phillips and Lloyd Garrison and the Abolitionists were in the right, but then he was never quite certain that they were not in the wrong after all; so that his advocacy of their cause was of a very uncertain character. He saw the best, to alter slightly the famous Horatian line, but he never could quite make up his mind whether he altogether approved of its wisdom, and therefore followed it but falteringly.

"`Better to bear those ills we have, Than fly to others that we know not of,'

"expressed the philosophy to which Hawthorne was thus borne imperceptibly. Unjustly, but yet not unreasonably, he was looked upon as a pro-slavery man, and suspected of Southern sympathies. In politics he was always halting between two opinions; or, rather, holding one opinion, he could never summon up his courage to adhere to it and it only."

The truth is that his own times and their people and their affairs were just as shadowy to him as those of any of his stories, and his mind held the same curious, half-wistful poise among all the conflicts of principle and passion around him, as among those of which he read and mused. If you ask why this was so—how it was that the tragedy of an old Italian garden, or the sin of a lonely Puritan parish, or the crime of a provincial judge, should so stimulate his imagination with romantic appeals and harrowing allegories, while either it did not see a Carolina slave-pen, or found in it only a tame prosperity—you must take your answer in the other question, why he did not weave into any of his stories the black and bloody thread of the Inquisition. His genius obeyed its law. When he wrote like a disembodied intelligence of events with which his neighbors' hearts were quivering—when the same half-smile flutters upon his lips in the essay ABOUT WAR MATTERS, sketched as it were upon the battle-field, as in that upon FIRE WORSHIP, written in the rural seclusion of the mossy Manse—ah me! it is Donatello, in his tower of Monte Beni, contemplating with doubtful interest the field upon which the flower of men are dying for an idea. Do you wonder, as you see him and hear him, that your heart, bewildered, asks and asks again, "Is he human? Is he a man?"

Now that Hawthorne sleeps by the tranquil Concord, upon whose shores the Old Manse was his bridal bower, those who knew him chiefly there revert beyond the angry hour to those peaceful days. How dear the Old Manse was to him he has himself recorded; and in the opening of the TANGLEWOOD TALES he pays his tribute to that placid landscape, which will always be recalled with pensive tenderness by those who, like him, became familiar with it in happy hours. "To me," he writes, "there is a peculiar, quiet charm in these broad meadows and gentle eminences. They are better than mountains, because they do not stamp and



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

stereotype themselves into the brain, and thus grow wearisome with the same strong impression, repeated day after day. A few summer weeks among mountains, a lifetime among green meadows and placid slopes, with outlines forever new, because continually fading out of the memory, such would be my sober choice." He used to say, in those days—when, as he was fond of insisting, he was the obscurest author in the world, because, although he had told his tales twice, nobody cared to listen—that he never knew exactly how he contrived to live. But he was then married, and the dullest eye could not fail to detect the feminine grace and taste that ordered the dwelling, and perceive the tender sagacity that made all things possible.

Such was his simplicity and frugality that, when he was left alone for a little time in his Arcadia, he would dismiss "the help", and, with some friend of other days who came to share his loneliness, he cooked the easy meal, and washed up the dishes. No picture is clearer in the memory of a certain writer than that of the magician, in whose presence he almost lost his breath, looking at him over a dinner-plate which he was gravely wiping in the kitchen, while the handy friend, who had been a Western settler, scoured the kettle at the door. Blithedale, where their acquaintance had begun, had not allowed either of them to forget how to help himself. It was amusing to one who knew this native independence of Hawthorne, to hear, some years afterwards, that he wrote the "campaign" LIFE OF FRANKLIN PIERCE for the sake of getting an office. That such a man should do such a work was possibly incomprehensible to those who did not know him upon any other supposition, until the fact was known that Mr. Pierce was an old and constant friend. Then it was explained. Hawthorne asked simply how he could help his friend, and he did the only thing he could do for that purpose. But although he passed some years in public office, he had neither taste nor talent for political life. He owed his offices to works quite other than political. His first and second appointments were virtually made by his friend Mr. Bancroft, and the third by his friend Mr. Pierce. His claims were perceptible enough to friendship, but would hardly have been so to a caucus.

In this brief essay we have aimed only to indicate the general character of the genius of Hawthorne, and to suggest a key to his peculiar relation to his time. The reader will at once see that it is rather the man than the author who has been described; but this has been designedly done, for we confess a personal solicitude, shared, we are very sure, by many friends of Nathaniel Hawthorne, that there shall not be wanting to the future student of his works such light as acquaintance with the man may throw upon them, as well as some picture of the impression his personality made upon his contemporaries.

Strongly formed, of dark, poetic gravity of aspect, lighted by the deep, gleaming eye that recoiled with girlish coyness from contact with your gaze; of rare courtesy and kindness in personal intercourse, yet so sensitive that his look and manner can be suggested by the word "glimmering;" giving you a sense



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of restrained impatience to be away; mostly silent in society, and speaking always with an appearance of effort, but with a lambent light of delicate humor playing over all he said in the confidence of familiarity, and firm self-possession under all, as if the glimmering manner were only the tremulous surface of the sea, Hawthorne was personally known to few, and intimately to very few. But no one knew him without loving him, or saw him without remembering him; and the name Nathaniel Hawthorne, which, when it was first written, was supposed to be fictitious, is now one of the most enduring facts of English literature.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1866

[George William Curtis](#) was actively involved in the elections of this year and was chosen as delegate-at-large to the Convention for revising the New York State Constitution.

Thomas Hicks painted his “Authors of the United States” as a name-dropping set piece to show off various of the portraits of prominent personages he had painted at his studio in New-York. We have no idea as to the present whereabouts of the original of this, but an engraving of it was made by A.H. Ritchie. We note that the statues on the upper balcony are of course of founding literary giants [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#), [William Shakespeare](#), and [Dante Alighieri](#). [Henry Thoreau](#) is of course as always not noticeably absent, since he would

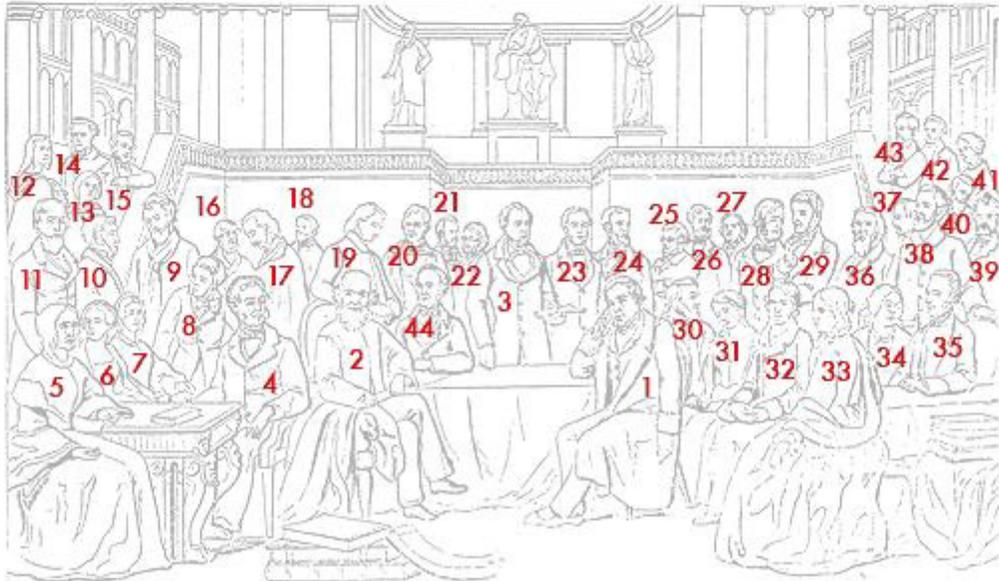
[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

not emerge into his present renown until well into the 20th Century.



The personages depicted are 1=[Washington Irving](#) 2=[William Cullen Bryant](#) 3=[James Fenimore Cooper](#)
 4=[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) 5=Miss Sedgwick 6=Mrs. [Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney](#) 7=Mrs.
 E.D.E.N. Southworth 8=Mitchell 9=Nathaniel Parker Willis 10=Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. 11=Kennedy
 12=Mrs. Mowatt Ritchie 13=Alice Carey 14=Prentice 15=G.W. Kendall 16=Morris 17=[Edgar Allan Poe](#)
 18=Frederick Goddard Tuckerman 19=[Nathaniel Hawthorne](#) 20=Simms 21=P. Pendelton Cooke 22=Hoffman
 23=William H. Prescott 24=[George Bancroft](#) 25=Parke Godwin 26=John Lothrop Motley 27=Reverend Henry



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Ward Beecher 28=[George William Curtis](#) 29=[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) 30=[Richard Henry Dana, Jr.](#)
31=[Margaret Fuller](#), *marchesa d'Ossoli* 32=Reverend [William Ellery Channing](#) 33=Harriet Beecher Stowe
34=Mrs. Kirkland 35=Friend [John Greenleaf Whittier](#) 36=[James Russell Lowell](#) 37=Boker 38=Bayard Taylor
39=Saxe 40=Stoddard 41=Mrs. Amelia Welby 42=Gallagher 43=Cozzens 44=Halleck.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1867

December 5, Thursday: [Chester Dewey](#) died in Rochester, New York.

Francis George Curtis was born, 3d child of [George William Curtis](#) and Anna Shaw Curtis.

Charles Dickens read at the Tremont Temple in Boston, "Nickleby" and "Boots at the Holly Tree Inn."



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1868

Edmund G. Ross's HISTORY OF THE IMPEACHMENT OF ANDREW JOHNSON.

READ THE FULL TEXT

At the beginning of the 40th Congress, Senator Benjamin Wade became the new presiding officer of the US Senate — as the position of Vice-President was empty, that meant that he had by default become the Constitutional successor to the President. What the impeachment trial would mean, therefore, in practical terms, was, do we really want a righteous guy like this Senator Wade to be our nation's President? How much of that kind of righteousness are we going to be able to survive?



During the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, the Democrats began to solicit Chief Justice Salmon Portland Chase, whom they regarded as a more practical man, as a presidential candidate. Chase took a page out of Garibaldi's book, and indicated that he was not opposed to such a Democratic nomination — if only that

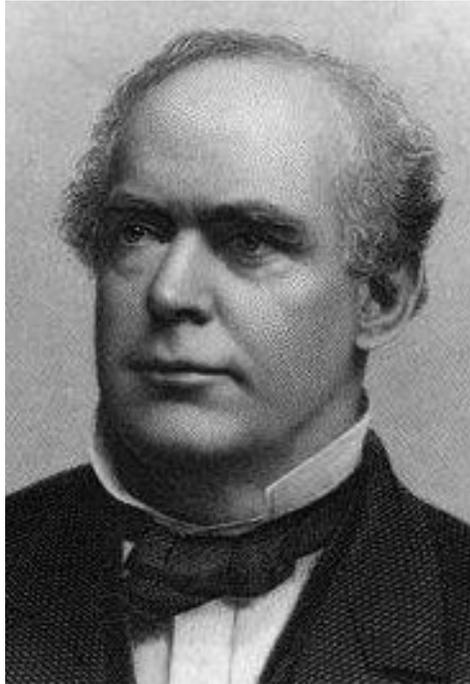


THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

party would commit itself to universal suffrage!



Although Presidential candidate, former general, Ulysses S. Grant was being urged by the Radical Republicans to make Benjamin Wade his vice-presidential candidate, Grant refused to consider this and instead went with

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

another more acceptable radical, Schuyler Colfax.



[George William Curtis](#) was an elector on the Republican ticket, and cast his vote for candidate Ulysses S. Grant.

April 17, Sunday: [George William Curtis](#) wrote to Charles Wesley Slack about not being able to attend a function.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1869

[George William Curtis](#) declined the editorship of the New-York Times. He also declined the office of Secretary of State for the State of New York.

Lydia Thompson left New-York to take her burlesque company on a US tour.

A group of commercial buildings on the waterfront of New-York between Main and Docks streets was destroyed by fire.

Mary Mason Jones created the famous “Marble Row” of elegant Italianate residences at the northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street in New-York.

Jay Cooke and Company became the financial agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad.

[Thomas Alva Edison](#) patented an improved stock ticker.

Jay Cooke and Company became the financial agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad.

[Thomas Alva Edison](#) patented an improved stock ticker.

The Reverend Lyman Abbott resigned as pastor of the New England Congregationalist Church.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1870

[George William Curtis](#) served as Chairman of the Republican National Convention.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1871

[George William Curtis](#) was nominated as Chairman of the Civil Service Reform Commission.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1873

III, [George William Curtis](#) was advised by his doctor that he should rest.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1874

[George William Curtis](#) had resigned his Chairmanship of the Civil Service Commission because of doubt that the Grant administration was actually going to support Civil Service reform.

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

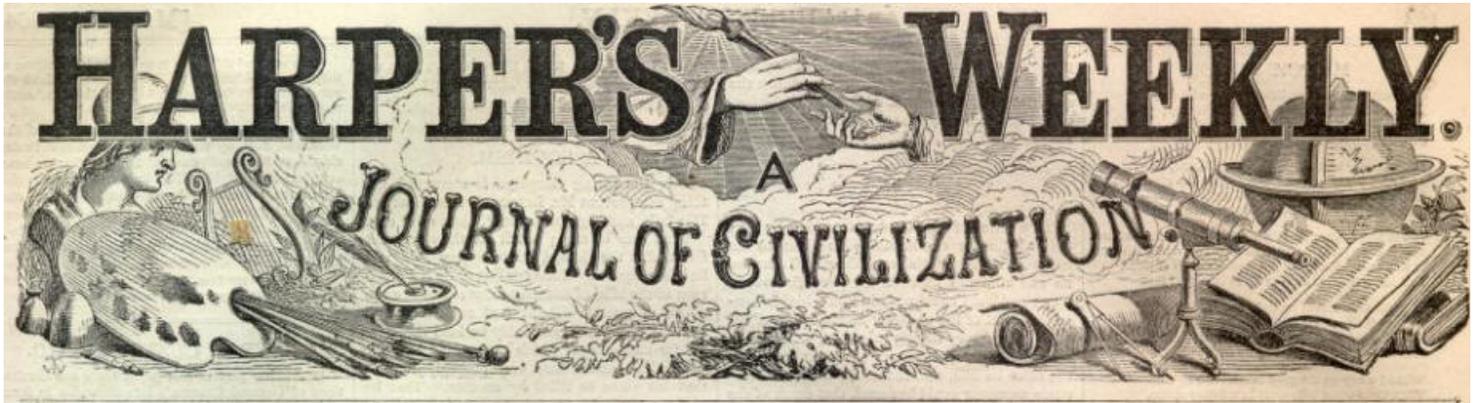
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1875

April 19, Monday: At Concord's April 19th celebration [Waldo Emerson](#), like the 1,250-pound statue, had not much to say, and at any rate could not be heard by the assembled mass of some 3,500 to 5,000 listeners. [James Russell Lowell](#) read some sort of ode over which we need not linger. The speakers' platform collapsed twice but despite such disruptions [George William Curtis](#) (formerly of [Concord](#) and currently the editor of [Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization](#) in the city of New-York) was able to deliver an oration that we may possibly now consider to be a tad too racist for our 21st-Century sensibilities — and may possibly have been a tad too prolonged even for 19th-Century sensitivities. Curtis described at length the dangers presented by new immigrants: not only do foreigners not understand our “republican ideas” but also they are in general possessed of “an immense ignorance.” Shamelessly, Curtis rang in a parallelism between the 1st December 25th in Bethlehem and the “shot heard 'round the world” of the 1st April 19th by permuting “Glory to God in the highest, for Christ is born” into “Good-will to men, America is born.”³⁸



Mr. President, and Fellow Citizens of Concord, of Middlesex County, of Massachusetts, of the Union, — I see, what you may not, the deep malevolence of the President of the Day. For as he knows that in the unequal contest of my voice with a hundred bands of music and a cracking platform, that voice got irretrievably the worst of it, in revenge for holding so many of my fellow-citizens for more than an hour in the cold, the President of the Day, with malicious intent, is resolved to make an end of that voice altogether. But, sir, when the name of Rhode Island is mentioned, every son of Rhode Island falls into line.

38. At one point during the oration, the speaker had to be halted so that President of the United States Ulysses S. Grant could depart in order to fulfil a speaking engagement at the celebration in nearby Lexington:

Ladies and gentlemen, [Concord](#) always keeps faith with Lexington. We promised to deliver to them the President at one o'clock; and he is therefore obliged to leave. Give him three parting cheers.

Three cheers were then given, which the President acknowledged by bowing to the assembly, and with the Vice-President, the Cabinet, Governor Gaston, the Executive Council and Legislature of Massachusetts, the Judges of the Supreme Judicial Court, and several others of our guests who had accepted the Lexington invitation, left the tent.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Little in size, but great in soul! Like the minute-men of one hundred years ago, who marched to the North Bridge under three leaders, so Rhode Island always marches under her three historical men, — Roger Williams, Doctor Channing and General Greene, the friend of Washington. Little in size, but great in soul! for the founder of Rhode Island was the first man among the founders of States who ever asserted absolute religious liberty as the truest foundation of human society. Fellow-citizens, as I stand here in Middlesex County on a day devoted to Revolutionary remembrances, it is my pleasure to remember that when the first regiment from Massachusetts marched to the late war, when it was passing through the city of New York, a friend of mine joined a soldier on the march, and said to him, "Well, my friend, what part of the old Commonwealth do you come from?" And that soldier, whose ear for music, I take it, was not very good, anxious to answer the question while he still kept time to the drum-beat, answered my friend as he marched on, "From Bunker Hill, from Bunker Hill, from Bunker Hill." And so, fellow-citizens, I think we may take this lesson from this day, and the spot on which we stand, — that every American citizen, whatever the summons may be, when it is a summons to march for liberty, may reply, when asked from what part of this Union he takes his departure, not from Maine, from Florida, from Massachusetts, from Rhode Island, from Virginia, from Illinois, from Nevada, from Oregon: let him say only, "From Concord Bridge, from Concord Bridge, from Concord Bridge," and then the whole world will know that he, too, is marching to victory.

Mr. President: I hope it will be always as true as it was one hundred years ago, if a man should be asked, when he is marching to fight or die in the service of his Country, from what part of Massachusetts he came, that he might answer, "From the whole of it;" and it would not be a very hard thing to say of Rhode Island. We have here, to which I must call attention, a good many Revolutionary relics. You have had already shown to you what is left of the sword — broken off, a foot of it, and the point sharpened — that Isaac Davis carried at the North Bridge. There is before me a sword taken by Nathaniel Bemis of Watertown from a British officer whom he himself shot; and the gun is here with which he shot him. The sword bears the legend, and the gun has on the breech, "David Bemis, 1775." But, gentlemen, I hold in my hand one sacred relic, whose historic glory is unsurpassed. Little local jealousies may exist among neighboring towns as to the particular share that this or that spot had in this great American day. The title of Concord North Bridge rests upon one unquestioned fact: that there first, by a duly commissioned officer in command of soldiers, an order to the soldiers of the people to fire upon the soldiers of the King was given, and was obeyed. Major John Buttrick of Concord, whose gun I hold in my hand, gave the order to fire, and fired this gun, his own gun that he held in his hand, in execution of his own order; and it was the first gun fired in obedience to military authority in the war of the Revolution. Fifty years ago, when



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Lafayette visited the United States, this gun was shown to him, and this story told him. He grasped and held it up over his head, and said it was "the alarum gun of liberty throughout the world." I have already said to you that I considered the independence of America as assured by what took place between the North Bridge and Charlestown Neck one hundred years ago. It made conciliation impossible, and independence certain. Lord Chatham had already prophesied in the British parliament, in January, 1775, that the first drop of blood shed in civil and unnatural war might be a wound that never could be cured. He put into that speech a recommendation to the ministry, which, read in the light of this day, sounds curiously enough, although not in the meaning which he gave to it. He introduced into the British parliament a resolution calling on the King to withdraw his troops from Boston. It did not pass: it received but a few votes in the House of Lords. In the course of that speech, he said that he advised the ministry "to make the first advances to Concord." And Gen. Gage made them. You know how they turned out.

Now, my friends, although this, as we all know, is the great centennial, some allusion was made by the orator, in an oratorical spirit, undoubtedly, to the Fourth of July. He knows that comes this year and next, and we think very well of the Fourth of July. It is a natural deduction from the 19th of April; and whoever gets the spirit of the 19th of April may be trusted anywhere on the Fourth of July. My friend General Hawley, late Governor Hawley of Connecticut, entitled to memory as General Hawley of the late war, Chairman of the National Centennial Commission, is here; and I am sure, if any body can say any thing in favor of the Fourth of July, he can say it, and I should like to hear from him on that subject.

We are fortunate that we behold this day. The heavens bend benignly over; the earth blossoms with renewed life; and our hearts beat joyfully together with one emotion of filial gratitude and patriotic exultation. Citizens of a great, free, and prosperous country we come hither to honor the men, our fathers, who, on this spot and upon this day, a hundred years ago, struck the first blow in the contest which made that country independent. Here beneath the hills they trod, by the peaceful river on whose shores they dwelt, amidst the fields that they sowed and reaped, proudly recalling their virtue and their valor, we come to tell their story, to try ourselves by their lofty standard to know if we are their worthy children, and, standing reverently where they stood and fought and died, to swear before God and each other, in the words of him upon whom in our day the spirit of the Revolutionary fathers visibly descended, that government of the People, by the People, for the People, shall not perish from the earth.

This ancient town, with its neighbors who share its glory, has neVer failed fitly to commemorate this great day of its history. Fifty years ago, while some soldiers of the Concord fight were yet living.- twenty-five years ago, while still a few venerable survivors lingered, - with prayer and eloquence and song you

HDTWHAT?INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

renewed the pious vow. But the last living link with the Revolution has long been broken. Great events and a mightier struggle have absorbed our own generation. Yet we who stand here to-day have a sympathy with the men at the old North Bridge, which those who preceded us here at earlier celebrations could not know. With them, war was a name and a tradition. So swift and vast had been the change and the development of the country, that the Revolutionary clash of arms was already vague and unreal, and [Concord](#) and Lexington seemed to them almost as remote and historic as Arbela and Sempach. When they assembled to celebrate this day, they saw a little group of tottering forms, eyes from which tile light was fading, arms nerveless and withered, thin white hairs that fluttered in the wind; they saw a few venerable relics of a vanished age, whose pride was, that, before living memory, they had been minute-men of American Independence. But with us how changed! War is no longer a tradition half romantic and obscure. It has ravaged how many of our homes! it has wrung how many of the hearts before me! North and South we know the pang. Our common liberty is consecrated by a common sorrow. We do not count around us a few feeble veterans of the contest; but we are girt with "a cloud of witnesses." We are surrounded - everywhere by multitudes in the vigor of their prime. Behold them here to-day sharing in these pious and peaceful rites, - the honored citizens, legislators, magistrates, yes, the Chief Magistrate of the republic, - whose glory it is that they were minute-men of American liberty and union. These men of to-day interpret to us with resistless eloquence the men and the times we commemorate. Now, if never before, we understand the Revolution. Now we know the secret of those old hearts and homes. We can measure the sacrifice, the courage, the devotion; for we have seen them all. Green hills of [Concord](#), broad fields of Middlesex, that heard the voice of Hancock and of Adams, you heard, also, the call of Lincoln and of Andrew; and your Ladd and Whitney, your Prescott and Ripley and Melvin, have revealed to US more truly the Davis and the Buttrick, the Hosmer and the Parker, of a hundred years ago. The story of this old town is the history of New England. It shows us the people and the institutions that have made the American republic. [Concord](#) was the first settlement in New England above tide-water. It was planted directly from the mother-country, and was what was called a mother-town, the parent of other settlements throughout the wilderness. It was a military post in King Philip's war; and two hundred years ago -just a century before the minute-men whom we commemorate- the militia of Middlesex were organized as minute-men against the Indians. It is a [Concord](#) tradition, that in those stern days, when the farmer tilled these fields at the risk of his life, Mary Shepard, a girl of fifteen, was watching on one of the hills for the savages, while her brothers threshed in the barn. Suddenly the Indians appeared, slew the brothers, and carried her away. In the night, while the savages slept, she untied a horse which they had stolen, slipped a saddle from under the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

head of one of her captors, mounted, fled, swam the Nashua River, and rode through the forest home. Mary Shepard was the true ancestor of the [Concord](#) matrons who share the fame of this day, - of Mrs. James Barrett, of the Widow Brown, of Mrs. Amos Wood, and Hannah Burns, with the other faithful women whose self-command, and ready wit and energy, on this great morning, show that the mothers of New England were like the fathers, and that equally in both their children may reverence their own best virtues.

A little later than Philip's war, one hundred and eighty-six years ago last night, while some of the first settlers of Massachusetts Bay still lingered, when the news came that King James the Second had been dethroned, a company marched from this town, and joined that general uprising of the colony which the next day, this very day, with old Simon Bradstreet at its head, deposed Sir Edmund Andros, the king's governor, and restored the ancient charter of the colony. "We demand only the traditional rights of Englishmen," said the English nobles, as they seated William and Mary upon the throne. "We ask nothing more," said the freemen of [Concord](#), as they helped to dissolve royal government in America, and returned to their homes. Eighty-five years later, the first Provincial Congress, which had been called to meet at [Concord](#), if, for any reason, the General Court at Salem were obstructed, assembled in the old meeting-house on the 11th of October, 1774, the first independent legislature in Massachusetts, in America; and from that hour to this the old mothertown has never forgotten the words, nor forsworn the faith, of the Revolution, which had been proclaimed here six weeks before: "No danger shall affright, no difficulties intimidate us; and if, in support of our rights, we are called to encounter even death, we are yet undaunted, sensible that he can never die too soon who lays down his life in support of the laws and liberties of his country."

But the true glory of [Concord](#), as of all New England, was the town meeting the nursery of American Independence. When the Revolution began, of the eight millions of people then living in Old England, only one hundred and sixty thousand were voters; while in New England the great mass of free male adults were electors. And they had been so from the landing at Plymouth. Here in the wilderness the settlers were forced to govern themselves. They could not constantly refer and appeal to another authority twenty miles away through the woods. Every day brought its duty, that must be done before sunset. Roads must be made, schools built, young men trained to arms against the savage and the wild-cat, taxes must be laid and collected for all common purposes, preaching must be maintained; and who could know the time, the means, and the necessity, so well as the community itself? Thus each town was a small but perfect republic, as solitary and secluded in the New England wilderness as the Swiss cantons among the Alps. No other practicable human institution has been devised or conceived to secure the just ends of local government so felicitous as the town meeting. It



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

brought together the rich and the poor, the good and the bad, and gave character, eloquence, and natural leadership full and free play. It enabled superior experience and sagacity to govern; and virtue and intelligence alone are rulers by divine right. The Tories called the resolution for committees of correspondence the source of the rebellion; but it was only a correspondence of town meetings. From that correspondence came the confederation of the colonies. Out of that arose the closer, majestic union of the Constitution, the greater phoenix born from the ashes of the lesser; and the national power and prosperity to-day rest securely only upon the foundation of the primary meeting. That is where the duty of the citizen begins. Neglect of that is disloyalty to liberty. No contrivance will supply its place, no excuse absolve the neglect; and the American who is guilty of that neglect is as deadly an enemy of his country as the British soldier a century ago.

But here and now I cannot speak of the New England town meeting without recalling its great genius, the New Englander in whom the Revolution seemed to be most frilly embodied, and the lofty prayer of whose life was answered upon this spot and on this day. He was not eloquent like Otis, nor scholarly like Quincy, nor all-fascinating like Warren, yet bound heart to heart with these great men, his friends, the plainest, simplest, austere, among them, he gathered all their separate gifts, and, adding to them his own, fused the whole in the glow of that untiring energy, that unerring perception, that sublime will, which moved before the chosen people of the colonies a pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night. People of Massachusetts, your proud and grateful hearts outstrip my lips in pronouncing the name of Samuel Adams. Elsewhere to-day, nearer the spot where he stood with his immortal friend Hancock a hundred years ago this morning, a son of Massachusetts, who bears the name of a friend of Samuel Adams, and whose own career has honorably illustrated the fidelity of your State to human liberty, will pay a fitting tribute to the true American tribune of the people, - the father of the Revolution, as he was fondly called. But we also are his children, and must not omit our duty.

Until 1768, Samuel Adams did not despair of a peaceful issue of the quarrel with Great Britain. But when, in May of that year, the British frigate "Romney" sailed into Boston harbor, and her shotted guns were trained upon the town, he saw that the question was changed. From that moment, he knew that America must be free, or slave; and the unceasing effort of his life by day and night, with tongue and pen, was to nerve his fellow-colonists to strike when the hour should come. On that gray December evening, two years later, when he rose in the Old South, and in a clear, calm voice said, "This meeting can do nothing more to save the country," and so gave the word for the march to the tea-ships, he comprehended more clearly, perhaps, than any man in the colonies, the immense and far-reaching consequences of his words. He was ready to throw the tea overboard, because he was ready to throw overboard the King and Parliament of England.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

During the ten years from the passage of the Stamp Act to the day of Lexington and [Concord](#), this poor man, in an obscure provincial town beyond the sea, was engaged with the British ministry in one of the mightiest contests that history records. Not a word in parliament that he did not hear, not an act in the cabinet that he did not see. With brain and heart and conscience all alive, he opposed every hostile order in council with a British precedent, and arrayed against the Government of Great Britain the battery of principles impregnable with the accumulated strength of centuries of British conviction. The cold Grenville, the brilliant Townsend, the obsequious North, the reckless Hillsborough, the crafty Dartmouth, all tile ermined and coroneted chiefs of the proudest aristocracy in the world, derided, declaimed, denounced, laid unjust taxes, and sent troops to collect them, cheered loudly by a servile parliament, the parasite of a headstrong king; and the plain Boston Puritan laid his finger on the vital point of the tremendous controversy, and held to it inexorably king, lords, commons, the people of England, and the people of America. Entrenched in his own honesty, the king's gold could not buy him; enshrined in the love of his fellow-citizens, the king's writ could not take him: and when, on this morning, the king's troops marched to seize him, his sublime faith saw beyond the clouds of the moment the rising sun of the America that we behold; and careless of himself, mindful only of his country, he exultingly exclaimed, "Oh, what a glorious morning!"

Yet this man held no office but that of clerk of the assembly, to which he was yearly elected, and that of constant moderator of the town meeting. That was his mighty weapon. The town meeting was the alarm-bell with which he aroused the continent: it was the rapier with which he fenced with that ministry: it was the claymore with which he smote their counsels: it was the harp of a thousand strings that he swept into a burst of passionate defiance, or an electric call to arms, or a proud paean of exulting triumph, defiance, challenge, and exultation—all lifting the continent to independence. His indomitable will, and command of the popular confidence, played Boston against London, the provincial town meeting against the royal parliament, Faneuil Hall against St. Stephen's. And as long as the American town meeting is known, its great genius will be revered, who with the town meeting overthrew an empire. So long as Faneuil Hall stands, Samuel Adams will not want his most fitting monument; and, when Faneuil Hall falls, its name with his will be found written as with a sunbeam upon every faithful American heart.

The first imposing armed movement against the colonies, on the 19th of April, 1775, did not, of course, take by surprise a people so prepared. For ten years they had seen the possibility, for five years the probability, and for at least a year, the certainty, of the contest. They quietly organized, watched, and waited. The royal governor, Gage, was a soldier; and he had read the signs of the times. He had fought with provincial troops at



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the bloody ambush of Braddock; and he felt the full force of the mighty determination that exalted New England. He had about four thousand effective troops, trained veterans, with brilliant officers, who despised and ridiculed the Yankee militia. Massachusetts had provided for a constitutional army of fifteen thousand men. Minute companies were everywhere organized, and military supplies were deposited at convenient towns. Everybody was on the alert. Couriers were held ready to alarm the country, should the British march, and wagons to remove the stores. In the early spring, Gage sent out some of his officers as spies; and two of them came in disguise as far as [Concord](#). On the 22d of March, the Provincial Congress met in this town, and made the last arrangements for a possible battle, begging the militia and minute-men to be ready, but to act only on the defensive.

As the spring advanced, it was plain that some movement would be made; and on Monday, the 17th of April, the Committee of Safety ordered part of the stores deposited here to be removed to Sudbury and Groton, and the cannon to be secreted. On Tuesday, the 18th, Gage, who had decided to send a force to [Concord](#) to destroy the stores, picketed the roads from Boston into Middlesex to prevent any report of the intended march from spreading into the country. But the very air was electric. In the tension of the popular mind, every sound and sight was significant. It was part of Gage's plan to seize Hancock and Adams, who were at Lexington; and, on the evening of the 18th, the Committee of Safety, at Cambridge, sent them word to beware, for suspicious officers were abroad. A British grenadier, in full uniform, went into a shop in Boston. He might as well have proclaimed that an expedition was on foot. In the afternoon, one of the governor's grooms strolled into a stable where John Ballard was cleaning a horse. John Ballard was a son of liberty; and when the groom idly remarked, in nervous English, that "there would be hell to pay to-morrow," John's heart leaped, and his hand shook; and, asking the groom to finish cleaning the horse, he ran to a friend, who carried the news straight to Paul Revere, who told him he had already heard it from two other persons.

That evening, at ten o'clock, eight hundred British troop, under Lieut.-Col. Smith, took boat at the foot of the Common, and crossed to the Cambridge shore. Gage thought that his secret had been kept; but Lord Percy, who had heard the people say on the Common that the troops would miss their aim, undeceived him. Gage instantly ordered that no one should leave the town. But Dr. Warren was before him; and, as the troops crossed the river, William Dawes, - with a message from Warren to Hancock and Adams, was riding over the Neck to Roxbury, and Paul Revere was rowing over the - river farther down to Charlestown, having agreed with his friend Robert Newman to show lanterns from the belfry of the Old North Church -

"One, if by land, and two, if by sea" —

as a signal of the march of the British. Already the moon was



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

rising; and, while the troops were stealthily landing at Lechmere Point, their secret was flashed out into the April night; and Paul Revere, springing into the saddle upon the Charlestown shore, spurred away into Middlesex.

“How far that little candle throws his beams!”

The modest spire yet stands, reverend relic of the old town of Boston, - of those brave men and of their deeds. Startling the land that night with the warning of danger, let it remind -the land forever of the patriotism with which that danger was averted, and for our children, as for our fathers, still stand secure, the Pharos of American liberty.

It was a brilliant April night. The winter had been un usually mild, and the spring very forward. The hills were already green; the early grain waved in the fields; and the air was sweet with blossoming orchards. Already the robins whistled, the bluebird sang, and the benediction of peace rested upon the landscape. Under the cloudless moon the soldiers silently marched, and Paul Revere swiftly rode, galloping through Medford and West Cambridge, rousing every house as he went, spurring for Lexington, and Hancock and Adams, and evading the British patrols who had been sent out to stop the news. Stop the news! Already the village church bells were beginning to ring the alarm, as the pulpits beneath them had been ringing for many a year. In the awakening houses, lights flashed from window to window. Drums beat faintly far away and on every side. Signal-guns flashed and echoed. The watch-dogs barked, the bocks crew. Stop the news! Stop the sunrise! The murmuring night trembled with the summons so earnestly expected, so dreaded, so desired. And as, long ago, the voice rang out at midnight along the Syrian shore, wailing that great Pan was dead, but in the same moment the choiring angels whispered, “Glory to God in the highest, for Christ is born,” so, if the stern alarm of that April night seemed to many a wistful and loyal heart to portend the passing glory of British dominion, and the tragical chance of war, it whispered to them with prophetic inspiration, “Good-will to men: America is born!”

There is a tradition, that, long before the troops reached Lexington, an unknown horseman thundered at the door of Capt. Joseph Robbins, in Acton, waking every man and woman, and the babe in the cradle, shouting that the regulars were marching to [Concord](#), and that the rendezvous was the Old North Bridge. Capt. Robbins’s son, a boy of ten years, heard the summons in the garret where he lay, . and in a few minutes was on his father’s old mare, a young Paul Revere, galloping along the road to rouse Capt. Isaac Davis, who commanded the minute-men of Acton. He was a young man of thirty, a gunsmith by trade, brave and thoughtful, and tenderly fond of his wife and four children. The company assembled at his shop, formed, and marched a little way, when he halted them, and returned for a moment to his house. He said to his wife, “Take good care of the children,” kissed her, turned to his men, gave the order to march, and saw his home no more.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Such was the history of that night in how many homes! The hearts of those men and women of Middlesex might break; but they could not waver. They had counted the cost. They knew what and whom they served; and, as the midnight summons came, they started up, and answered, "Here am I!"

Meanwhile the British bayonets, glistening in the moon, moved steadily along the road. Col. Smith heard and saw that the country was aroused, and sent back to Boston for reinforcements, ordering Major John Pitcairn, with six companies, to hasten forward, and seize the bridges at [Concord](#). Paul Revere and Dawes had reached Lexington by midnight, and had given the alarm. The men of Lexington instantly mustered on the Green; but, as there was no sign of the enemy, they were dismissed to await his coming. He was close at hand. John Pitcairn swiftly advanced, seizing every man upon the road, and was not discovered until half-past four in the morning, within a mile or two of Lexington meeting-house. Then there was a general alarm. The bell rang, drums beat, guns fired; and sixty or seventy of the Lexington militia were drawn up in line upon the Green, Capt. John Parker at their head. The British bayonets, glistening in the dawn, moved rapidly toward them. John Pitcairn rode up, and angrily ordered the militia to surrender and disperse. But they held their ground. The troops fired over their heads. Still the militia stand. Then a deadly volley blazed from the British line; and eight of the Americans fell dead, and ten wounded, at the doors of their homes, and in sight of their kindred. Capt. Parker, seeing that it was massacre, not battle, ordered his men to disperse. They obeyed, some firing upon the enemy. The British troops, who had suffered little, with a loud huzza of victory pushed on toward [Concord](#), six miles beyond.

Four hours before, Paul Revere and William Dawes had left Lexington to rouse [Concord](#), and were soon overtaken by Dr. Samuel Prescott of that town, "a high son of liberty," who had been to Lexington upon a tender errand. A British patrol captured Revere and Dawes; but Prescott leaped a stone wall, and dashed to [Concord](#). Between one and two o'clock in the morning, Amos Melvin, the sentinel at the court-house, rang the bell, and roused the town. He sprang of heroic stock. One of his family, thirty years before, had commanded a company at Louisburg and another at Crown Point; while four brothers of the same family served in the late war, and the honored names of the three who perished are carved upon your soldiers' monument. When the bell rang, the first man that appeared was William Emerson, the minister, with his gun in his hand. It was his faith that the scholar should be the minute-man of liberty, - a faith which his descendants have piously cherished, and illustrated before the world. The minute-men gathered hastily upon the Common. The citizens, hurrying from their homes, secreted the military stores. Messengers were sent to the neighboring villages, and the peaceful town prepared for battle. The minute-men of Lincoln, whose captain was William Smith, and whose lieutenant

HDTWHAT?INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

was Samuel Hoar, - a name not unknown in Middlesex, in Massachusetts, and in the country, and, wherever known, still honored for the noblest qualities of the men of the Revolution, - had joined the [Concord](#) militia and minute-men; and part of them had marched down the Lexington road to reConnoitre. Seeing the British, they fell back toward the hill, over the road at the entrance of the village, upon which stood the liberty-pole. It was now seven o'clock. There were, perhaps, two hundred men in arms upon the hill. Below them, upon the Lexington road, a quarter of a mile away, rose a thick cloud of dust, from which, amidst proudly rolling drums, eight hundred British bayonets flashed in the morning sun. The Americans saw that battle where they stood would be mere butchery; and they fell gradually back to a rising ground about a mile north of the meetinghouse, - the spot upon which we are now assembled. The British troops divided as they entered the town; the infantry coming over the hill from which the Americans had retired, the marines and grenadiers marching by the high-road. The place was well known to the British officers through their spies; and Colonel Smith, halting before the court-house, instantly sent detachments to hold the two bridges, and others to destroy the stores. But so care fully had these been secreted, that, during the two or three hours in which they were engaged in the work, the British only emptied about sixty barrels of flour, half of which was afterward saved, knocked off the trunnions of three cannon, burned sixteen new carriage-wheels and some barrels of wooden spoons and trenchers, threw five hundred pounds of balls into the pond and wells, cut down the liberty-pole, and fired the court-house.

The work was hurriedly done; for Colonel Smith, a veteran soldier, knew his peril. He had advanced twenty miles into a country of intelligent and resolute men, who were rising around him. All Middlesex was moving. From Acton and Lincoln, from Westford, Littleton MA, and Chelmsford, from Bedford and Billerica, from Stow, Sudbury, and Carlisle, the sons of Indian fighters, and of soldiers of the old French war, poured along the roads, shouldering the fire-locks and fowlingpieces and old king's-arms that had seen famous service when the earlier settlers had gone out against King Philip, or the later colonists had marched under the flag on which George Whitefield had written, "Nil desperandum Cristo Duce," - Never despair while Christ is captain; and those words the children of the Puritans had written on their hearts. As the minute-men from the other towns arrived, they joined the force upon the rising ground near the North Bridge, where they were drawn into line by Joseph Hosmer of [Concord](#), who acted as adjutant. By nine o'clock, some five hundred men were assembled, and a consultation of officers and citizens was held. That group of Middlesex farmers, here upon Punkatasset, without thought that they were heroes, or that the day and its deeds were to be so momentous, is a group as memorable as the men of Riitli on the Swiss Alps, or the barons in the meadow of Runnymede. They confronted the mightiest empire in the world, invincible on land, supreme on the sea, whose guns



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

had just been heard in four continents at once, girdling the globe with victory. And that empire was their mother-land, in whose renown they had shared, - the land dear to their hearts by a thousand ties of love, pride, and reverence. They took a sublime and awful responsibility. They could not know that the other colonies, or even their neighbors of Massachusetts, would justify their action. There was as yet no [Declaration of Independence](#), no continental army. There was, indeed, a general feeling that a blow would soon be struck; but to mistake the time, the place, the way, might be to sacrifice the great cause itself, and to ruin America. But their conscience and their judgment assured them that the hour had come. Before them lay their homes, and on the hill beyond, the graveyard in which their forefathers slept. A guard of the king's troops opposed their entrance to their own village. Those troops were at that moment searching their homes, perhaps insulting their wives and children. Already they saw the smoke as of burning houses rising in the air, and they resolved to march into the town, and to fire upon the troops if they were opposed. They resolved upon organized, aggressive, forcible resistance to the military power of Great Britain,- the first that had been offered in the colonies. All unconsciously every heart beat time to the music of the slave's epitaph in the graveyard that overhung the town: -

“God wills us free man wills us slaves:
I will as God wills: God's will be done.”

Isaac Davis of Acton drew his sword, turned toward his company, and said, “I haven't a man that's afraid to go.” Colonel Barrett of [Concord](#) gave the order to march. In double file, and with trailed arms, the men moved along the Causeway, the Acton company in front; Major John Buttrick of [Concord](#), Captain Isaac Davis of Acton, and Lieutenant-Colonel John Robinson of Westford, leading the way. As they approached the bridge, the British forces withdrew across it, and began to take up the planks. Major Buttrick ordered his men to hasten their march. As they came within ten or fifteen rods of the bridge, a shot was fired by the British, which wounded Jonas Brown, one of the [Concord](#) minutemen, and Luther Blanchard, fifer of the Acton Company. A British volley followed; and Isaac Davis of Acton, making a way for his countrymen, like Arnold von Winkelried at Sempach, fell dead, shot through the heart. By his side fell his friend and neighbor, Abner Hosmer, a youth of twenty-two. Seeing them fall, Major Buttrick turned to his men, and, raising his hand, cried, “Fire, fellow soldiers! for God's sake, fire!” John Buttrick gave the word. The cry rang along the line. The Americans fired. The Revolution began. It began here. Let us put off the shoes from off our feet; for the place whereon we stand is holy ground.

One of the British was killed, several were wounded; and they retreated in confusion toward the centre of the village. The engagement was doubtless seen by Smith and John Pitcairn from the graveyard hill that overlooked the town; and the shots were heard by all the searching parties, which immediately returned



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in haste and disorder. Colonel Smith instantly prepared to retire; and at noon, one hundred years ago, at this hour, the British columns marched out of yonder square.

Then and there began the retreat of British power from the American colonies. Through seven weary and wasting years it continued.

From Bunker Hill to Long Island, from Princeton, Trenton, and Saratoga, from the Brandywine, Monmouth, and King's Mountain, through the bloody snow at Valley Forge, through the treachery of Arnold and of Lee, through cabals and doubt, and poverty and despair, but steadily urged by one great heart that strengthened the continent, - the heart of George Washington, - the British retreat went on from [Concord](#) Bridge and Lexington Green to the plains of Yorktown, and the king's acknowledgment of American Independence.

Of the beginning of this retreat, of that terrible march of the exhausted troops from this square to Boston, I have no time fitly to tell the tale. Almost as soon as it began, all Massachusetts was in motion. William Prescott mustered his regiment of minute-men at Pepperell; and Timothy Pickering, at Salem and Marblehead. Dedham left no man behind between the ages of sixteen and seventy. The minute-men of Worcester marched out of the town one way as the news went out the other, and, flying over the mountains, sent Berkshire to Bunker Hill. Meanwhile the men of [Concord](#) and the neighborhood, following the British over the Bridge, ran along the heights above the Lexington road, and posted themselves to await the enemy. The retreating British column, with wide-sweeping flankers, advanced steadily and slowly. No drum beat, no fife blew: there was the hushed silence of intense expectation. As the troops passed Merriam's Corner, a little beyond [Concord](#), and the flank-guard was called in, they turned suddenly, and fired upon the Americans. The minute-men and militia instantly returned the fire; and the battle began that lasted until sunset.

When Colonel Smith ordered the retreat, although he and his officers may have had some misgivings, they had, probably, lost them in the contempt of regulars for the militia; but, from the moment of the firing at Merriam's Corner, they were undeceived. The landscape was alive with armed men. They swarmed through every wood-path and by-way, across the pastures, and over the hills. Some came up in order along the roads, as from Reading and Billerica, from East Sudbury and Bedford; and John Parker's company from Lexington waited in a woody defile to avenge the death of their comrades. The British column marched steadily on; while from trees, rocks, and fences, from houses, barns, and sheds, blazed the withering American fire. The hills echoed and flashed. The woods rang. The road became an endless ambuscade of flame. The Americans seemed to the appalled British troops to drop from the clouds, to spring from the earth. With every step, the attack was deadlier, the danger more imminent. For some time, discipline, and the plain extremity of the peril, sustained the order of the British line. But the stifling clouds



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of dust, the consuming thirst, the exhaustion of utter fatigue, the wagons full of wounded men moaning and dying, madly pressing through the ranks to the front, the constant falling of their comrades, officers captured and killed, and, through all, the fatal and incessant shot of an unseen foe smote with terror that haughty column, which, shrinking, bleeding, wavering, reeled through Lexington panic-stricken and broken. The officers, seeing the dire extremity, fought their way to the front, and threatened the men with death if they advanced. The breaking line recoiled a little, and even steadied under one of the sharpest attacks of the day; for not as yet were Hessians hired to enslave Americans, and it was English blood and pluck on both sides. At two o'clock in the afternoon, a half-mile beyond Lexington meeting-house, just as the English officers saw that destruction or surrender was the only alternative, Lord Percy, with a re-enforcement of twelve hundred men, came up, and, opening with two cannon upon the Americans, succored his flying and desperate comrades, who fell upon the ground among Percy's troops, their parched tongues hanging from their mouths. The flower of General Gage's army was now upon the field; but its commander saw at once that its sole hope of safety was to continue the retreat. After half an hour's delay, the march was resumed, and with it the barbarities, as well as the sufferings, of war. Lord Percy threw out flanking-parties, which entered the houses upon the line of march, plundering and burning. The fields of Menotomy, or Arlington, through which lay the road, became a plain of blood and fire. But the American pursuit was relentless and beyond Lexington the lower counties and towns came hurrying to the battle. Many a man afterward famous was conspicuous that day; and, near West Cambridge, Joseph Warren was the inspiring soul of the struggle. It was now past five o'clock. The British ammunition was giving out. The officers, too much exposed in the saddle, alighted, and marched with the men, who, as they approached Charlestown, encountered the hottest fire of the day. General Gage had learned the perilous extremity of his army from a messenger sent by Percy, and had issued a proclamation threatening to lay Charlestown in ashes if the troops were attacked in the streets. The town hummed with the vague and appalling rumors of the events of the day, and, just before sunset, the excited inhabitants heard the distant guns, and soon saw the British troops running along the old Cambridge road to Charlestown Neck, firing as they came. They had just escaped the militia seven hundred strong from Salem and Marblehead, — the flower of Essex; and, as the sun was setting, they entered Charlestown and gained the shelter of their frigate-guns. Then General Heath ordered the American pursuit to stop, and the battle was over. But all that day and night the news was flying from mouth to mouth, from heart to heart, rousing every city, town, and solitary farm in the colonies; and before the last shot of the minute-men on the British retreat from [Concord](#) Bridge was fired, or the last wounded grenadier had been rowed across the river, the whole country was in arms.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Massachusetts, New England, America, were closing around the city; and the siege of Boston, and the war of American Independence, had begun.

Such was the opening battle of the Revolution, - a conflict, which, so far as we can see, saved civil liberty in two hemispheres, - saved England as well as America, and whose magnificent results shine through the world as the beacon-light of free popular government. And who won this victory? The minute-men and militia, who, in the history of our English race, have been always the vanguard of freedom. The minute-man of the American Revolution - who was he? He was the husband and father, who, bred to love liberty, and to know that lawful liberty is the sole guaranty of peace and progress, left the plough in the furrow, and the hammer on the bench, and, kissing wife and children, marched to die - or to be free. He was the son and lover, the plain, shy youth of the singing-school and the village choir, whose heart beat to arms for his country, and who felt, though he could not say, with the old English cavalier, -

“I could not love thee, deare, so much,
Loved I not honor more.”

The minute-man of the Revolution!

he was the old, the middle-aged, and the young. He was Captain Charles Miles of [Concord](#), who said that he went to battle as he went to church. He was Captain Davis of Acton, who reproved his men for jesting on the march. He was Deacon Josiah Haynes of Sudbury, eighty years old, who marched with his company to the South Bridge at [Concord](#), then joined in the hot pursuit to Lexington, and fell as gloriously as Warren at Bunker Hill. He was James Hayward of Acton, twenty-two years old, foremost in that deadly race from [Concord](#) to Charlestown, who raised his piece at the same moment with a British soldier, each exclaiming, “You are a dead man!” The Briton dropped, shot through the heart. James Hayward fell mortally wounded. “Father,” he said, “I started with forty balls: I have three left. I never did such a day’s work before. Tell mother not to mourn too much; and tell her whom I love more than my mother, that I am not sorry I turned out.”

This was the minute-man of the Revolution, the rural citizen trained in the common school, the church, and the town meeting, who carried a bayonet that thought, and whose gun, loaded with a principle, brought down not a Wan, but a system. Him we gratefully recall to-day, - him, in yon manly figure wrought in the metal which but feebly typifies his inexorable will, we commit in his immortal youth to the reverence of our children. And here among these peaceful fields, - here in the county whose children first gave their blood for American union and independence, and, eighty-six years later, gave it first also for a truer union and a larger liberty, - here in the heart of Middlesex, county of Lexington and [Concord](#) and Bunker Hill, stand fast, Son of Liberty, as the minute-man stood at the Old North Bridge! But should we or our descendants, false to liberty, false to justice and humanity, betray in any way their



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

cause, spring into life as a hundred years ago, take one more step, descend, and lead us, as God led you in saving America, to save the hopes of man!

At the end of a century, we can see the work of this day as our fathers could not: we can see that then the final movement began of a process long and unconsciously pre -paring, which was to in trust liberty to new forms and institutions that seemed full of happy promise for mankind. And now, for nearly a century, what was formerly called the experiment of a representative republic of imperial extent and power has been tried. Has it fulfilled the hopes of its founders, and the just expectations of mankind? I have already glanced at its early and fortunate conditions, and we know how vast and splendid were its early growth and development. Our material statistics soon dazzled the world. Europe no longer sneered, but gazed in wonder, waiting and watching. Our population doubled every fifteen years; and our wealth every ten years. Every little stream among the hills turned a mill; and the great inland seas, bound by the genius of Clinton to the ocean, became the highway of boundless commerce, the path of unprecedented empire. Our farms were the granary of other lands. Our cottonfields made England rich. Still we chased the whale in the Pacific Ocean, and took fish in the tumbling seas of Labrador. We hung out friendly lights along thousands of miles of coast to tempt the trade of every clime; and wherever, on the dim rim of the globe, there was a harbor, it was white with American sails. Meanwhile at home the political foreboding of Federalism had died away; and its very wail seemed a tribute to the pacific glories of the land.

“The ornament of beauty is Suspect,
A crow that flies in heaven’s sweetest air.”

The government was felt to be but a hand of protection and blessing; labor was fully employed; capital was secure; the army was a jest; enterprise was pushing through the Alleghanies, grasping and settling the El Dorado of the prairies, and still braving the wilderness, reached out toward the Rocky Mountains, and, reversing the voyages of Columbus, rediscovered the Old World from the New. America was the Benjamin of nations, the best-beloved of Heaven; and the starry flag of the United States flashed a line of celestial light around the world, the harbinger of freedom, peace, and prosperity.

Such was the vision and the exulting faith of fifty years ago. “Atlantis hath risen from the ocean!” cried Edward Everett to applauding Harvard; and Daniel Webster answered from Bunker Hill, “If we fail, popular governments are impossible.” So far as they could see, they stood among the unchanged conditions of the early republic. And those conditions are familiar. The men who founded the republic were few in number, planted chiefly along a temperate coast, remote from the world. They were a homogeneous people, increasing by their own multiplication, speaking the same language, of the same general religious faith, cherishing the same historic and political traditions, universally educated, hardy, thrifty, with general equality of



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

fortune, and long and intelligent practice of self-government, while the slavery that existed among them, inhuman in itself, was not seriously defended, and was believed to be disappearing. But within the last half-century causes then latent, or wholly incalculable before, have radically changed those conditions; and we enter upon the second century of the republic with responsibilities which neither our fathers, nor the men of fifty years ago, could possibly foresee.

Think, for instance, of the change wrought by foreign immigration, with all its necessary consequences. In the State of Massachusetts to-day, the number of citizens of foreign birth who have no traditional association with the story of [Concord](#) and Lexington is larger than the entire population of the State on the day of battle. The first fifty years after that day brought to the whole country fewer immigrants than are now living in Massachusetts alone. At the end of that half-century, when Mr. Everett stood here, less than three hundred thousand foreign immigrants had come to this country; but, in the fifty years that have since elapsed, there has been an immigration of more than nine millions of persons. The aggregate population in the last fifty years has advanced somewhat more than threefold; the foreign immigration, more than thirty-fold; so that now immigrants and the children of immigrants are a quarter of the whole population. This enormous influx of foreigners has added an immense ignorance, and entire unfamiliarity with republican ideas and habits, to the voting-class. It has brought other political traditions, other languages, and other religious faiths. It has introduced powerful and organized influences not friendly to the republican principle of freedom of thought and action. It is to the change produced by immigration that we owe the first serious questioning of the public school system, which was the nursery of the early republic, and which is to-day the palladium of free popular government.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not lamenting, even in thought, the boundless hospitality of America. I do not forget that the whole European race came hither but yesterday, and has been domesticated here not yet three hundred years. I am not insensible of the proud claim of America to be the refuge of the oppressed of every clime; nor do I doubt in her maturity her power, if duly directed, to assimilate whole nations, if need be, as in her infancy she achieved her independence, and in her prime maintained her unity. But if she has been the hope of the world, and is so still, it is because she has understood both the conditions and the perils of freedom, and watches carefully the changing conditions under which republican liberty is to be maintained. She will still welcome to her ample bosom all who choose to be called her children. But, if she is to remain the mother of liberty, it will not be the result of those craven counsels whose type is the ostrich burying his head in the sand, but of that wise and heroic statesmanship, whose symbol is her own heaven-soaring eagle, gazing undazzled even at the spots upon the sun.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Again: within the century, steam has enormously expanded the national domain; and every added mile is an added strain to our system. The marvellous ease of communication both by rail and telegraph tends to obliterate conservative local lines, and to make a fatal centralization more possible. The telegraph, which instantly echoes the central command at the remotest point, becomes both a facility and a temptation to exercise Command; while below upon the rail the armed blow swiftly follows the word that flies along the wire. Steam concentrates population in cities. But, when the government was formed, the people were strictly rural, and there were but six cities with eight thousand inhabitants or more. In 1790, only one-thirtieth of the population lived in cities: in 1870, more than one-fifth. Steam destroys the natural difficulties of communication; but those very difficulties are barriers against invasion, and protect the independence of each little community, the true foundation of our free republican system. In New England, the characteristic village and local life of the last century perishes in the age of steam. Meanwhile the enormous accumulation of capital engaged in great enterprises, with unscrupulous greed of power, constantly tends to make itself felt in corruption of the press, which moulds public opinion, and the legislature which makes the laws. Thus steam and the telegraph tend to the concentration of capital, and the consolidation of political power, - a tendency which threatens liberty, and which was wholly unknown when the republic began, and was unsuspected fifty years ago. Sweet liberty is a mountain nymph, because mountains baffle the pursuer. But the inventions that level mountains and annihilate space alarm that gracious spirit, who sees her greater insecurity. But stay, heaven-eyed maid, and stay forever! Behold, our devoted wills shall be thy invincible Alps, our loyal hearts thy secret bower, the spirit of our fathers a cliff of adamant, that engineering skill can never pierce nor any foe can scale.

But the most formidable problem for popular government which the opening of our second century presents springs from a source which was unsuspected a hundred years ago, and which the orators of fifty years since forbore to name. This was the system of slave labor, which vanished in civil war. But slavery had not been the fatal evil that it was, if, with its abolition, its consequences had disappeared. It holds us still in mortmain. Its dead hand is strong as its living power was terrible. Emancipation has left the republic exposed to a new and extraordinary trial of the principles and practices of free government. A civilization resting upon slavery, as formerly in part of the country, however polished and ornate, is necessarily aristocratic, and hostile to republican equality, while the exigencies of such a society forbid that universal education which is indispensable to wise popular government. When war emancipates the slaves and makes them equal citizens, the ignorance and venality which are the fatal legacies of slavery to the subject class, whether white or black, and the natural



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

alienation of the master class, which alone has political knowledge and experience, with all the secret conspiracies, the reckless corruption, the political knavery, springing naturally from such a situation, and ending often in menacing disorder that seems to invite the military interference - and supervision of the government -all this accumulation of difficulty and danger lays a strain along the very fibre of free institutions; for it suggests the twofold question, whether the vast addition of the ignorance of the emancipated vote to that of the immigrant vote may not overwhelm the intelligent vote of the country, and whether the constant appeal to the central hand of power - however necessary it may seem, and for whatever reason of humanity and justice it may be urged-must not necessarily destroy that local self-reliance which was the very seed of the American republic, and fatally familiarize the country with that employment of military power which is inconsistent with free institutions, and bold resistance to which has forever consecrated the spot on which we stand.

These are some of the more obvious changes in the conditions under which the republic is to be maintained. I mention them merely; but every wise patriot sees and ponders them. Does he therefore despond? Heaven forbid! When was there ever an auspicious day for humanity that was not one of doubt and conflict? The robust moral manhood of America confronts the future with steadfast faith and indomitable will, raising the old battle-cry of the race for larger liberty and surer law. It sees clouds, indeed, as Sam Adams saw them when this day dawned; but with him it sees through and through them, and with him thanks God for the glorious morning. There is, indeed, a fashion of scepticism of American principles, even among some Americans; but it is one of the oldest and worst fashions in our history. There is a despondency, which fondly fancies, that, in its beginning, the American republic moved proudly toward the future with all the splendid assurance of the Persian Xerxes descending on the shores of Greece, but that it sits to-day among shattered hopes, like Xerxes above his ships at Salamis. And when was this golden age? Was it when John Adams appealed from the baseness of his own time to the greater candor and patriotism of this? Was it when Fisher Ames mourned over lost America, like Rachel for her children, and would not be comforted? Was it when William Wirt said that he sought in vain for a man fit for the presidency or for great responsibility? Was it when Chancellor Livingston saw only a threatening future, because Congress was so feeble? Was it when we ourselves saw the industry, the commerce, the society, the church, the courts, the statesmanship, the conscience, of America seemingly prostrate under the foot of slavery? Was this the golden age of these doubting sighs, this the region behind the north wind of these reproachful regrets? And is it the young nation which with prayer and faith, with untiring devotion and unconquerable will, has lifted its bruised and broken body from beneath that crushing heel, whose future is distrusted?



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Nay, this very scepticism is one of the foes that we must meet and conquer. Remember, fellow-citizens, that the impulse of republican government given a century ago at the Old North Bridge has shaken every government in the world, but has been itself wholly unshaken by them. It has made monarchy impossible in France. It has freed the Russian serfs. It has united Germany against ecclesiastical despotism. It has flashed into the night of Spain. It has emancipated Italy, and discrowned the pope as king. In England, repealing the disabilities of Catholic and Hebrew, it forecasts the separation of Church and State, and step by step transforms monarchy into another form of republic. And here at home how glorious its story! In a tremendous war between men of the same blood, - men who recognize and respect each other's valor, - we have proved what was always doubted, - the prodigious power, endurance, and resources of a republic; and, in emancipating an eighth of the population, we have at last gained the full opportunity of the republican principle. Sir, it is the signal felicity of this occasion, that, on the one hundredth anniversary of the first battle in the war of American Independence, I may salute you, who led to victory the citizen-soldiers of American liberty, as the first elected president of the free republic of the United States. Fortunate man! to whom God has given the priceless boon of associating your name with that triumph of freedom which will presently bind the East and the West, the North and the South, in a closer and more perfect union for the establishment of justice, and the security of the blessings of liberty, than these States have ever known.

Fellow-citizens, that union is the lofty task which this hallowed day and this sacred spot impose upon us. And what cloud of doubt so dark hangs over us as that which lowered above the colonies when the troops of the king marched into this town, and the men of Middlesex resolved to pass the Bridge? With their faith and their will we shall win their victory. No royal governor, indeed, sits in yon stately capital, no hostile fleet for many a year has vexed the waters of our coasts, nor is any army but our own ever likely to tread our soil. Not such are our enemies to-day. They do not come proudly stepping to the drum-beat, with bayonets flashing in the morning sun. But wherever party spirit shall strain the ancient guaranties of freedom; or bigotry and ignorance shall lay their fatal hands upon education; or the arrogance of caste shall strike at equal rights; or corruption shall poison the very springs of national life, - there, minute-men of liberty, are your Lexington Green and [Concord](#) Bridge; and as you love your country and your kind, and would have your children rise up and call you blessed, spare not the enemy! Over the hills, out of the earth, down from the clouds, pour in resistless might. Fire from every rock and tree, from door and window, from hearthstone and chamber; hang upon his flank and rear from noon to sunset, and so, through a land blazing with holy indignation, hurl the hordes of ignorance and corruption and injustice back, back, in utter defeat and ruin.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1876

[George William Curtis](#) was a delegate to the Republican National Convention.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1877

The first large, public artificially frozen ice-[skating](#) rink, in Manchester, England.

After due consideration, [George William Curtis](#) declined the position of ambassador to England, and then the position of ambassador to [Germany](#), that were unofficially being suggested to him by President-elect Rutherford B. Hayes.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1880

Upon the founding of the New York Civil Service Reform Association, [George William Curtis](#) was elected as its president (he would still be at this post at the time of his death).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1881

Upon the founding of the Civil Service Reform League, [George William Curtis](#) became its president.

HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

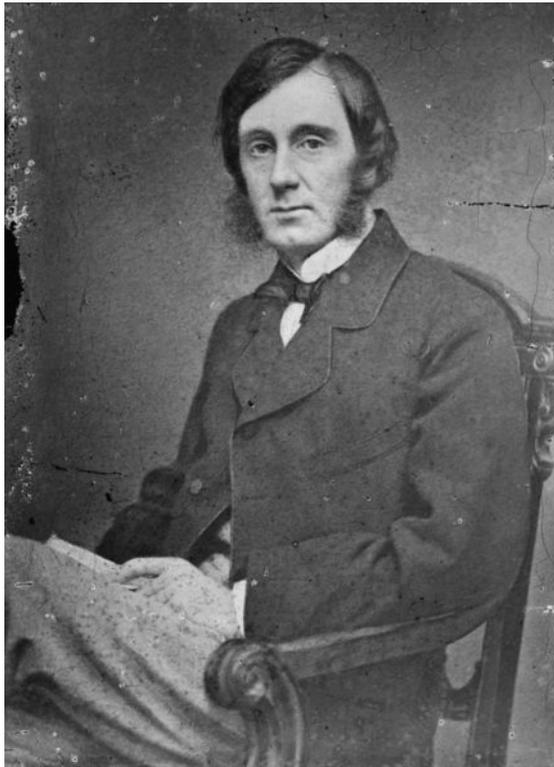
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1882

[George William Curtis](#) placed an article in [Harper's Magazine](#) about [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#). (This would be republished in 1895 as part of Curtis's LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)



In this year he received the honorary degree of LL.D. from [Harvard University](#).

NEW "HARVARD MEN"



PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

LONGFELLOW³⁹

In the school readers of half a century ago there were two poems which every boy and girl read and declaimed and remembered. How much of that old literature has disappeared! How much that stirred the hearts and touched the fancies of those boys and girls, their children have never heard of! Willis's "Saturday Afternoon" and "Burial of Arnold" have floated away, almost out of sight, with Pierpont's "Bunker Hill" and Sprague's Fourth-of-July oration. The relentless winds of oblivion incessantly blow. Scraps of verse and rhetoric once so familiar are caught up, wafted noiselessly away, and lodged in neglected books and in the dark corners of fading memories, gradually vanish from familiar knowledge. But the two little poems of which we speak have survived. One of them was Bryant's "March", and the other was Longfellow's "April", and the names of the two poets singing of spring were thus associated in the spring-time of our poetry, as the fathers of which they will be always honored.

Both poems originally appeared in the United States Literary Gazette, and were included in the modest volume of selections from that journal which was published in Boston in 1826. The chief names in this little book are those of Bryant, Longfellow, Percival, Mellen, Dawes, and Jones. Percival has already become a name only; Dawes, and Greenville Mellen, who, like Longfellow, was a son of Maine, are hardly known to this generation, and Jones does not even appear in Duyckinck's Cyclopaedia. But in turning over the pages it is evident that Time has dealt justly with the youthful bards, and that the laurel rests upon the heads of the singers whose earliest strains fitly preluded the music of their prime. Longfellow was nineteen years old when the book was published. He had graduated at Bowdoin College the year before, and the verses had been written and printed in the Gazette while he was still a student.

The glimpses of the boy that we catch through the recollections of his old professor, Packard, and of his college mates, are of the same character as at every period of his life. They reveal a modest, refined, manly youth, devoted to study, of great personal charm and gentle manners. It is the boy that the older man suggested. To look back upon him is to trace the broad and clear and beautiful river far up the green meadows to the limpid rill.

His poetic taste and faculty were already apparent, and it is related that a version of an ode of Horace which he wrote in his Sophomore year so impressed one of the members of the examining board that when afterwards a chair of modern languages was established in the college, he proposed as its incumbent the young Sophomore whose fluent verse he remembered. The impression made by the young Longfellow is doubtlessly accurately described

39. [George William Curtis](#), LONGFELLOW, [Harper's Magazine](#), Vol. LXV., 1882, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

by one of his famous classmates, Hawthorne, for the class of '25 is a proud tradition of Bowdoin. In "P.'s Correspondence", one of the *MOSESSES FROM AN OLD MANSE*, a quaint fancy of a letter from "my unfortunate friend P.", whose wits were a little disordered, there are grotesque hints of the fate of famous persons. P. talks with Burns at eighty-seven; Byron, grown old and fat, wears a wig and spectacles; Shelley is reconciled to the Church of England; Coleridge finishes "Christabel"; Keats writes a religious epic on the millennium; and George Canning is a peer. On our side of the sea, Dr. Channing had just published a volume of verses; Whittier had been lynched ten years before in South Carolina; and, continues P., "I remember, too, a lad just from college, Longfellow by name, who scattered some delicate verses to the winds, and went to Germany, and perished, I think, of intense application, at the University of Göttingen." Longfellow, in turn, recalled his classmate Hawthorne—a shy, dark-haired youth flitting across the college grounds in a coat with bright buttons.

Among these delicate verses was the poem to "An April Day". As the work of a very young man it is singularly restrained and finished. It has the characteristic elegance and flowing melody of his later verse, and its half-pensive tone is not excessive nor immature. It is not, however, for this that it is most interesting, but because, with Bryant's "March", it is the fresh and simple note of a truly American strain. Perhaps the curious reader, enlightened by the observation of subsequent years, may find in the "March" a more vigorous love of nature, and in the "April" a tenderer tone of tranquil sentiment. But neither of the poems is the echo of a foreign music, nor an exercise of remembered reading. They both deal with the sights and sounds and suggestions of the American, landscape in the early spring. In Longfellow's "April" there are none of the bishops' caps and foreign ornament of illustration to which Margaret Fuller afterwards objected in his verse. But these early associated poems, both of the younger and of the older singer, show an original movement of American literary genius, and, like the months which they celebrate, they foretold a summer.

That summer had been long awaited. In 1809, Buckminster said in his Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard College: "Our poets and historians, our critics and orators, the men of whom posterity are to stand in awe, and by whom they are to be instructed, are yet to appear among us." Happily, however, the orator thought that he beheld the promise of their coming, although he does not say where. But even as he spoke they were at hand. Irving's *KNICKERBOCKER* was published in 1809, and Bryant's "Thanatopsis" was written in 1812. The *North American Review*, an enterprise of literary men in Boston and Cambridge, was begun in 1815, and Bryant and Longfellow were both contributors. But it was in the year 1821, the year in which Longfellow entered college, that the beginning of a distinctive American literature became most evident. There were signs of an independent intellectual movement both in the choice of subjects and in the character of



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

treatment. This was the year of the publication of Bryant's first slim volume, and of Cooper's *SPY*, and of Dana's *IDLE MAN*. Irving's *SKETCH BOOK* was already finished, Miss Sedgwick's *HOPE LESLIE* and Percival's first volume had been issued, and Halleck's and Drake's "Croakers" were already popular. In these works, as in all others of that time, there was indeed no evidence of great creative genius.

The poet and historian whom Buckminster foresaw, and who were to strike posterity with awe, had not yet appeared, but in the same year the voice of the orator whom he anticipated was heard upon Plymouth Rock in cadences massive and sonorous as the voice of the sea. In the year 1821 there was the plain evidence of an awakening original literary activity.

Longfellow was the youngest of the group in which he first appeared. His work was graceful, tender, pensive, gentle, melodious, the strain of a troubadour. When he went to Europe in 1826 to fit himself more fully for his professorship, he had but "scattered some delicate verses to the winds". When he returned, and published in 1833 his translations of "Coplas de Manrique" and other Spanish poems, he had apparently done no more. There was plainly shown an exquisite literary artist, a very Benvenuto of grace and skill. But he would hardly have been selected as the poet who was to take the strongest hold of the hearts of his countrymen, the singer whose sweet and hallowing spell was to be so deep and universal that at last it would be said in another country that to it also his death was a national loss.

The qualities of these early verses, however, were never lost. The genius of the poet steadily and beautifully developed, flowering according to its nature. The most urbane and sympathetic of men, never aggressive, nor vehement, nor self-asserting, he was yet thoroughly independent, and the individuality of his genius held its tranquil way as surely as the river Charles, whose placid beauty he so often sang, wound through the meadows calm and free. When Longfellow came to Cambridge, the impulse of Transcendentalism in New England was deeply affecting scholarship and literature. It was represented by the most original of American thinkers and the typical American scholar, Emerson, and its elevating, purifying, and emancipating influences are memorable in our moral and intellectual history. Longfellow lived in the very heart of the movement. Its leaders were his cherished friends. He too was a scholar and a devoted student of German literature, who had drunk deeply also of the romance of German life. Indeed, his first important works stimulated the taste for German studies and the enjoyment of its literature more than any other impulse in this country. But he remained without the charmed Transcendental circle, serene and friendly and attentive. There are those whose career was wholly moulded by the intellectual revival of that time. But Longfellow was untouched by it, except as his sympathies were attracted by the vigor and purity of its influence. His tastes, his interests, his activities, his



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

career, would have been the same had that great light never shone. If he had been the ductile, echoing, imitative nature that the more ardent disciples of the faith supposed him to be, he would have been absorbed and swept away by the flood. But he was as untouched by it as Charles Lamb by the wars of Napoleon. It was in the first flush of the Transcendental epoch that Longfellow's first important works appeared. In 1839, his prose romance of *HYPERION* was published, following the sketches of travel called *OUTRE-MER*. He was living in Cambridge, in the famous house in which he died, and in which *HYPERION* and all of his familiar books were written. Under the form of a slight love tale, *HYPERION* is the diary of a poet's wandering in a storied and picturesque land, the hearty, home-like genius of whose life and literature is peculiarly akin to his own. The book bubbles and sings with snatches of the songs of the country; it reproduces the tone and feeling of the landscape, the grandeur of Switzerland, the rich romance of the Rhine; it decorates itself with a quaint scholarship, and is so steeped in the spirit of the country, so glowing with the palpitating tenderness of passion, that it is still eagerly bought at the chief points which it commemorates, and is cherished by young hearts as no prose romance was ever cherished before.

HYPERION, indeed, is a poet's and lover's romance. It is full of deep feeling, of that intense and delighted appreciation of nature in her grander forms, and of scenes consecrated by poetic tradition, which belongs to a singularly fine, sensitive, and receptive nature, when exalted by pure and lofty affection; and it has the fulness and swing of youth, saddened by experience indeed, yet rising with renewed hope, like a field of springing grain in May bowed by the west wind, and touched with the shadow of a cloud, but presently lifting itself again to heaven. A clear sweet humor and blitheness of heart blend in this romance. What is called its artificial tone is not insincerity; it is the play of an artist conscious of his skill and revelling in it, even while his hand and his heart are deeply in earnest. *WERTHER* is a romance, Disraeli's *WONDRIOUS TALE OF ALROY* is a romance, but they belong to the realm of Beverley and Julia in Sheridan's *RIVALS*. In *HYPERION*, with all its elaborate picturesqueness, its spicy literary atmosphere, and imaginative outline, there is a breezy freshness and simplicity and healthiness of feeling which leaves it still unique.

In the same year with *HYPERION* came the *VOICES OF THE NIGHT*, a volume of poems which contained the "Coplas de Manrique" and the translations, with a selection from the verses of the Literary Gazette, which the author playfully reclaims in a note from their vagabond and precarious existence in the corners of newspapers -gathering his children from wanderings in lanes and alleys, and introducing them decorously to the world. A few later poems were added, and these, with the *HYPERION*, showed a new and distinctive literary talent. In both of these volumes there is the purity of spirit, the elegance of form, the romantic tone, the airy grace, which were already associated with



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Longfellow's name. But there are other qualities. The boy of nineteen, the poet of Bowdoin, has become a scholar and a traveller. The teeming hours, the ample opportunities of youth, have not been neglected or squandered, but, like a golden-banded bee, humming as he sails, the young poet has drained all the flowers of literature of their nectar, and has built for himself a hive of sweetness. More than this, he had proved in his own experience the truth of Irving's tender remark, that an early sorrow is often the truest benediction for the poet.

Through all the romantic grace and elegance of the VOICES OF THE NIGHT and HYPERION, however, there is a moral earnestness which is even more remarkable in the poems than in the romance. No volume of poems ever published in the country was so popular. Severe critics indeed, while acknowledging its melody and charm, thought it too morally didactic, the work of a student too fondly enamoured of foreign literatures. But while they conceded taste and facility, two of the poems at least—the "Psalm of Life" and the "Footsteps of Angels"—penetrated the common heart at once, and have held it ever since. A young Scotchman saw them reprinted in some paper or magazine, and, meeting a literary lady in London, repeated them to her, and then to a literary assembly at her house; and the presence of a new poet was at once acknowledged. If the "Midnight Mass for the Dying Year" in its form and phrase and conception recalled a land of cathedrals and a historic religious ritual, and had but a vague and remote charm for the woodman in the pine forests of Maine and the farmer on the Illinois prairie, yet the "Psalm of Life" was the very heart-beat of the American conscience, and the "Footsteps of Angels" was a hymn of the fond yearning of every loving heart.

During the period of more than forty years from the publication of the VOICES OF THE NIGHT to his death, the fame of Longfellow constantly increased. It was not because his genius, like that of another scholarly poet, Gray, seldom blossomed in song, so that his renown rested upon a few gem-like verses. He was not intimidated by his own fame. During those forty years he wrote and published constantly. Other great fames arose around him. New poets began to sing. Popular historians took their places. But still with Bryant the name of Longfellow was always associated at the head of American singers, and far beyond that of any other American author was his name known through all the reading world. The volume of VOICES OF THE NIGHT was followed by similar collections, then by THE SPANISH STUDENT, EVANGELINE, THE GOLDEN LEGEND, HIAWATHA, THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH, THE TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN, THE NEW ENGLAND TRAGEDIES, THE MASQUE OF PANDORA, THE HANGING OF THE CRANE, the MORITURI SALUTARNUS, the KRAMOS. But all of these, like stately birds

"Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the upper realms of air,"

were attended by shorter poems, sonnets, "birds of passage", as the poet called his swallow flights of song. In all these larger poems, while the characteristics of the earlier volumes were



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

more amply developed and illustrated, and the subtle beauty of the skill became even more exquisite, the essential qualities of the work remain unchanged, and the charm of a poet and his significance in the literature and development of his country were never more readily defined.

Child of New England, and trained by her best influences; of a temperament singularly sweet and serene, and with the sturdy rectitude of his race; refined and softened by wide contact with other lands and many men; born in prosperity, accomplished in all literatures, and himself a literary artist of consummate elegance, he was the fine flower of the Puritan stock under its changed modern conditions. Out of strength had come forth sweetness. The grim iconoclast, "humming a surly hymn", had issued in the Christian gentleman. Captain Miles Standish had risen into Sir Philip Sidney. The austere morality that relentlessly ruled the elder New England reappeared in the genius of this singer in the most gracious and captivating form. The grave nature of Bryant in his early secluded life among the solitary hills of Western Massachusetts had been tinged by them with their own sobriety. There was something of the sombre forest, of the gray rocky face of stern New England in his granitic verse. But what delicate wild-flowers nodded in the clefts! What scent of the pine-tree, what music of gurgling water, filled the cool air! What bird high poised upon its solitary way through heaven-taught faith to him who pursued his way alone!

But while the same moral tone in the poetry both of Bryant and of Longfellow shows them to be children of the same soil and tradition, and shows also that they saw plainly, what poets of the greatest genius have often not seen at all, that in the morality of human life lies its true beauty, the different aspect of Puritan development which they displayed was due to difference of temperament and circumstance. The foundations of our distinctive literature were largely laid in New England, and they rest upon morality. Literary New England had never a trace of literary Bohemia. The most illustrious group, and the earliest, of American authors and scholars and literary men, the Boston and Cambridge group of the last generation—Channing, the two Danas, Sparks, Everett, Bancroft, Ticknor, Prescott, Norton, Ripley, Palfrey, Emerson, Parker, Hawthorne, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, Agassiz, Lowell, Motley—have been all sober and industrious citizens of whom Judge Sewall would have approved. Their lives as well as their works have ennobled literature. They have illustrated the moral sanity of genius. Longfellow shares this trait with them all. It is the moral purity of his verse which at once charms the heart, and in his first most famous poem, the "Psalm of Life", it is the direct inculcation of a moral purpose. Those who insist that literary art, like all other art, should not concern itself positively with morality, must reflect that the heart of this age has been touched as truly by Longfellow, however differently, as that of any time by its master-poet. This, indeed, is his peculiar



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

distinction. Among the great poetic names of the century in English literature, Burns, in a general way, is the poet of love; Wordsworth, of lofty contemplation of nature; Byron, of passion; Shelley, of aspiration; Keats, of romance; Scott, of heroic legend; and not less, and quite as distinctively, Longfellow, of the domestic affections. He is the poet of the household, of the fireside, of the universal home feeling. The infinite tenderness and patience, the pathos, and the beauty of daily life, of familiar emotion, and the common scene, these are the significance of that verse whose beautiful and simple melody, softly murmuring for more than forty years, made the singer the most widely beloved of living men.

Longfellow's genius was not a great creative force. It burst into no tempests of mighty passion. It did not wrestle with the haughtily veiled problems of fate and free-will absolute. It had no dramatic movement and variety, no eccentricity and grotesqueness and unexpectedness. It was not Lear, nor Faust, nor Manfred, nor Romeo. A carnation is not a passion-flower. Indeed, no poet of so universal and sincere a popularity ever sang so little of love as a passion. None of his smaller poems are love poems; and EVANGELINE is a tale, not of fiery romance, but of affection "that hopes and endures and is patient", of the unwasting "beauty and strength of woman's devotion", of the constantly tried and tested virtue that makes up the happiness of daily life. No one has described so well as Longfellow himself the character and influence of his own poetry:

"Come read to me some poem,
Some simple and heart-felt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

"Hot from the grand old masters,
Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.

* * * * *

"Such songs have power to quiet
The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
That follows after prayer."

This was the office of Longfellow in literature, and how perfectly it was fulfilled! It was not a wilful purpose, but he carefully guarded the fountain of his song from contamination or diversion, and this was its natural overflow. During the long period of his literary activity there were many "schools" and styles and fashions of poetry. The influence first of Byron, then of Keats, is manifest in the poetry of the last generation, and in later days a voluptuous vagueness and barbaric splendor, as of the lower empire in literature, have corroded the vigor of much modern verse. But no perfumed blandishment of doubtful



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

goddesses won Longfellow from his sweet and domestic Muse. The clear thought, the true feeling, the pure aspiration, is expressed with limpid simplicity:

"Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full."

The most delightful picture in Goldsmith's life is that of the youth wandering through rural Europe, stopping at the little villages in the peaceful summer sunset, and sweetly playing melodies upon his flute for the lads and lasses to dance upon the green. Who that reads "The Traveller" and "The Deserted Village" does not hear in their pensive music the far-away fluting of that kind-hearted wanderer, and see the lovely idyl of that simple life? So sings this poet to the young men and maidens in the soft summer air. They follow his measures with fascinated hearts, for they hear in them their own hearts singing; they catch the music of their dearest hope, of their best endeavor; they hear the voices of the peaceful joy that hallows faithful affection, of the benediction that belongs to self-sacrifice and devotion. And now that the singer is gone, and his voice is silent, those hushed hearts recall the words of Father Felicien, Evangeline's pastor:

"Forty years of my life have I labored among you, and taught you
Not in word alone, but in deed, to love one another."

It is this fidelity of his genius to itself, the universal feeling to which he gives expression, and the perfection of his literary workmanship, which is sure to give Longfellow a permanent place in literature. His poems are apples of gold in pictures of silver. There is nothing in them excessive, nothing overwrought, nothing strained into turgidity, obscurity, and nonsense. There is sometimes, indeed, a fine stateliness, as in the "Arsenal at Springfield", and even a resounding splendor of diction, as in "Sandalphon". But when the melody is most delicate it is simple. The poet throws nothing into the mist to make it large. How purely melodious his verse can be without losing the thought or its most transparent expression is seen in "The Evening Star" and "Snow-Flakes".

The literary decoration of his style, the aroma and color and richness, so to speak, which it derives from his ample accomplishment in literature, are incomparable. His verse is embroidered with allusions and names and illustrations wrought with a taste so true and a skill so rare that the robe, though it be cloth of gold, is as finely flexible as linen, and still beautifully reveals, not conceals, the living form.

This scholarly allusion and literary tone were at one time criticised as showing that Longfellow's genius was really an exotic grown under glass, or a smooth-throated mocking-bird warbling a foreign melody. A recent admirable paper in the Evening Post intimates that the kindly poet took the suggestion in good part, and modified his strain. But there was never any interruption or change in the continuity of his work. EVANGELINE



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and HIAWATHA and THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH blossom as naturally out of his evident and characteristic taste and tendency as THE GOLDEN LEGEND or the MASQUE OF PANDORA. In the TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN the "Ride of Paul Revere" is as natural a play of his power as "King Robert of Sicily". The various aspect and character of nature upon the American continent is nowhere so fully, beautifully, and accurately portrayed as in EVANGELINE. The scenery of the poem is the vast American landscape, boundless prairie and wooded hill, brimming river and green valley, sparkling savanna and broad bayou, city and village, camp and wigwam, peopled with the children of many races, and all the blended panorama seen in the magic light of imagination. So, too, the poetic character of the Indian legend is preserved with conscientious care and fit monotony of rippling music in HIAWATHA. But this is an accident and an incident. It is not the theme which determines the poet. All Scotland, indeed, sings and glows in the verse of Burns, but very little of England is seen or heard in that of Byron.

In no other conspicuous figure in literary history are the man and the poet more indissolubly blended than in Longfellow. The poet was the man, and the man the poet. What he was to the stranger reading in distant lands, by

"The long wash of Australasian seas,"

that he was to the most intimate of his friends. His life and character were perfectly reflected in his books. There is no purity or grace or feeling or spotless charm in his verse which did not belong to the man. There was never an explanation to be offered for him; no allowance was necessary for the eccentricity or grotesqueness or wilfulness or humor of genius. Simple, modest, frank, manly, he was the good citizen, the self-respecting gentleman, the symmetrical man.

He lived in an interesting historic house in a venerable university town, itself the suburb of a great city; the highway running by his gate and dividing the smooth grass and modest green terraces about the house from the fields and meadows that sloped gently to the placid Charles, and the low range of distant hills that made the horizon. Through the little gate passed an endless procession of pilgrims of every degree and from every country to pay homage to their American friend. Every morning came the letters of those who could not come in person, and with infinite urbanity and sympathy and patience the master of the house received them all, and his gracious hospitality but deepened the admiration and affection of the guests. His nearer friends sometimes remonstrated at his sweet courtesy to such annoying "devastators of the day". But to an urgent complaint of his endless favor to a flagrant offender, Longfellow only answered, good-humoredly, "If I did not speak kindly to him, there is not a man in the world who would." On the day that he was taken ill, six days only before his death, three schoolboys came out from Boston on their Saturday holiday to ask his autograph. The benign lover of children welcomed them heartily,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

showed them a hundred interesting objects in his house, then wrote his name for them, and for the last time.

Few men had known deeper sorrow. But no man ever mounted upon his sorrow more surely to higher things. Blessed and beloved, the singer is gone, but his song remains, and its pure and imperishable melody is the song of the lark in the morning of our literature:

“Type of the wise who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred points of heaven and home.”



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1884

[George William Curtis](#) was a delegate to the Republican National Convention (he would, however, during the election, support Democratic candidate Cleveland, having become suspicious that Republican candidate Blaine was not going to support the needed reforms).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1888

[George William Curtis](#) supported President Grover Cleveland's bid for reelection.



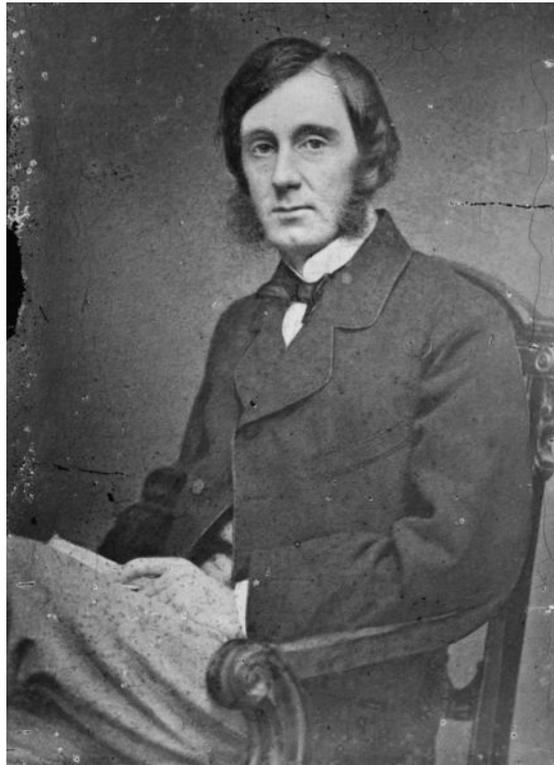
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1889

[George William Curtis](#) read, at Ashfield, an essay he had written on [Washington Irving](#). (This would be printed by the Grolier Club in 1892 and then republished in 1895 as part of Curtis's LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)





PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

WASHINGTON IRVING⁴⁰

Forty years ago, upon a pleasant afternoon, you might have seen tripping with an elastic step along Broadway, in New York, a figure which even then would have been called quaint. It was a man of about sixty-six or sixty-seven years old, of a rather solid frame, wearing a Talma, as a short cloak of the time was called, that hung from the shoulders, and low shoes, neatly tied, which were observable at a time when boots were generally worn. The head was slightly declined to one side, the face was smoothly shaven, and the eyes twinkled with kindly humor and shrewdness. There was a chirping, cheery, old-school air in the whole appearance, an undeniable Dutch aspect, which, in the streets of New Amsterdam, irresistibly recalled Diedrich Knickerbocker. The observer might easily have supposed that he saw some later descendant of the renowned Wouter Van Twiller refined into a nineteenth-century gentleman. The occasional start of interest as the figure was recognized by some one in the passing throng, the respectful bow, and the sudden turn to scan him more closely, indicated that he was not unknown. Indeed, he was the American of his time universally known. This modest and kindly man was the creator of Diedrich Knickerbocker and Rip Van Winkle. He was the father of our literature, and at that time its patriarch. He was Washington Irving.

At the same time you might have seen another man, of slight figure and rustic aspect, with an air of seriousness, if not severity, moving with the crowd, but with something remote and reserved in his air, as if in the city he bore with him another atmosphere, and were still secluded among solitary hills. In the bright and busy street of the city which was always cosmopolitan, and in which there lingers a tradition, constantly renewed, of good-natured banter of the losel Yankee, this figure passed like the grave genius of New England. By a little play of fancy the first figure might have seemed the smiling spirit of genial cheerfulness and humor, of kindly sympathy even with the foibles and weaknesses of poor human nature; and the other the mentor of its earnest endeavor and serious duty. For he was the first of our poets, whose "Thanatopsis" was the hymn of his meditations among the primeval forests of his native hills, and who, in his last years, sat at the door of his early home and looked across the valley of the Westfield to the little town of Plainfield upon the wooded heights beyond, whose chief distinction is that there he wrote the "Waterfowl"; for this graver figure was the poet Bryant.

If in the same walk you had passed those two figures, you would have seen not only the first of our famous prose writers and the first of our acknowledged poets, but also the representatives of the two fundamental and distinctive qualities of our American

40. [George William Curtis](#), WASHINGTON IRVING, read at Ashfield, 1889, printed by the Grolier Club in 1892, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

literature, as of all literature—its grave, reflective, earnest character, and its sportive, genial, and humorous genius.

At the time of which I speak another figure also was familiar in Broadway, but less generally recognized as it passed than either of the others, although, perhaps, even more widely known to fame than they. This was Cooper, who gave us so many of the heroes of our childhood's delight, but who at this time was himself the hero of innumerable lawsuits, undertaken to chastise the press for what he believed to be unjust and libelous comments upon himself. Now that the uproar of that litigation is silent, and its occasion forgotten, it seems comical that a man for whom fame had already rendered a favorable judgment should be busily seeking the opinion of local courts upon transitory newspaper opinions of him-self and his writings. It is as if Dickens, when the whole English-reading world—judges on the bench and bishops in their studies, cobblers in their stalls and grooms in the stables—were all laughing over Pickwick, should have sued the Eatanswill Gazette for calling him a clown. Thackeray pronounces Cooper's Long Tom Coffin one of the prizemen of fiction. That is a final judgment by the chief-justice. But who knows what was the verdict in Cooper's lawsuits to vindicate himself, and who cares? When Cooper died there was a great commemorative meeting in New York. Daniel Webster presided, and praised the storyteller; Bryant read a discourse upon him, while Irving sat by his side. One of the triumvirate of our early literature was gone, and two remained to foresee their own future in the honors paid to him. Indeed, it was to see them, quite as much as to hear of their dead comrade, that the multitude assembled that evening; and the one who was seen with the most interest was Irving, the one in whom the city of New York naturally feels a peculiar right and pride, as the most renowned of her children. If I say that he made personally the same impression that his works make, you can easily see the man. As you read the story of his life you feel its constant gayety and cheerfulness. It was the life of a literary man and a man of society—a life without events, or only the events of all our lives, except that it lacks the great event of marriage. In place of it there is a tender and pathetic romance. Irving lived to be seventy-six years old. At twenty-six he was engaged to a beautiful girl, who died. He never married; but after his death, in a little box of which he always kept the key, was found the miniature of a lovely girl, and with it a braid of fair hair, and a slip of paper on which was written the name Matilda Hoffman, with some pages upon which the writing was long since faded. That fair face Irving kept all his life in a more secret and sacred shrine. It looks out, now and then, with unchanged loveliness from some pensive passage, which he seems to write with wistful melancholy of remembrance. That fond and immortal presence constantly renewed the gentle humanity, the tenderness of feeling, the sweet healthfulness and generous sympathy which never failed in his life and writings.

He was born in the city of New York in 1783, the year in which



HDT

WHAT?

INDEX

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the Revolution ended in the acknowledgment of American independence. The British army marched out of the city, and the American army, with Washington at the head, marched in. "The patriot's work is ended just as my boy is born," said the patriotic mother, "and the boy shall be named Washington". Six years later, when Washington returned to New York to be inaugurated President, he was one day going into a shop when the boy's Scotch nurse democratically stopped the new republican chief magistrate and said to him, "Please your honor, here's a bairn was named for you". The great man turned and looked kindly on his little namesake, laid his hand upon his head, and blessed his future biographer.

The name of no other American has been so curiously confused with Washington's as that of Irving. Many a young fellow puzzles over the connection which the name seems vaguely to imply, and in other lands the identity of the men is confounded. When Irving first went to Europe, a very young man, well-educated, courteous, with great geniality of manner and charm of conversation, he was received by Prince Torlonia, the banker, in Rome, with unusual and flattering civility. His travelling companion, who had been treated by the prince with entire indifference, was perplexed at the warmth of Irving's welcome. Irving laughingly said that it only proved the prince's remarkable discrimination. But the young travellers laughed still more when the prince unconsciously revealed the secret of his attentions by taking his guest aside, and asking him how nearly he was related to General Washington.

Many years afterwards, when he had become famous, an English lady and her daughter paused in an Italian gallery before a bust of Washington. "And who was Washington, mamma?" asked the daughter. "Why, my dear, I am surprised at your ignorance," answered the mother, "he was the author of the SKETCH BOOK." Long ago in Berlin I was talking with some American friends one evening at a café, and observed a German intently listening to our conversation as if trying his ability to understand the language. Presently he said to me, politely, "You are English, no?" But when I replied "No, we are Americans"— "Americans!" he exclaimed enthusiastically, grasping my hand and shaking it warmly, "Americans, ach! we all know your great General Washington Irving."

Irving's father was a Presbyterian deacon, in whose heart the sterner traditions of the Covenanters lingered. He tried hard to teach his son to contemn amusement, and to impale his youth upon the five points of Calvinism, rather than to play ball. But it was John Knox trying to curb the tricky Ariel. Perhaps from some bright maternal ancestor the boy had derived his sweet gayety of nature which nothing could repress. His airy spirits bubbled like a sunny fountain in that some-what arid household. He read at ten a translation of the ORLANDO FURIOSO, and his father's yard, doubtless trim and well kept as beseemed a deacon's yard, became at once a field of chivalry. Candles were forbidden him in his chamber, but when he made the acquaintance



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

of ROBINSON CRUSOE and SINDBAD THE SAILOR, he secreted lights to illuminate his innocent revels with those immortal playmates. The amusements which were permitted were of too depressing a character to be tolerated by the healthy boy, who, like the duck taking to the water from under the wing of the astonished hen, sometimes escaped from the serious house at night by dropping from a window, and with a delight that must have torn his father's heart with anguish had he known it, tasted the forbidden fruit of the theatre. It was a Presbyterian boy who tasted it then; but in the same city many years afterwards it was a Quaker boy whom I knew who was also enamoured of the play. "John," said his grieved father, "is this dreadful thing true that I hear of thee? Has thee ever been to see the play-actress Frances Kemble?" "Yes, father," answered the heroic John. "I hope thee has not been more than once, John," said the afflicted father. "Yes, father," replied John, resolved to make a clean breast of his sins, "more than thirty times." It is useless to try to prevent blue-birds from flying in the spring. The blithe creatures made to soar and sing will not be restrained. The same kind Providence that made Calvin made Shakespeare. The sun is higher than the clouds, and smiles are as heaven-born as tears. In Emerson's poem the squirrel says to the mountain:

"You're not so small as I,
And not half so spry;

* * * * *

"If I cannot carry forests on my back
Neither can you crack a nut."

It was in vain to try to thwart the young Irving's genius. Yet the boy who a little later was to light with rosy cheer the air which, as Wendell Phillips said, was still black with sermons; who was to give to our literature its first distinctly humorous strain, and innocently to amuse the world, was somehow or other, as he said, "taught to feel that everything pleasant was wicked".

If that were so, what a sinner Washington Irving was! If to make life easier by making it pleasanter, if to outwit trouble by gay banter, if with satire that smiles but never stings to correct foibles and to quicken good impulses; if to deepen and strengthen human sympathy, is not to be a human benefactor, what makes one? When Dr. Johnson said of Garrick that his death eclipsed the gayety of nations, he did not mean merely that the player would no longer make men laugh, but that he could no longer make them better. "If, however," said Irving—and Willis selected the words for the motto of his second volume of verse published in 1827— "I can by a lucky chance, in these days of evil, rub out one wrinkle from the brow of care, or beguile the heavy heart of one moment of sadness; if I can, now and then, penetrate the gathering film of misanthropy, prompt a benevolent view of human nature, and make my reader more in good-humor with his fellow-beings and himself, surely, surely I shall not then



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

have written entirely in vain."

That cannot be said to have been the spirit of any American author before Irving. Our colonial literature was mainly political and theological. You have only to return to the early New England days in the stories of Hawthorne, the magician who restores with a shuddering spell that old, sombre life, to understand the character of its reading. The books that were not treatises upon special topics all seemed to say with one of the grim bards of Calvinism:

"My thoughts on awful subjects roll,
Damnation and the dead."

Literature, in its proper sense, there was none. There was no imaginative creation, no play of fancy and humor, no subtle charm of the ideal life, no grace and delight of expression, which are essential to literature. The perpetual twilight and chill of the New England Puritan world were an arctic winter in which no flower of poesy bloomed and no bird sang. One of the French players who came to this country with Rachel says, in his journal, with a startled air, as if he had remarked in Americans a universal touch of lunacy, that he was invited to take a pleasure-drive to Greenwood Cemetery. Evidently he was not familiar with Froissart's epigram nor with the annals of the Puritan fathers, or he would have known that their favorite pleasure-ground was the graveyard. Judge Sewell's Journal, the best picture of daily New England life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a portrait framed in black and hung with thick crape. It is a register of funerals—a book which seems to require a suit of sables for its proper reading. The early Christians dwelt so often and so long in the catacombs that when they emerged, accustomed to associate life with the tomb, they doubtless regarded the whole world as a cemetery. The American Puritans inherited the disposition from their early confessors, and so powerful was the tendency that it laid its sombre spirit upon the earliest enduring poem in our literature, and the fresh and smiling nature of the new world was first depicted by our literary art as a tomb:

"The hills,
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods; rivers that move
In majesty; and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,
Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste,
Are but the solemn decorations all Of the great tomb of
man."

"Thanatopsis" is the swan-song of Puritanism. Indeed, when New England Puritanism could sing, as for the first time it did in the verse of Bryant, the great change was accomplished. Out of strength had come forth sweetness. I am not decrying the Puritans. They were the stern builders of the modern world, the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

unconscious heralds of wider liberty, and a kindlier future for mankind. But

“God works in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform,”

and never more mysteriously than when he chose as the pioneers of religious liberty in the New World those who hung Quakers, and as the founders of civil equality those who permitted only members of their own Church to vote.

Irving was not a studious boy. He did not go to college. He read some law at sixteen, but he read much more literature, and sauntered in the country about New York with his gun and fishing-rod. He sailed up the Hudson, and explored for the first time the realm that was presently to be his forever by the right of eminent domain of the imagination. New York was a snug little city in those days. At the beginning of the century it was all below the present City Hall, and the young fellow, who was born a cosmopolitan, greatly enjoyed the charms of the modest society in which the Dutch and the English circles were still somewhat separated, and in which such literary cultivation as there was was necessarily foreign. But while he enjoyed he observed, and his literary instinct began to stir.

Under the name of “Jonathan Oldstyle”, the young Irving printed in his brother’s newspaper essays in the style of the Spectator, discussing topics of the town, and the modest theatre in John Street and its chance actors, as if it had been Drury Lane with Garrick and Mrs. Siddons. The little town kindly smiled upon the lively efforts of the Presbyterian deacon’s son; and its welcome of his small essays, the provincial echo of the famous Queen Anne’s men in London, is a touching revelation of our scant and spare native literary talent. The essays are forgotten now, but they were enough to bring Charles Brockden Brown to find the young author, and to tempt him, but in vain, to write for The Literary Magazine and American Register, which the novelist was just beginning in Philadelphia, a pioneer of American literary magazines, which Brown sustained for five years.

The youthful Addison of New Amsterdam was a delicate lad, and when he came of age he sailed for France and the Mediterranean, and passed two years in travelling. Napoleon Bonaparte was emperor, and at war with England, and the young American, despite his passport, was everywhere believed to be an Englishman. Travelling was hard work in those days of war, but the cheery youth proved the truth of the proverb that a light heart and a whole pair of breeches go round the world. At Messina, in Sicily, he saw Nelson’s fleet pass through the strait, looking for the French ships; and before the year ended the famous battle of Trafalgar had been fought, and at Greenwich in England Irving saw the body of the great sailor lying in state, wrapped in his flag of victory. At Rome he made the acquaintance of Washington Allston, and almost resolved to be a painter. In Paris he saw Madame de Stal, who overwhelmed him with eager questions about his remote and unknown country, and

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

in London he was enchanted by Mrs. Siddons. Some years afterwards, when the SKETCH BOOK had made him famous, he was presented to Mrs. Siddons, and the great actress said to him, in her deepest voice and with her stateliest manner, "You've made me weep." The modest young author was utterly abashed, and could say nothing. After the publication of his BRACEBRIDGE HALL he was once more presented to her, and again with gloomy grandeur she said to him, "You've made me weep again." This time Irving received the solemn salute with more composure, and doubtless retorted with a compliment magnificent enough even for the sovereign Queen of Tragedy, who, as her niece Mrs. Fanny Kemble said of her, never laid aside her great manner, and at the dinner-table brandished her fork and stabbed the potatoes.

Irving returned from this tour with established health—a refined, agreeable, exceedingly handsome and charming gentleman; with a confirmed taste for society, and a delightful store of interesting recollection and anecdote. With a group of cultivated and lively friends of his own age he dined and supped and enjoyed the town, and a little anecdote which he was fond of telling shows that the good old times were not unlike the good new times: One morning, after a gay dinner, Irving met one of his fellow-revellers, who told him that on the way borne, after draining the parting bumper, he had fallen through a grating in the sidewalk, which had been carelessly left open, into the vault beneath. It was impossible to climb out, and at first the solitude was rather dismal, he said; but several of the other guests fell in, in the course of the evening, and, on the whole, they had quite a pleasant time of it.

In the midst of this frolicking life, and growing out of it, Irving's real literary career began. With his brother William, and his friend James K. Paulding, who afterwards wrote the DUTCHMAN'S FIRESIDE, and was one of the recognized American authors of fifty years ago, he issued every fortnight a periodical, which ran for twenty numbers, and stopped in the midst of its success. It was modelled upon the Spectator and Goldsmith's CITIZEN OF THE WORLD, describing and criticising the manners and morals of the town with extravagant humor and pungency, and a rollicking independence which must have been both startling and stimulating.

Perhaps, also, the town was secretly pleased to discover that it was sufficiently important to be worthy of such bright raillery and humorous reproof. SALMAGUNDI was only a lively *jeu d'esprit*, and Irving was never proud of it. "I know," said Paulding, writing to him in later life, "you consider old Sal as a sort of saucy, flippant trollope, belonging to nobody, and not worth fathering." But, nevertheless, Irving's genius was trying its wings in it, and pluming itself for flight. SALMAGUNDI undoubtedly, to a later taste, is rather crude and cumbrous fun, but it is interesting as the immediate forerunner of our earliest work of sustained humor, and of the wit of Holmes and Lowell at a later date. When it was discontinued, at the beginning of 1808, Irving and his brother began the HISTORY OF NEW



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

YORK, which was originally designed to be a parody of a particular book. But the work was interrupted by the business difficulties of the brother, and at last Irving resumed it alone, recast it entirely, and as he finished it the engagement with Matilda Hoffman ended with her death, and the long arid secret romance of his life began.

Knickerbocker's HISTORY was published just before Christmas, 1809, and made a merry Christmas for our grandfathers and grandmothers eighty years ago. The fun began before the book was published. In October the curiosity of the town of eighty thousand inhabitants was awakened by a series of skilful paragraphs in the Evening Post. The art of advertising was never more ingeniously illustrated. Mr. Fulkerson himself would have paid homage to the artist. One day the quid-nuncs found this paragraph in the paper, It was headed,

"DISTRESSING.

"Left his lodgings, some time since, and has not since been heard of, a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of Knickerbocker. As there are some reasons for believing that he is not entirely in his right mind, and, as great anxiety is entertained about him, any information concerning him left either at the Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street, or at the office of this paper, will be thankfully received.

"P. S.—Printers of newspapers would be aiding the cause of humanity by giving an insertion to the above.

"OCTOBER 25TH."

This was followed within a fortnight by another ingenious lure:

"To the Editor of the Evening Post:

"Sir,—Having read in your paper of the 26th October last a paragraph respecting an old gentleman by the name of Knickerbocker, who was missing from his lodgings, if it would be any relief to his friends, or furnish them with any clue to discover where he is, you may inform them that a person answering the description was seen by the passengers of the Albany stage early in the morning, about four or five weeks ago, resting himself by the side of the road, a little above Kingsbridge. He had in his hands a small bundle, tied in a red bandana handkerchief. He appeared to be travelling northward, and was very much fatigued and exhausted.

"November 6. A Traveller."

Ten days after came a letter signed by Seth Handaside, landlord of the Independent Handaside:

"Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street.

"Sir,—You have been kind enough to publish in your paper a paragraph about Mr. Diedrich Knickerbocker, who was missing so strangely from his lodgings some time since. Nothing satisfactory has been heard from the old



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

gentleman since, but a very curious written Book has been found in his room in his own handwriting. Now, I wish you to notice him, if he is still alive, that if he does not return and pay off his bill for board and lodging, I shall have to dispose of his Book to satisfy me for the same."

This is very simple jesting, but at that time it was very effective in a town that enjoyed the high spirits of SALMAGUNDI. Moreover, the book which was announced in this lively strain was as unprecedented as the announcement. It was a very serious time and country, and the work of the small elderly gentleman who carried a little bundle tied in a red bandana handkerchief appeared in the midst of the sober and dry effusions of our Puritan literature, and of an eager and energetic life still engrossed with the subjection of a continent and the establishment of a new nation. It was the work of a young man of twenty-six, who lived fifty years afterwards with constantly increasing fame, making many and admirable contributions to literature. But nothing that followed surpassed the joyous brilliancy and gay felicity of his first book, which was at once acknowledged as the wittiest book that America had produced.

Knickerbocker's HISTORY is a prolonged and elaborate and audacious burlesque of the early annals of New Amsterdam. The undaunted Goth of the legend who plucked the Roman senator by the beard was not a more ruthless iconoclast than this son of New Amsterdam, who drew its grave ancestors from venerable obscurity by flooding them with the cheerful light of blameless fun. To pass the vague and venerable traditions of the austere and heroic founders of the city through the alembic of a youth's hilarious creative humor, and to turn them out in forms resistlessly grotesque, but with their identity unimpaired, was a stroke as daring as it was successful. But the skill and power with which this is done can be best appreciated by those who are most familiar with the history which the gleeful genius burlesques.

Irving follows the actual story closely, and the characters that he develops faithfully, although with rollicking caricature, are historical. Indeed, the fidelity is so absolute that the fiction is welded with the fact. The days of the Dutch ascendancy in New York are inextricably associated with this ludicrous narrative. It is impossible not to think of the forefathers of New Amsterdam as Knickerbocker describes them. The Wouter Van Twiller, the Wilhemus Kieft, the Peter Stuyvesant, who are familiarly and popularly known, are not themselves, but the figures drawn by Diedrich Knickerbocker. In comical despair, the historian Grahame, whose COLONIAL HISTORY is still among the best, says of Knickerbocker: "If Sancho Panza had been a real governor, misrepresented by the wit of Cervantes, his future historian would have found it no easy matter to bespeak a grave attention to the annals of his administration."

The gayety of this blithe genius bursting in upon our staid literature is irresistible. Irving's temperament, his travels,



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

his humor, gave him a cosmopolitan point of view; and his little native city, with its local sense of importance, and its droll aristocratic traditions springing from Dutch burgomasters and traders, impressed his merry genius like a complacent Cranford or Tarascon taking itself with a provincial seriousness, which, to his sympathetic fancy, was an exhaustless fountain of fun. Part of the fun to us, and perhaps to Irving, was the indignation with which it was received by the descendants of the Dutch families in the city and State. The excited drawing-rooms denounced it as scandalous satire and ridicule. Even Irving's friend, Gulian Verplanck, nine years afterwards, deepening the comedy of his remark by his evident unconsciousness of the drollery of his gravity, grieved that the author's exuberance of genuine humor should be wasted on a coarse caricature. Irving, who was then in Europe, saw Verplanck's strictures just as he had written *RIP VAN WINKLE*, and he wrote to a friend at home that he could not help laughing at Verplanck's outburst of filial feeling for his ancestors, adding, in the true Knickerbocker vein, "Remember me heartily to him, and tell him that I mean to grow wiser and better and older every day, and to lay the castigation he has given seriously to heart." The success of Knickerbocker's *HISTORY* was immediate, and it was the first American work of literature which arrested attention in Europe.

Sir Walter Scott, who was then the most famous of English poets, and was about to publish the first of the *Waverley Novels*, was delighted with a humor which he thought recalled Swift's, and a sentiment that seemed to him as tender as Sterne's. He wrote a generous acknowledgment to the American friend who had sent him the book, and in later years he welcomed Diedrich Knickerbocker at Abbotsford, and the American has given a charming and vivid picture of Scott's home and its master.

But the success of his book did not at once determine Irving's choice of a career. He was still a gilded youth who enjoyed the gay idleness of society, and who found in writing only another and pleasant recreation. He had been bred in the conservative tradition which looked upon livelihood by literature as the deliberate choice of Grub Street, and the wretchedness of Goldsmith as the necessary and natural fate of authors; but it is droll that, although he recoiled from the uncertainty of support by literary labor, he was willing to try the very doubtful chances of office-holding as a means of securing leisure for literary pursuits. He offered himself as a candidate for appointment as the clerk of a court in the city. By tradition and sympathy he was a Federalist, but he had taken no active part in politics, and his chance was slight. He went to Albany, however, and in a lively letter he paints a familiar picture of the crowd of office-hunters who, he says, "like a cloud of locusts, have descended upon the city to devour every plant and herb and every green thing." He was sick with a cold, and stifled in rooms heated by stoves, and was utterly disgusted, as he says, "by the servility and duplicity and rascality I have witnessed



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

among the swarms of scrub politicians who crawl about the great metropolis of our State like so many vermin about the head of the body politic."

Again the good old times were apparently very much like the good new times. Thirty-nine years after Irving's discomfiture in trying to get a public office, Hawthorne was turned out of one that he held, and wrote to a friend: "It seems to me that an inoffensive man of letters, having obtained a pitiful little office on no other plea than his pitiful little literature, ought not to be left at the mercy of these thick-skulled and no-hearted ruffians." The language is strong, but the epithets are singularly well-chosen. The distinctive qualities of the ringleaders, whether of high or low degree, in the degradation of public trusts into private and party spoils, have never been more accurately or effectively described than by the words "thick-skulled" and "no-hearted".

The story of the sturdy beggar who asked General Jackson to give him the mission to France, and finally came down to a request for an old coat, well illustrates a system which regards public office not as a public trust, but as private alms. The service of the State, whether military or civil, is an object of high and generous ambition, because it involves the leadership of men. But if Irving and Hawthorne thought that what is called office-seeking is disgusting, it was not because the public service is not noble and dignified, but because we choose to allow it to be so often dependent, not upon fitness and character, but upon the personal or political favor of the "thick-skulled" and "no-hearted".

But the problem of a career was soon solved. In the year 1810 Irving formed a business connection with two of his brothers, and the next five years were passed in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, forming various literary plans, looking out for his business interests, sparkling in society; and when war with England began, serving upon the governor's military staff as Colonel Washington Irving. In the spring of 1815 he sailed to roam again through Europe, but the illness of his brother compelled him to remain in England in charge of the business. "London," as a shrewd and celebrated American recently said, "was then as it is now, the social centre of the world." Irving saw famous men and women, and his charming sweetness and humor opened all doors and hearts. But the business fell into distress, then into disaster, and in the beginning of 1818 the house failed. He was now thrown wholly upon his literary resources, which did not fail, and in the spring of 1819, when he was thirty-six years old, the first number of the SKETCH BOOK was issued in New York.

The merry, exuberant, satirical Diedrich Knickerbocker was transformed into the genial, urbane, and tender-hearted Geoffrey Crayon. Our fathers and grandfathers knew him well. They had been bred upon Addison and Goldsmith, the essayists and the poets of the eighteenth century, and in Geoffrey Crayon they recognized and welcomed another member of that delightful



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

literary society. He was all the more welcome that he was an American—one of themselves. The bland and courteous Geoffrey, indeed, had few rivals among his countrymen. In our little American world of letters at that time he came and conquered. Bryant's "Thanatopsis", had been published only two years before; Halleck's and Drake's lively but strictly local "Croakers" were still appearing, and Edward Everett had just hailed Percival's first volume as authorizing great expectations.

But prophecy is always dangerous. The year before, Sydney Smith had said, in the Edinburgh Review, "Literature the Americans have none—no native literature we mean. It is all imported. They had a Franklin, indeed, and may afford to live half a century on his fame. There is, or was, a Mr. Dwight, who wrote some poems, and his baptismal name was Timothy. There is also a small account of Virginia by Jefferson, and an epic poem by Mr. Joel Barlow, and some pieces of pleasantries by Mr. Irving. But why should Americans write books, when a six weeks' passage brings them, in their own tongue, our sense, science, and genius, on bales and hogsheads? Prairies, steamboats, grist-mills are their natural objects for centuries to come. Then, when they have got to the Pacific Ocean, epic poems, plays, pleasures of memory, and all the elegant gratifications of an ancient people who have tamed the wild earth, and sat down to amuse themselves. This is the natural march of human affairs." As the sarcastic Yorkshire canon, sitting on the Edinburgh Olympus, wiped his pen, the SKETCH BOOK was published. The good canon was right as to our small literary product, but even an Edinburgh Review could not wisely play the prophet.

This Mr. Everett also discovered, for his "great expectations" of Percival were not fulfilled. A desponding student of our poetry recently sighs that Percival is a forgotten poet, and then, seizing a promiscuous assortment of names, exclaims that Charles Sprague, William Wirt, Washington Irving, and Jack Downing may be referred to as forgotten authors. But this is the luxury of woe. Why should not Percival be a forgotten poet? That is to say, what is there in the verse of Percival that should command interest and attention to-day? He was a remarkably accomplished man and a most excellent gentleman, and his name is very familiar in the reading-books of the time when grandfathers of to-day were going to school. But he was a noted poet not because he took rank with his contemporaries—with Byron and Scott and Keats and Shelley and Coleridge and Wordsworth—but because there were very few Americans who wrote verses, and our fathers patriotically stood by them.

Yet because the note of a singer of another day is not heard by us, it does not follow that he did not touch the heart of his time. Grenville Mellen is a forgotten poet also, and Rufus Dawes and John Neal and James G. Eastburn. If the gentle reader will turn to the pages of Kettell, or any early American anthology, he will seem to himself to be walking among tombs. Upon each page might be suitably inscribed, "Sacred to the memory" of

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

almost every one of the singers. But can we say with honest reproach, "forgotten poets"? The loiterer in the wood hears the song of the wood-thrush, but is the hermit-bird wronged, or is his song less sweet, because it is not echoed round the world? Is Fame to be held responsible for not retaining the name of every minstrel who loiters by and touches his harp lightly, and sings a sweet song as he passes on? Is it a hard fate to give pleasure to those who listen because those out of hearing do not applaud?

Many an author may have a tone and a touch which please the ear and taste of his own day, and which, as characteristic of a time, may be only curious to a later taste, like the costumes and dances of our great-grandmothers. But young America, sauntering at the club and at Newport, would not willingly wear the boots of Beau Nash, nor even the cloak of Beau Brummel. The law which provides that nothing shall be lost is equally observable in the realm of literary fame. Is anything of literature lost that deserves longer remembrance? or, more properly, can it be lost? A fair answer to the question can be found in the reply to another, whether delving in Kettell, or in any other anthology, reveals treasures dropped by Fame as precious as those she carries.

There are two ways in which authors survive: one by the constant reading of his works, the other by his name. Is Milton a forgotten author? But how much is he read, compared with the contemporary singers? Is Plato forgotten? Yet how many know him except by name? Irving thus far holds both. Time, like a thrifty husbandman, winnows its wheat, blowing away much chaff, but the golden grain remains. This is true not only of the whole multitude of authors, but of the works of each author. How many of them really survive in the anthology only? ASTORIA and CAPTAIN BONNEVILLE and MAHOMET and other books of Irving will disappear; but KNICKERBOCKER and RIP VAN WINKLE still buffet the relentless wave of oblivion, and their buoyancy is undiminished.

As for Sprague—a mild, genial, charming gentleman, who carried his simple freshness of nature and of manner to the end, and about whose venerable head in State Street always shone the faint halo of early poetic renown—his literary talent was essentially for a day, not for all time. But what then? On Christmas Eve we hear the passing music in the street that supplies for us the song of the waits. Distant and melodious, it pensively recalls the days and the faces and the voices that are no more. But the singers are not the same waits that we heard long ago; still less are they those that the youth of a century ago heard with the same musing melancholy. But the substance of the song, and the emotion which it awakens, and the tender pathos of association—these are all the same. Sprague was a wait of yesterday, of last year, of fifty years ago. Others sing in the street the song that he sang, and, singing, they pass on, and the sweet strain grows fainter, softer, and fainter and fainter, and the echoes answer, "Dying, dying, dying," and it is gone. See how tenderly Mr. Stedman speaks of the troubadours who are



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

singing for us now, whose names are familiar, who trill and twitter in the magazines, and in tasteful and delicate volumes, which seem to tempt the stream of time to suffer such light and graceful barks to slip along unnoted to future ages. But the kindly critic's tone forecasts the fate of the sparkling ventures.

Moore tells us of the Indian maids upon the banks of the Ganges who light a tiny taper, and, on a frail little chip, set it afloat upon the river. It twinkles and dwindles, and flashes and expires. Mr. Stedman watches the minor poets trimming their tapers and carefully launching their chips upon the brimming river. "Pleasant journey," he cries cheerily from the shore, as if he were speaking to hearty Captain Cook going up the side of his great ship, and shaking out his mighty canvas to circumnavigate the globe. "Pleasant journey," cries the cheery critic; but there is a wistful something in his tone that betrays a consciousness of the swift extinction of the pretty perfumed flickering flame.

So scant, indeed, was the blossom of our literature when the SKETCH BOOK was published, that even twenty years later, when Emerson described the college Commencement Day as the only tribute of a country too busy to give to letters any more, Geoffrey Crayon, with the exception of Cooper, had really no American competitors. Long afterwards I met Mr. Irving one morning at the office of Mr. Putnam, his publisher, and in his cordial way, with a twinkle in his eye, and in his pleasant husky voice, he said, "You young literary fellows to-day have a harder time than we old fellows had. You trip over each other's heels; there are so many of you. We had it all our own way. But the account is square, for you can make as much by a lecture as we made by a book." Then, laughing slyly, he added, "A pretty figure I should make lecturing in this voice." Indeed, his modesty forbade him to risk that voice in public addresses.

Irving, I think, made but one speech. It was at the dinner given to him upon his return from Europe in 1832, after his absence of seventeen years. Like other distinguished Americans who have felt the fascination of the old home of their ancestors, and who have not thought that a narrow heart and a barbaric disdain of everything foreign attested the truest patriotism, he was suspected of some alienation from his country. His speech was full of emotion, and his protestation of love for his native land was received with boundless acclamation. But he could not overcome his aversion to speech-making. When Dickens came, and the great dinner was given to him in New York, Irving was predestined to preside. Nobody else could be even mentioned. He was himself conscious of it, and was filled with melancholy forebodings. Professor Felton, of Harvard, compared Irving's haunting terror and dismay at the prospect of this speech to that of Mr. Pickwick at the prospect of leading that dreadful horse all day.

Poor Irving went about muttering, "I shall certainly break down. I know I shall break down." At last the day, the hour, and the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

very moment itself arrived, and he rose to propose the health of Dickens. He began pleasantly and smoothly in two or three sentences, then hesitated, stammered, smiled, and stopped; tried in vain to begin again, then gracefully gave it up, announced the toast— "Charles Dickens, the guest of the nation"—then sank into his chair amid immense applause, whispering to his neighbor, "There, I told you I should break down, and I've done it."

When Thackeray came, Irving consented to preside at a dinner if speeches were absolutely forbidden. The condition was faithfully observed, but it was the most extraordinary instance of American self-command on record. Whenever two or three Americans are gathered together, somebody must make a speech; and no wonder, because somebody always speaks so well. The custom is now so confirmed that it is foolish and useless to oppose it.

I remember a few years since that a dinner was given to a famous American artist long resident abroad, and, as the condition of the attendance of a distinguished guest whose presence was greatly desired, the same agreement was made that Irving required at the Thackeray dinner. It was a company of exceedingly clever and brilliant men, but the gayety of the feast was extinguished by the general consciousness that the situation was abnormal. It was a fruit without flavor, a flower without fragrance, a symphony without melody, a dinner without speeches. But the dinner of which I speak, when the condition of Irving's presence was that there should be no speeches, was the great exception. It was the only dinner of the kind that I have ever known. But Irving's cheery anecdote and gayety, the songs and banter of the company, the happy chat and sparkling wit, took the place of eloquence, and I recall no dinner more delightful.

However scant was our literature when the SKETCH BOOK appeared, it is a mistake to suppose that Irving owes his success to English admiration. That was, undoubtedly, very agreeable to him and to his countrymen. But it is well to correct a misapprehension which is still cherished. Many years ago an English critic said that Irving was much more relished and admired in England than in his own country, and added: "It is only recently critics on the lookout for a literature have elevated him to his proper and almost more than his proper place. This docility to English guidance in the case of their best, or almost their best, prose writer, may perhaps be followed by a similar docility in the case of their best, or almost their best, poet, Poe, whom also England had preceded the United States in recognizing." This comical patron is all the more amusing from his comparative estimate of Poe.

If it were true that Irving's countrymen had not recognized and honored him from the first, it might be suspected that it was because they were descendants of the people who showed little contemporaneous appreciation of Shakespeare. But it is certainly creditable to the literary England which was busy idolizing Scott and Byron, that it recognized also the charming genius of



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Irving, and that Leslie, the painter, could truly write of him, "Geoffrey Crayon is the most fashionable fellow of the day."

But while the English appreciation of Irving is very creditable to England, English conceit must not go so far as to suppose that it was that appreciation which commended him to his own countrymen. At the time when Sydney Smith wrote the article from which we have quoted there was apparently an almost literary sterility in this country, and the professional critics of the critical journals were, as Professor Lounsbury says in his admirable *LIFE OF COOPER*, undoubtedly greatly affected by English opinion. But there was an American reading public independent of the few literary periodicals, as was shown when Cooper's *SPY* was published at the end of 1821, the year in which Bryant's first volume of poems and Dana's *IDLE MAN* appeared. Cooper had published his *PRECAUTION* in 1819, a book which Professor Lounsbury is one of the very few men who are known to have read. He was an unknown author. But the *SPY* was instantly successful. Some of the timid English journals awaited the English opinion, for Murray had declined, upon Gifford's advice, to publish the book. But a publisher was found, and England and Europe followed America in their approval. Cooper always said, and truly, that it was to his countrymen alone that he owed his first success, and his biographer concedes that the success of the *SPY* was determined before the opinion of Europe was known.

Nearly three years before, in May, 1819, the first number of Irving's *SKETCH BOOK* was published. He sent the manuscript to his brother, who had regretted Irving's refusal of a government place in the Navy Board, and to whom he wrote, "My talents are merely literary, and all my habits of thinking, reading, etc., have been in a different direction from that required for the active politician.... In fact, I consider myself at present as making a literary experiment, in the course of which I only care to be kept in bread and cheese. Should it not succeed—should my writings not acquire critical applause—I am content to throw up the pen, and that to any commonplace employment. But if they should succeed, it would repay me for a world of care and privation to be placed among the established authors of my country, and to win the affection of my countrymen."

The first number of the *SKETCH BOOK* was published simultaneously in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Its success was immediate. In September, 1819, Irving wrote: "The manner in which the work has been received, and the eulogiums that have been passed upon it in the American papers and periodical works, have quite overwhelmed me ... I feel almost appalled by such success." The echo of the acclamation reached England. Murray at first declined to publish it, as he had at first declined Cooper's *SPY*. But when England ascertained that the American judgment was correct, and that it was a popular work, Murray was willing to publish it.

The delightful genius which his country had recognized with joy it never ceased proudly and tenderly to honor. When, in 1832, he returned to his native land, as his latest biographer, Mr.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Warner, records, "America greeted her most famous literary man with a spontaneous outburst of love and admiration." It was in his own country that he had published his works. It was his own countrymen whose applause apprised England of the charm of the new author; and it is a humorous mentor who now teaches us that it was our happy docility to English guidance which enabled us to recognize and honor him.

Was it docility to the same beneficent guidance which enabled us to perceive the genius of Carlyle, whose works we first collected, and taught England to read and admire? Did it enable us, also, to inform England that in Robert Browning she had another poet? Was it the same docility which enabled us to reveal to England one of her most philosophic observers in Herbert Spencer, and to offer to Darwin his most appreciative correspondents and interpreters in Chauncey Wright, John Fiske, and Professors Gray and Wyman? There are many offences to be scored against us, but failure to know our own literary genius is not one of them.

Indeed, there is not one great literary fame in America that was not first recognized here. Not to one of them has docility to English literary opinion conducted us, as is often believed. Bryant and Cooper and Irving, Bancroft and Prescott and Motley, Emerson and Channing, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Lowell, Whittier, and Holmes were authors whom we were content to admire and love without knowing or asking whether England had heard of them, or what she thought of them. The "greatness" of Poe England may have preceded us in recognizing. That is an assertion which we are not disposed to dispute. But Walter Scott was not more immediately popular and beloved in England than was Washington Irving in America; and American guidance led England to Scott quite as much as English guidance drew America to Irving.

The first number of the SKETCH BOOK contained the tale of RIP VAN WINKLE, one of the most charming and suggestive of legends, whose hero is an exceedingly pathetic creation. It is, indeed, a mere sketch, a hint, a suggestion; but the imagination readily completes it. It is the more remarkable and interesting because, although the first American literary creation, it is not in the least characteristic of American life, but, on the contrary, is a quiet and delicate satire upon it. The kindly vagabond asserts the charm of loitering idleness in the sweet leisure of woods and fields against the characteristic American excitement of the overflowing crowd and crushing competition of the city, its tremendous energy and incessant devotion to money-getting.

It is not necessary to defend poor Rip, or to justify the morality of his example. It is the imagination that interprets him; and how soothing to those who give their lives to the furious accumulation of the means of living to behold that figure stretched by the brook, or finding nuts with the children, or sauntering homeward at sunset! Later figures of our literature allure us—Hester Prynne, wrapped in her cloak of Nersus, the Scarlet Letter, Hosea Biglow, Evangeline, Uncle Tom, and Topsy—but the charm of this figure is unfading. The new



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

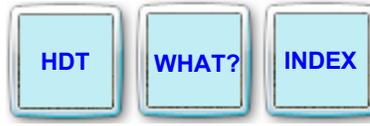
PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

writers introduce us to their worlds, and with pleasure we make the acquaintance of new friends. The new standards of another literary spirit are raised, a fresh literary impulse surrounds us; but it is not thunder that we hear in the Kaatskills on a still summer afternoon it is the distant game of Hendrick Hudson and his men; and on the shore of our river, rattling and roaring with the frenzied haste and endless activity of prosperous industry, still Rip Van Winkle lounges idly by, an unwasted figure of the imagination, the constant and unconscious satirist of American life.

He seems to me peculiarly congenial with the temperament of Irving. He, too, was essentially a loiterer. He had the same freshness of sympathy, the same gentleness of nature, the same taste for leisure and repose. His genius was reminiscent, and, as with all humorists, its climate was that of April. The sun and the shower chased each other. Irving's intellectual habit was emotional rather than thoughtful. In politics and public affairs he took no part, although office was often urged upon him, as when the friends of General Jackson wished him to go as representative to Congress, or President Van Buren offered him the secretaryship of the navy, or Tammany Hall, in New York, unanimously and vociferously nominated him for mayor, an incident in the later annals of the city which transcends the most humorous touch in KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY. He was appointed secretary of legation in England in 1829, and in 1842, when Daniel Webster was secretary of state, minister to Spain.

But what we call practical politics was always distasteful to him. The spirit which I once heard laugh at a young man new in politics because he treated "the boys" with his own good cigars instead of buying bad ones at the saloon—the spirit which I once heard assure a man of public ability and fitness that he could never reach political office unless he pushed himself, and paid agents to buy votes, because no man could expect an office to be handed to him on a gold plate—the spirit which, to my knowledge, displayed a handful of bank-notes in the anteroom of a legislature, and exclaimed, "That's what makes the laws!"—this was a spirit which, like other honorable men and patriotic Americans, Irving despised.

He was a gentleman of manly feeling and of moral refinement, who had had glimpses of what is called "the inside" of politics; and, as he believed these qualities would make participation in politics uncomfortable, he abstained. To those of us who are wiser than he, who know that simple honesty and public spirit and self-respect and contempt of sneaking and fawning and bribery and crawling are the conditions of political preferment, Irving, in not perceiving this, must naturally seem to be a queer, wrong-headed, and rather super-celestial American, who had lived too much in the heated atmosphere of European aristocracies and altogether too little in the pure and bracing air of American ward politics and caucuses and conventions. To use an old New York phrase, Irving preferred to stroll and fish and chat with Rip Van Winkle rather than to "run wid der



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

machine".

THE SKETCH BOOK made Irving famous, and with its predecessor, KNICKERBOCKER, and its successor, BRACEBRIDGE HALL, disclosed the essential quality of his genius. But all these books performed another and greater service than that of winning the world to read an American book: this was the restoration of a kindlier feeling between the two countries which, by all ties, should be the two most friendly countries on the globe. The books were written when our old bitterness of feeling against England had been renewed by the later war. In the thirty years since the Revolution ended we had patriotically fostered the quarrel with John Bull. Our domestic politics had turned largely upon that feeling, and the game of French and English was played almost as fiercely upon our side of the ocean as upon their own.

The great epoch of our extraordinary material development and prosperity had not opened, and, even had John Bull been friendlier than he was, it would have been the very flattery of falsehood had he complimented our literature, our science, our art. Sydney Smith's question, "Who reads an American book?" was contemptuous and exasperating. But here was an American who wrote books which John Bull was delighted to read, and was compelled to confess that they depicted the most characteristic and attractive aspects of his own life with more delicate grace than that of any living Englishman.

It was Irving who recalled the old English Christmas. It was his cordial and picturesque description of the great holiday of Christendom which preceded and stimulated Dickens's CHRISTMAS CAROLS and Thackeray's HOLIDAY TALES. It was the genial spirit of Christmas, native to his gentle heart and his happy temperament, which made Irving, as Thackeray called him, a peacemaker between the mother-country and her proud and sensitive offspring of the West. He showed John Bull that England is ours as well as his. "Old fellow," he said, "you cannot help yourself. It is the same blood that flows in our veins, the same language that we speak, the same traditions that we cherish. If you love liberty, so do we; if you will see fair play, so will we. It is natural to you, so it is to us. We cannot escape our blood. Shakespeare is not your poet more than ours. If your ancestors danced round the Maypole, so did our ancestors in your ancestors' shoes. If Old England cherished Christmas and New England did not, Bradford and Endicott and Cotton were Englishmen, not Americans. If old English life and customs and traditions are dear to you, listen to my story, and judge whether they are less dear to us." Then, with a merry smile, the young stranger holds out his hand to John Bull, and exclaims, "Behold, here is my arm! I bare it before your eyes, and here it is—it is the strawberry-mark; come to my bosom, I am your long-lost brother."

It was an incalculable service which Irving rendered in renewing a common feeling between England and America. It was involuntary, because in writing he had no such purpose. He was only following the bent of his own taste, and his works reflected only his individual sympathies. But it was this very fact—it was



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the English instinct in the American, the appreciation native in the heart of the Western stranger of the true poetic charm of England—which was the spell of the magician. Irving had the same imaginative enthusiasm for traditional and poetic England that Burke had for political England. Indeed, it is an England which never actually existed except in the English and American imagination. The coarse, mercenary, material England which Lecky photographs in his history of the eighteenth century was the same England in which Burke lived, and which his glowing imagination exalted into the magnificent image of constitutional liberty before which he bowed his great head. So with the old England that Irving drew. He saw with poetic fancy a rural Arcadia, and reproduced the vision with airy grace and called it England. No wonder that John Bull was delighted with an artist who could paint so fascinating a picture, and write under it John Bull's portrait.

To change a word in Marvell's noble lines, when Irving was in England

"He nothing common saw or mean Upon that memorable scene."

Only an American could have seen England as he described it, and invested it with an enchantment which the mass of Englishmen had neither suspected nor perceived. Irving's instinct was that of Hawthorne afterwards, who called England "Our Old Home". There is a foolish American habit growing patriotically out of our old contentions with England, and politically out of our desire to conciliate the Irish vote in this country, of branding as servile and un-American the natural susceptibility of people of English descent, but natives of another land, to the charm of their ancestral country. But the American is greatly to be pitied who thinks to prove the purity of his patriotism by flouting the land in which he has a legitimate right, the land of Alfred and Runnymede, of Chaucer and Shakespeare and Milton, of Hampden and Cromwell, of Newton and Bunyan, of Somers and Chatham and Edmund Burke, the cradle of constitutional liberty and parliamentary government. If the great body of the literature of our language in which we delight, if the sources of our law and politics, if the great exploits of contemporary scholarship and science, are largely beyond our boundaries, yet are legitimately ours as well as all that we have ourselves achieved, why should we spurn any of our just and hereditary share in the great English traditions of civilization and freedom?

Irving returned to America in 1832, and here he afterwards remained, except during his absence as minister in Spain. In an earlier visit to that country he had felt the spell of its romantic history, and had written the LIFE OF COLUMBUS, the CONQUEST OF GRANADA, and the CHRONICLES OF THE ALHAMBRA. During all his later years he was busy with his pen, and, while the modest author had risen to the chief place in American literature, its later constellation was rising into the heavens.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

But his intrinsic modesty never disappeared either from the works or the character of the benign writer. In the height of his renown there was no kind of presumption or conceit in his simple and generous breast. Some time after his return from his long absence in Europe, and before Putnam became his publisher, Irving found some disinclination upon the part of publishers to issue new editions of his books, and he expressed, with entire good humor, the belief that he had had his day.

It is doubtless true, as BLACKWOOD remarked, with what we may call BLACKWOOD courtesy, when Mr. Lowell was American minister in England, that Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Addison, Pope, and so many more "will not be replaced by Mr. Washington Irving and Mr. Lowell". But it is equally true that, since Swift, BLACKWOOD cannot find in English literature political satire more trenchant, humorous, forcible, and effective than the BIGLOW PAPERS, and nothing in Swift more original. It is said that it is ludicrous to compare the mild humor of Rip Van Winkle with the "robustious fun of Swift". But this is a curious "derangement of epitaphs". Swift has wit, and satiric power, and burning invective, and ribaldry, and caustic, scornful humor; but fun, in any just sense, he has not. He is too fierce to be funny. The tender and imaginative play of Rip Van Winkle are wholly beyond the reach of Swift.

Irving and other American writers are not the rivals of their British associates in the literature of the English language—they are worthy comrades. Wordsworth and Byron are not Shakespeare and Milton, but they are nevertheless Wordsworth and Byron, and their place is secure. So the brows of Irving and Cooper, of Bryant and Longfellow, and of Lowell, of Emerson and Hawthorne do not crave the laurels of any other master. The perturbed spirit of BLACKWOOD may rest in the confident assurance that no generous and intelligent student of our literature admires Gibbon less because he enjoys Macaulay, or depreciates Bacon because he delights in Emerson, or denies the sting of Gulliver because he feels the light touch of Knickerbocker. It is with good fame as with true love:

"True love in this differs from gold and clay,
That to divide is not to take away."

In the year that Irving published the SKETCH BOOK, Cooper published his first novel, and two years before Bryant's *Thanatopsis* had been published. When, forty years afterwards, in the last year of his life, the last volume of the LIFE OF WASHINGTON was issued, Irving and Bryant and Cooper were no longer the solitary chiefs of our literature. An illustrious company had received the torch unextinguished from their hands—Whittier, Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell, Bancroft, Prescott, Motley, Parkman, Mrs. Stowe, had all taken their places, yet all gladly and proudly acknowledged Irving as the patriarch. It is our happy fortune that these names, of which we are all proud, are not those of men of letters only, but of typical American citizens. The old traditions of the literary

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

life, the mad roustering, the dissipation, Grub Street, the sponging-house, the bailiff, the garret, and the jail, genius that fawns for place and flatters for hire, the golden talent wrapped in a napkin, and often a dirty and ragged napkin, have vanished in our American annals of letters. Pure, upright, faithful, industrious, honorable, and honored, there is scarcely one American author of eminence who may not be counted as a good and useful citizen of the Republic of the Union, and a shining light of the Republic of Letters.

Of Washington Irving, as of so many of this noble company, it is especially true that the author was the man. The healthy fun and merry satire of Diedrich Knickerbocker, the sweet humor and quick sympathy and simple pathos of Geoffrey Crayon, were those of the modest master of Sunnyside. Every literary man of Irving's time, whether old or young, had nothing but affectionate praise of his artless urbanity and exhaustless good-nature. These qualities are delightfully reflected in Thackeray's stories of him in the ROUNDAABOUT PAPERS upon Irving and Macaulay, "the Goldsmith and the Gibbon of our time".

"He came to one of my lectures in Washington," Thackeray says, "and the retiring President, Mr. Fillmore, and his successor, Mr. Pierce, were present. 'Two kings of Brentford smelling at one rose,' said Irving, with his good-natured smile. In his little bower of a home at Sunnyside he was always accessible. One English newspaper man came and introduced himself, and partook of luncheon with the family, and, while the host fell into a little doze, as was his habit, the wary Englishman took a swift inventory of everything in the house, and served up the description to the British public, including the nap of his entertainer. At another time, Irving said, 'Two persons came to me, and one held me in conversation while the other miscreant took my portrait.'" Thackeray tells these little stories with admiring sympathy. His manly heart always grew tender over his fellow-authors who had no acrid drop in their humor, and Irving's was as sweet as dew.

It is late for a fresh compliment to be paid to him, but the London Spectator paid it in 1883, the year of his centenary, by saying, "Since the time of Pope more than one hundred essayists have attempted to excel or to equal the Tatler and Spectator. One alone, in a few of his best efforts, may be said to have rivalled them, and he is Washington Irving." The Spectator adds that one has surpassed them, "the incomparable Elia".

Irving's temperament, however, was much more congenial with that of the early essayists than Charles Lamb's, and his pictures of English country life in BRACEBRIDGE HALL have just the delicate, imaginative touch of the sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley. But in treating distinctively English topics, however airy and vivid his touch may be, Irving is manifestly enthralled by his admiration for the literary masters of the Anne time, and by the spirit of their writing. It is in the Knickerbocker world that he is characteristically at home. Indeed, it is his humorous and graphic fancy more than the sober veracity of history which has



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

given popular and perpetual form to the early life of New York, and it is Irving who has enriched it with romantic tradition such as suffuses the story of no other State.

The bay, the river, the city, the Kaatskill Mountains, as Choate said of Faneuil Hall and Webster, breathe and burn of him. He has charmed the Hudson with a peculiar spell. The quaint life of its old Dutch villages, the droll legend of Sleepy Hollow, the pathetic fate of Rip Van Winkle, the drowsy wisdom of Communipaw, the marvellous municipality of New Amsterdam, and the Nose of Anthony guarding the Highlands, with the myriad sly and graphic allusions and descriptions strewn all through his books, have made the river Irving's river, and the state Irving's state, and the city Irving's city, so that the first instinctive question of every lover of Irving from beyond the state, as he enters Central Park and beholds its memorial statues, is, "Where is the statue of Irving?"

Unhappily, echo, and not the park guide-book, answers. There is, indeed, a bust, and, in a general sense, "Si monumentum" may serve for a reply. From that point of view, indeed, Westminster Abbey, as the monument of English heroes in letters and arms, in the Church and the State, would be superfluous. But the abbey is a shrine of pilgrimage because of the very fact that it is the burial-place of famous Englishmen. The Central Park, in New York, is already a Walhalla of famous men, and the statue that would first suggest itself as peculiarly fitting for the Park is of the New-Yorker who first made New York distinctively famous in literature—the New-Yorker whose kindly genius first made American literature respected by the world.

Reversing the question, "Where be the bad people buried?" the wondering pilgrim in the Park asks, "Where be Irving and Bryant and Cooper?" They were not Americans only, but, by birth or choice, New-Yorkers, and the three distinctive figures of our early literature. It was very touching to see the venerable Bryant, in the soft May sunshine, when the statue of Halleck was unveiled, standing with bare head and speaking of his old friend and comrade. But who that listened could not see, through tender mists of years, the grave and reverend form of the speaker himself, transformed to marble or bronze, sitting serene forever beneath the shadowing trees, side by side with the poet of Faust and the worshipper of Highland Mary?

But Bryant would have been the first to name Washington Irving as the most renowned distinctively American man of letters whose figure, reproduced characteristically and with simple quaintness, should decorate the Park. To a statue of Washington Irving all the gates should open, as every heart would open, in welcome. That half-humorous turn of the head and almost the twinkling eye, that brisk and jaunty air, that springing step, that modest and gentle and benign presence, all these could be suggested by the artist, and in their happy combination the pleased loiterer would perceive old Diedrich Knickerbocker and the summer dreamer of the Hudson legends, the charming biographer of Columbus and of Goldsmith, the cheerful gossip of

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Wolfert's Roost, and the mellow and courteous Geoffrey Crayon, who first taught incredulous Europe that beyond the sea there were men also, and that at last all the world must read an American book.

Irving was seventy-six years old when he died, late in 1859. Born in the year in which the Revolution ended, he died on the eve of the civil war. His life exactly covered the period during which the American republic was an experiment. It ended just as the invincible power of free institutions was to be finally demonstrated. His life had been one of singular happiness, both of temperament and circumstance. His nature was too simple and gentle to breed rivalries or to tolerate animosities. Through the sharpest struggles of our politics he passed without bitterness of feeling and with universal respect, and his eyes happily closed before seeing a civil war which, although the most righteous of all wars, would have broken his heart. The country was proud of him: the older authors knew in him not a rival, but a friend, the younger loved him as a father. Such love, I think, is better than fame. On the day of his burial in the ground overlooking the Hudson and the valley of Sleepy Hollow, unable to reach Tarrytown in time for the funeral, I came down the shore of the river which he loved and immortalized. As the train hastened and wound along, I saw the Catskills draped in autumnal mist, not concealing, but irradiating them with lingering and pathetic splendor. Far away towards the south the river-bank on which his home lay was Sunnyside still, for the sky was cloudless and soft with serene sunshine. I could not but remember his last words to me, more than a year before, when his book was finished and his health was failing: "I am getting ready to go; I am shutting up my doors and windows", and I could not but feel that they were all open now, and bright with the light of eternal morning.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1890

At the John Brown homestead in upstate New York, the body of [Dangerfield Newby](#) was reburied.



[George William Curtis](#) was appointed as the Chancellor of the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York (he would still be in this position at the time of his death).



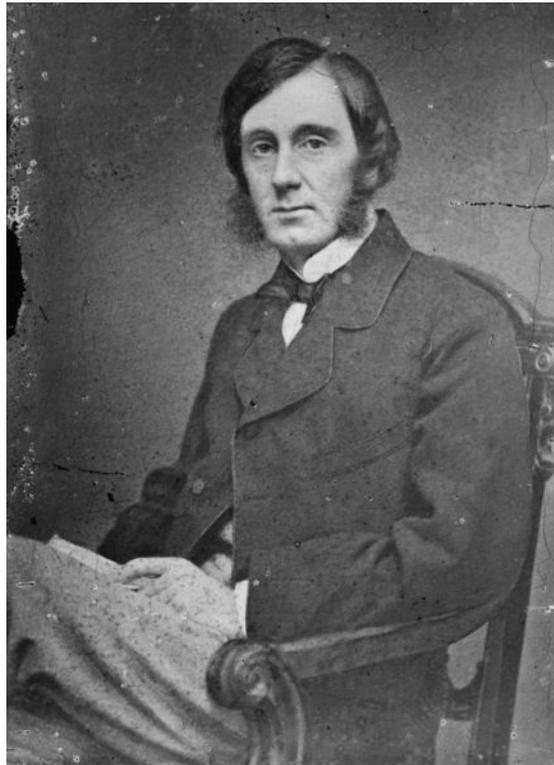
THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1891

[George William Curtis](#) placed an article in [Harper's Magazine](#) about Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.. (This would be republished in 1895 as part of Curtis's LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS.)





PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES⁴¹

In 1817 Bryant's "Thanatopsis" was published in the North American Review. Richard Henry Dana, the elder, who was then one of the editors, said that it could not be an American poem, for there was no American who could have written it. But it does not seem to have produced a remarkable impression upon the public mind. The planet rose silently and unobserved. Ten years afterwards, in 1827, Dana's own "Buccaneer" was published, and Christopher North, in Blackwood, saluted it as "by far the most original and powerful of American poetical compositions". But it produced in this country no general effect which is remembered. Nine years later, in 1836, Holmes's "Metrical Essay" was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard College, and was as distinct an event in literary circles as Edward Everett's oration before the same society in 1824, or Ralph Waldo Emerson's in 1837, or Horace Bushnell's in 1848, or Wendell Phillips's in 1881. Holmes was then twenty-seven years old, and had just returned from his professional studies in Europe, where, as in his college days at Cambridge, where he was born, he had toyed with many Muses, yet still, with native Yankee prudence, held fast the hand of Æsculapius. His poem, like the address of Emerson in the next year, showed how completely the modern spirit of refined and exquisite literary cultivation and of free and undaunted thought had superseded the uncouth literary form and stern and rigid Calvinism of the Mathers and early Boston.

The melody and grace of Goldsmith's line, but with a fresh local spirit, have not been more perfectly reproduced, nor with a more distinct revelation of a new spirit, than in this poem. It is retrospective and contemplative, but it is also full of the buoyancy of youth, of the consciousness of poetic skill, and of blithe anticipation. Its tender reminiscence and occasional fond elegiac strain are but clouds of the morning. Its literary form is exquisite, and its general impression is that of bright, elastic, confident power. It was by no means, however, a first work, nor was the poet unknown in his own home. But the "Metrical Essay" introduced him to a larger public, while the fugitive pieces already known were the assurance that the more important poem was not a happy chance, but the development of a quality already proved. Seven years before, in 1829, the year he graduated at Harvard, Holmes began to contribute to The Collegian, a college magazine. Two years later, in 1831, appeared the New England Magazine, in which the young writer, as he might himself say, took the road with his double team of verse and prose, holding the ribbons with unsurpassed lightness and grace and skill, now for two generations guiding those fleet and well-groomed coursers, which still show their heels to

41. [George William Curtis](#), OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, [Harper's Magazine](#), Vol. LXXXIII., 1882, reprinted in 1895 in [LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS](#).



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

panting rivals, the prancing team behind which we have all driven and are still driving with constant and undiminished delight.

Mr. F. B. Sanborn, whose tribute to Holmes on his eightieth birthday shows how thorough was his research for that labor of love, tells us that his first contribution to the New England Magazine was published in the third or September number of the first year, 1831. It was a copy of verses of an unpromising title— "To an Insect". But that particular insect, seemingly the creature of a day, proved to be immortal, for it was the katydid, whose voice is perennial:

"Thou sayest an undisputed thing
In such a solemn way."

In the contributions of the young graduate the high spirits of a frolicsome fancy effervesce and sparkle. But their quality of a new literary tone and spirit is very evident. The ease and fun of these bright prolusions, without impudence or coarseness, the poetic touch and refinement, were as unmistakable as the brisk pungency of the gibe. The stately and scholarly Boston of Channing, Dana, Everett, and Ticknor might indeed have looked askance at the literary claims of such lines as these "Thoughts in Dejection" of a poet wondering if the path to Parnassus lay over Charlestown or Chelsea bridge:

"What is a poet's fame?
Sad hints about his reason,
And sadder praise from gazetteers,
To be returned in season.

"For him the future holds
No civic wreath above him;
Nor slated roof nor varnished chair,
Nor wife nor child to love him.

"Maid of the village inn,
Who workest woe on satin,
The grass in black,
The graves in green,
The epitaph in Latin,

"Trust not to them who say
In stanzas they adore thee;
Oh, rather sleep in church-yard clay,
With maudlin cherubs o'er thee!"

The lines to the katydid, with "L'Inconnue"—

"Is thy name Mary, maiden fair?"—

published in the magazine at about the same time, disclose Holmes's natural melody and his fine instinct for literary form. But his lyrical fervor finds its most jubilant expression at this time in "Old Ironsides", written at the turning-point in



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the poet's life, when he had renounced the study of the law, and was deciding upon medicine as his profession. The proposal to destroy the frigate Constitution, fondly and familiarly known as "Old Ironsides", kindled a patriotic frenzy in the sensitive Boston boy, which burst forth into the noble lyric,

"Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!"

There had been no American poetry with a truer lilt of song than these early verses, and there has been none since. Two years later, in 1833, Holmes went to complete his medical studies in Paris, and the lines to a grisette—

"Ah, Clemence, when I saw thee last
Trip down the Rue de Seine!"—

published upon his return in his first volume of verse, are a charming illustration of his lyrical genius. His limpid line never flowed more clearly than in this poem. It has the pensive tone of all his best poems of the kind, but it is the half-happy sadness of youth.

All these early verses have an assured literary form. The scope and strain were new, but their most significant quality was not melody nor pensive grace, but humor. This was ingrained and genuine. Sometimes it was rollicking, as in "The Height of the Ridiculous" and "The September Gale". Sometimes it was drolly meditative, as in "Evening, by a Tailor". Sometimes it was a tearful smile of the deepest feeling, as in the most charming and perfect of these poems, "The Last Leaf", in which delicate and searching pathos is exquisitely fused with tender gayety. The haunting music and meaning of the lines,

"The mossy marbles rest
On the lips that he has pressed
In their bloom,
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
On the tomb",

lingered always in the memory of Lincoln, whose simple sincerity and native melancholy would instinctively have rejected any false note. It is in such melody as that of the "Last Leaf" that we feel how truly the grim old Puritan strength has become sweetness.

To this poetic grace and humor and music, which at that time were unrivalled, although the early notes of a tuneful choir of awakening songsters were already heard, the young Holmes added the brisk and crisp and sparkling charm of his prose. From the beginning his coursers were paired, and with equal pace they have constantly held the road. In the New England Magazine for November in the same year, 1831, a short paper was published called the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table". The tone of placid dogmatism and infallible finality with which the bulls of the domestic pope are delivered is delightfully familiar. This earliest one has perhaps more of the cardinal's preliminary



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

scarlet than of the mature papal white, but in its first note the voice of the Autocrat is unmistakable:

"Somebody was rigmarolling the other day about the artificial distinctions of society. 'Madam,' said I, 'society is the same in all large places. I divide it thus:

1. People of cultivation who live in large houses.
2. People of cultivation who live in small houses.
3. People without cultivation who live in large houses.
4. People without cultivation who live in small houses.
5. Scrubs.'

An individual at the upper end of the table turned pale and left the room as I finished with the monosyllable."

"'Tis sixty years since", but that drop is of the same characteristic transparency and sparkle as in the latest Tea-Cup.

The time in which the New England Magazine was published, and these firstlings of Holmes's muse appeared, was one of prophetic literary stir in New England. There were other signs than those in letters of the breaking-up of the long Puritan winter. A more striking and extreme reaction from the New England tradition could not well be imagined than that which was offered by Nathaniel Parker Willis, of whom Holmes himself says "that he was at the time something between a remembrance of Count D'Orsay and an anticipation of Oscar Wilde". Willis was a kindly saunterer, the first Boston dandy, who began his literary career with grotesque propriety as a sentimentalizer of Bible stories, a performance which Lowell gayly called inspiration and water. In what now seems a languid, Byronic way, he figured as a Yankee Pelham or Vivian Grey. Yet in his prose and verse there was a tacit protest against the old order, and that it was felt is shown by the bitterness of ridicule and taunt and insult with which, both publicly and privately, this most amiable youth was attacked, who, at that time, had never said an ill-natured word of anybody, and who was always most generous in his treatment of his fellow authors.

The epoch of Willis and the New England Magazine is very notable in the history of American literature. The traditions of that literature were grave and even sombre. Irving, indeed, in his Knickerbocker and Rip Van Winkle and Ichabod Crane, and in the general gayety of his literary touch, had emancipated it from strict allegiance to the solemnity of its precedents, and had lighted it with a smile. He supplied a quality of grace and cheerfulness which it had lacked, and without unduly magnifying his charming genius, it had a natural, fresh, and smiling spirit, which, amid the funereal, theologic gloom, suggests the sweetness and brightness of morning. In its effect it is a breath of Chaucer. When Knickerbocker was published, Joel Barlow's "Hasty-Pudding" was the chief achievement of American literary humor. Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner were not yet "the wits of Hartford". Those who bore that name held it by brevet.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Indeed, the humor of our early literature is pathetic. In no State was the ecclesiastical dominance more absolute than in Connecticut, and nothing shows more truly how absolute and grim it was than the fact that the performances of the "wits" in that State were regarded—gravely, it must have been—as humor.

For a long time there was no vital response in New England to the chord touched by Irving. Yet Boston was then unquestionably the chief seat of American letters. Dennie had established his Portfolio in Philadelphia in 1801, but in 1805 the Monthly Anthology, which was subsequently reproduced in the North American Review, appeared in Boston, and was the organ or illustration of the most important literary and intellectual life of the country at that time. The opening of the century saw the revolt against the supremacy of the old Puritan Church of New England—a revolt within its own pale. This clerical protest against the austere dogmas of Calvinism in its ancient seat was coincident with the overthrow in the national government of Federalism and the political triumph of Jefferson and his party. Simultaneously also with the religious and political disturbance was felt the new intellectual and literary impulse of which the Anthology was the organ. But the religious and literary movements were not in sympathy with the political revolution, although they were all indications of emancipation from the dominance of old traditions, the mental restlessness of a people coming gradually to national consciousness.

Mr. Henry Adams, in remarking upon this situation in his history of Madison's administration, points out that leaders of the religious protest which is known as the Unitarian Secession in New England were also leaders in the intellectual and literary awakening of the time, but had no sympathy with Jefferson or admiration of France. Bryant's father was a Federalist; the club that conducted the Anthology and the North American Review was composed of Federalists; and the youth whose "Thanatopsis" is the chief distinction of the beginning of that Review, and the morning star of American poetry, was, as a boy of thirteen, the author of the "Embargo", a performance in which the valiant Jack gave the giant Jefferson no quarter. The religious secession took its definite form in Dr. Channing's sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks in Baltimore in 1819, which powerfully arraigned the dominant theology of the time. This was the year in which Irving's SKETCH BOOK was published. Bryant's first volume followed a year or two later, and our distinctive literary epoch opened.

Ten years afterwards, when Bryant had left New England, Dr. Channing was its most dignified and characteristic name in literature. But he was distinctively a preacher, and his serene and sweet genius never unbent into a frolicsome mood. As early as 1820 a volume of Robert Burns's poems fell into Whittier's hands like a spark into tinder, and the flame that has so long illuminated and cheered began to blaze. It was, however, a softened ray, not yet the tongue of lyric fire which it afterwards became. But none of the poets smiled as they sang.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

The Muse of New England was staid and stately—or was she, after all, not a true daughter of Jove, but a tenth Muse, an Anne Bradstreet? The rollicking laugh of Knickerbocker was a solitary sound in the American air until the blithe carol of Holmes returned a kindred echo.

Willis was the sign of the breaking spell. But his light touch could not avail. The Puritan spell could be broken only by Puritan force, and it is the lineal descendants of Puritanism, often the sons of clergymen—Emerson and Holmes and Longfellow and Hawthorne and Whittier—who emancipated our literature from its Puritan subjection. In 1829 Willis, as editor of Peter Parley's Token and the American Monthly Magazine, was aided by Longfellow and Hawthorne and Motley and Hildreth and Mrs. Child and Mrs. Sigourney, and the elder Bishop Doane, Park Benjamin and George B. Cheever, Albert Pike and Rufus Dawes, as contributors. Willis himself was a copious writer, and in the American Monthly first appeared the titles of "Inkling of Adventure" and "Pencilings by the Way", which he afterwards reproduced for some of his best literary work. The Monthly failed, and in 1831, the year that the New England Magazine began, it was merged in the New York Mirror, of which Willis became associate editor, leaving his native city forever, and never forgiving its injustice towards him. In the heyday of his happy social career in England he wrote to his mother, "The mines of Golconda would not tempt me to return and live in Boston." This was the literary situation when Holmes was precluding in the magazine. The acknowledged poets in Boston were Dana, Sprague, and Pierpont. Are these names familiar to the readers of this essay? How much of their poetry can those readers repeat? No one knows more surely than he who writes of a living author how hard it is to forecast fame, and how dangerous is prophecy. When Edward Everett saluted Percival's early volume as the harbinger of literary triumphs, and Emerson greeted Walt Whitman at "the opening of a great career", they generalized a strong personal impression. They identified their own preference with the public taste. On the other hand, Hawthorne says truly of himself that he was long the most obscure man of letters in America. Yet he had already published the TWICE-TOLD TALES and the MOSESSES FROM AN OLD MANSE, the two series of stories in which the character and quality of his genius are fully disclosed. But although Longfellow hailed the publication of the first collection as the rising of a new star, the tone of his comment is not that of the discoverer of a planet shining for all, but of an individual poetic pleasure. The prescience of fame is very infrequent. The village gazes in wonder at the return of the famous man who was born on the farm under the hill, and whose latent greatness nobody suspected; while the youth who printed verses in the corner of the county paper, and drew the fascinated glances of palpitating maidens in the meetinghouse, and seemed to the farmers to have associated himself at once with Shakespeare and Tupper and the great literary or "littery folks," never emerges from the poet's department in the paper in which unconsciously

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

and forever he has been cornered. It would be a grim Puritan jest if that department had been named from the corner of the famous dead in Westminster Abbey.

If the Boston of sixty years ago had ventured to prophesy for itself literary renown, it is easy to see upon what reputations of the time it would have rested its claims. But if the most familiar names of that time are familiar no longer, if Kettell and poems from the United States Gazette seem to be cemeteries of departed reputations, the fate of the singers need not be deplored as if Fame had forgotten them. Fame never knew them. Fame does not retain the name of every minstrel who passes singing. But to say that Fame does not know them is not dispraise. They sang for the hearers of their day, as the players played. Is it nothing to please those who listen, because those who are out of hearing do not stop and applaud? If we recall the names most eminent in our literature, whether they were destined for a longer or shorter date, we shall see that they are undeniably illustrations of the survival of the fittest. Turning over the noble volumes of Stedman and Miss Hutchinson, in which, as on a vast plain, the whole line of American literature is drawn up for inspection and review, and marches past like the ghostly midnight columns of Napoleon's grand army, we cannot quarrel with the verdict of time, nor feel that injustice has been done to Themis or to Cawdor. There are singers of a day, but not less singers because they are of a day. The insect that flashes in the sunbeam does not survive like the elephant. The splendor of the most gorgeous butterfly does not endure with the faint hue of the hills that gives Athens its Pindaric name. And there are singers who do not sing. What says Holmes, with eager sympathy and pity, in one of his most familiar and most beautiful lyrics?—

"We count the broken lyres that rest
Where the sweet waiting singers slumber,
But o'er their silent sister's breast
The wild flowers who will stoop to number?

A few can touch the magic string,
And noisy fame is proud to win them;
Alas, for those that never sing,
And die with all their music in them!"

But as he says also that the capacities of listeners at lectures differ widely, some holding a gallon, others a quart, and others only a pint or a gill, so of the singers who are not voiceless, their voices differ in volume. Some are organs that fill the air with glorious and continuous music; some are trumpets blowing a ringing peal, then sinking into silence; some are harps of melancholy but faint vibration; still others are flutes and pipes, whose sweet or shrill note has a dying fall. Some are heard as the wind or sea is heard; some like the rustle of leaves; some like the chirp of birds. Some are heard long and far away; others across the field; others hardly across the



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

street. Fame is perhaps but the term of a longer or shorter fight with oblivion; but it is the warrior who "drinks delight of battle with his peers", and holds his own in the fray, who finally commands the eye and the heart. There were poets pleasantly singing to our grandfathers whose songs we do not hear, but the unheeded voice of the youngest songster of that time is a voice we heed to-day. Holmes wrote but two "Autocrat" papers in the New England Magazine—one in November, 1831, and the other in February, 1832. The year after the publication of the second paper he went to Paris, where for three years he studied medicine, not as a poet, but as a physician, and he returned in 1836 an admirably trained and highly accomplished professional man. But the Phi Beta Kappa poem of that year, like the tender lyric to Clemence upon leaving Paris, shows not only that the poet was not dead, but that he did not even sleep. The "Metrical Essay" was the serious announcement that the poet was not lost in the man of science, an announcement which was followed by the publication in the same year (1836) of his first volume of poems. This was three years before the publication of Longfellow's first volume of verses, *THE VOICES OF THE NIGHT*. Holmes's devotion to the two Muses of science and letters was uniform and untiring, as it was also to the two literary forms of verse and prose. But although a man of letters, like the other eminent men of letters in New England, he had no trace of the Bohemian. Willis was the only noted literary figure that ever mistook Boston for a seaport in Bohemia, and he early discovered his error. The fraternity which has given to Boston its literary primacy has been always distinguished not only for propriety of life and respectability in its true sense of worthiness and respect, but for the possession of the virtues of fidelity, industry, and good sense, which have carried so far both the influence and the renown of New England. Nowhere has the Bohemian tradition been more happily and completely shattered than in the circle to which Holmes returned from his European studies to take his place. American citizenship in its most attractive aspect has been signally illustrated in that circle, and it is not without reason that the government has so often selected from it our chief American representatives in other countries.

Dr. Holmes, as he was now called, and has continued to be called, practised his profession in Boston; but whether because of some lurking popular doubt of a poet's probable skill as a physician, or from some lack of taste on his part for the details of professional practice, like his kinsman, Wendell Phillips, and innumerable other young beginners, he sometimes awaited a professional call longer than was agreeable. But he wrote medical papers, and was summoned to lecture to the medical school at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, and later at Pittsfield in Massachusetts, while his unflinching charm as an occasional poet gave him a distinctive name. Holmes's felicity in occasional poems is extraordinary. The "Metrical Essay" was the first and chief of the long series of such verses, among



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

which the songs of '29, the poems addressed year after year to his college classmates of that year, have a delightful and endless grace, tenderness, wit, and point. Pegasus draws well in harness the triumphant chariot of '29, in which the lucky classmates of the poet move to a unique and happy renown.

As a reader, Holmes was the permanent challenge of Mrs. Browning's sighing regret that poets never read their own verses to their worth. Park Benjamin, who heard the Phi Beta Kappa poem, said of its delivery: "A brilliant, airy, and *spirituelle* manner varied with striking flexibility to the changing sentiment of the poem, now deeply impassioned, now gayly joyous and nonchalant, and anon springing up into almost an actual flight of rhapsody, rendered the delivery of this poem a rich, nearly a dramatic entertainment." This was no less true in later years when he read some of his poems in New York at Bishop Potter's, then rector of Grace Church, or of the reading of the poem at the doctors' dinner given to him by the physicians of New York a little later.

Holmes's readings were like improvisations. The poems were expressed and interpreted by the whole personality of the poet. The most subtle touch of thought, the melody of fond regret, the brilliant passage of description, the culmination of latent fun exploding in a keen and resistless jest, all these were vivified in the sensitive play of manner and modulation of tone of the reader, so that a poem by Holmes at the Harvard Commencement dinner was one of the anticipated delights which never failed. This temperament implied an oratorical power which naturally drew the poet into the lecture lyceum when it was in its prime, in the decade between 1850 and 1860. During that time the popular lecture was a distinct and effective public force, and not the least of its services was its part in instructing and training the public conscience for the great contest of the Civil War. The year 1831, in which Holmes's literary activity began, was also the year on whose first day the first number of Garrison's Liberator appeared, and the final period of the slavery controversy opened. But neither this storm of agitation nor the transcendental mist that a few years later overhung intellectual New England greatly affected the poet.

In the first number of the "Autocrat" there is a passage upon puns, which, crackling with fun, shows his sensitive scepticism. The "Autocrat" says: "In a case lately decided before Miller, J., Doe presented Roe a subscription paper, and urged the claims of suffering humanity. Roe replied by asking when charity was like a top. It was in evidence that Doe preserved a dignified silence. Roe then said, 'When it begins to hum.' There are temperaments of a refined suspiciousness to which, when the plea of reform is urged, the claims of suffering humanity at once begin to hum. The very word reform irritates a peculiar kind of sensibility, as a red flag stirs the fury of a bull. A noted party leader said, with inexpressible scorn, 'When Dr. Johnson defined the word patriotism as the last refuge of a scoundrel, he had not learned the infinite possibilities of the word refo-

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

a-r-m.'"

The acridity of this jest is wholly unknown to the "Autocrat", who has moved always with reform, if not always with reformers, and whose protest against bigotry is as searching as it is sparkling. Not only has his ear been quick to detect the hum of Mr. Honeythunder's loud appeal, but his eye to catch the often ludicrous aspect of honest whimsey. During all the early years of his literary career he flew his flashing darts at all the "isms", and he fell under the doubt and censure of those earnest children of the time whom the gay and clever sceptics derided as apostles of the newness. When Holmes appeared upon the lecture platform it was to discourse of literature or science, or to treat some text of social manners or morals with a crisp Poor Richard sense and mother wit, and a brilliancy of illustration, epigram, and humor that fascinated the most obdurate "come-outer". Holmes's lectures on the English poets at the Lowell Institute were among the most noted of that distinguished platform, and everywhere the poet was one of the most popular of "attractions". There were not wanting those who maintained that his use of the platform was the correct one, and that the orators who, often by happy but incisive indirection, fought the good fight of the hour abused their opportunity.

It was while Holmes was still a professor, but still also touching the lyre and writing scientific essays and charming the great audiences of the lecture lyceum, that in the first number of the Atlantic Monthly, in November, 1857, the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" remarked, "I was just going to say, when I was interrupted," and resumed the colloquies of the New England Magazine. He had been interrupted twenty-two years before. But as he began again it was plain that it was the same voice, yet fuller, stronger, richer, and that we were listening to one of the wisest of wits and sharpest of observers. Emerson warns us that superlatives are to be avoided. But it will not be denied that the "Autocrat" belongs in the highest rank of modern magazine or periodical literature, of which the essays of "Elia" are the type. The form of the "Autocrat"—a semi-dramatic, conversational, descriptive monologue—is not peculiar to Holmes's work, but the treatment of it is absolutely original. The manner is as individual and unmistakable as that of Elia himself. It would be everywhere recognized as the Autocrat's. During the intermission of the papers the more noted Macaulay flowers of literature, as the Autocrat calls them, had bloomed; Carlyle's SARTOR RESARTUS and reviews, Christopher North's NOCTES (now fallen into ancient night), Thackeray's ROUNDABOUT PAPERS, Lowell's HOSEA BIGLOW—a whole library of magazine and periodical literature of the first importance had appeared. But the Autocrat began again, after a quarter of a century, musical with so rich a chorus, and his voice was clear, penetrating, masterful, and distinctively his own.

The cadet branch of English literature—the familiar colloquial periodical essay, a comment upon men and manners and life—is a delightful branch of the family, and traces itself back to Dick



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

Steele and Addison. Hazlitt, who belonged to it, said that he preferred the Tatler to the Spectator; and Thackeray, who consorted with it proudly, although he was of the elder branch, restored Sir Richard, whose habits had cost him a great deal of his reputation, to general favor. The familiar essay is susceptible, as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show, of great variety and charm of treatment. What would the Christian Hero, writing to his Prue that he would be with her in a pint of wine's time, have said to "Blakesmoor" and "Oxford in the Vacation"? Yet Lamb and Steele are both consummate masters of the essay, and Holmes, in the "Autocrat", has given it a new charm. The little realm of the Autocrat, his lieges of the table, the persons of the drama, are at once as definitely outlined as Sir Roger's club. Unconsciously and resistlessly we are drawn within the circle; we are admitted *ad eundem*, and become the targets of the wit, the irony, the shrewd and sharp epigram, the airy whim, the sparkling fancy, the curious and recondite thought, the happy allusion, the felicitous analogy, of the sovereign master of the feast.

The index of the AUTOCRAT is in itself a unique work. It reveals the whimsical discursiveness of the book; the restless hovering of that brilliant talk over every topic, fancy, feeling, fact; a humming-bird sipping the one honeyed drop from every flower; or a hummer, to use its own droll and capital symbol of the lyceum lecturer, the bird that never lights. There are few books that leave more distinctly the impression of a mind teeming with riches of many kinds. It is, in the Yankee phrase, thoroughly wideawake. There is no languor, and it permits none in the reader, who must move along the page warily, lest in the gay profusion of the grove, unwittingly defrauding himself of delight, he miss some flower half hidden, some gem chance-dropped, some darting bird. Howells's LETTERS was called a chamber-window book, a book supplying in solitude the charm of the best society. We could all name a few such in our own literature. Would any of them, or many, take precedence of the AUTOCRAT OF THE BREAKFAST TABLE?

It is in this book that the value of the scientific training to the man of letters is illustrated, not only in furnishing noble and strong analogies, but in precision of observation and accuracy of statement. In Holmes's style, the definiteness of form and the clearness of expression are graces and virtues which are due to his exact scientific study, as well as to the daylight quality of his mind.

The delicate apprehension of the finer and tenderer feelings which is disclosed in the little passages of narrative in the record of the Autocrat and of his legitimate brothers, the Professor and the Poet, at the Breakfast Table, gives a grace and a sweetness to the work which naturally flow into the music of the poems with which the diary of a conversation often ends. These traits in the Autocrat suggested that he would yet tell a distinct story, which indeed came while the trilogy of the Breakfast Table was yet proceeding. ELSIE VENNER and the GUARDIAN



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

ANGEL, the two novels of Holmes's, are full of the same briskness and acuteness of observation, the same effusiveness of humor and characteristic Americanism, as the AUTOCRAT. Certain aspects of New England life and character are treated in these stories with incomparable vivacity and insight. Holmes's picture is of a later New England than Hawthorne's, but it is its lineal descendant. It is another facet of the Puritan diamond which flashes with different light in the genius of Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, and Judd in MARGARET. For, with all his lyrical instinct and rollicking humor, Holmes is essentially a New-Englander, and one of the most faithful and shrewd interpreters of New England.

The colloquial habit of the Autocrat is not lost in the stories, and it is so marked generally in Holmes's writings as to be called distinctive. It is a fascinating gift, when it is so restrained by taste and instinctive refinement as not to become what is known as bumptiousness. Thackeray, even in his novels, is apt to drop into this vein, to talk about the persons of his drama with his reader, instead of leaving them to play out their part alone. This trait offends some of Thackeray's audience, to whom it seems like the manager's hand thrust into the box to help out the play of the puppets. They resent not "the damnable faces" of the actors, but the damnable sermonizing of the author, and exhort him to permit the play to begin. Thackeray frankly acknowledged his tendency to preach, as he called it. But it was part of the man. Without the private personal touch of the essayist in his stories they would not be his. This colloquial habit is very winning when governed by a natural delicacy and an exquisite literary instinct. It is the quality of all the authors who are distinctly beloved as persons by their readers, and it is to this class that Holmes especially belongs. It is not a quality which is easily analyzed, but it blends a power of sympathetic observation and appreciation both of the thing observed and the reader to whom the observation is addressed. The Autocrat, as he converses, brightens with his own clear thought, with the happy quip, the airy fancy. He is sure of your delight, not only in the thought, but in its deft expression. He in turn is delighted with your delight. He warms to the responsive mind and heart, and feels the mutual joy. The personal relation is established, and the Autocrat's audience become his friends, to whom he describes with infinite glee the effect of his remarks upon his lieges at table. No other author takes the reader into his personal confidence more closely than Holmes, and none reveals his personal temperament more clearly. This confidential relation becomes even more simple and intimate as time chastens the eagerness of youth and matures the keen brilliancy of the blossom into the softer bloom of the fruit. The colloquies of the Autocrat under the characteristic title of "Over the Tea-Cups" are full of the same shrewd sense and wise comment and tender thought. The kindly mentor takes the reader by the button or lays his hand upon his shoulder, not with the rude familiarity of the bully or the boor, but with the

[HDT](#)[WHAT?](#)[INDEX](#)

THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

JOHN AUBREY

courtesy of Montaigne, the friendliness of John Aubrey, or the wise cheer of Selden. The reader glows with the pleasure of an individual greeting, and a wide diocese of those whom the Autocrat never saw plume themselves proudly upon his personal acquaintance.

In this discursive talk about one of the American authors who have vindicated the position of American letters in the literature of the language we have not mentioned all his works. It is the quality rather than the quantity with which we are concerned, the upright, honorable, pure quality of the poet, the wit, the scholar, for whom the most devoted reader is called to make no plea, no apology. The versatility of his power is obvious, but scarcely less so the uniformity of his work.

It is a power which was early mature. For many a year he has dwelt upon a high table-land where the air is equable and inspiring, yet, as we have hinted, ever softer and sweeter. The lyric of today glows with the same ardor as the fervent apostrophe to "Old Ironsides" or the tripping salutation to the remembered and regretted Clemence; it is only less eager. The young Autocrat who remarked that the word "scrub" dismissed from table a fellow-boarder who turned pale, now with the same smiling acuteness remarks the imprudent politeness which tries to assure him that it is no matter if he is a little older. Did anybody say so? The easy agility with which he cleared "the seven-barred gate" has carried him over the eight bars, and we are all in hot pursuit. For just sixty years since his first gay and tender note was heard, Holmes has been fulfilling the promise of his matin song. He has become a patriarch of our literature, and all his countrymen are his lovers.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1892

[George William Curtis](#) wrote of [Henry Thoreau](#) in his FROM THE EASY CHAIR (NY: Harper), pages 62-66:

The last time that the Easy Chair saw that remarkable man, Henry Thoreau, he came quietly into Mr. Emerson's study to get a volume of Pliny's letters. Expecting to see no one, and accustomed to attend without distraction to the business at hand, he was as quietly going out, when the host spoke to him, and without surprise, and with unsmiling courtesy, Thoreau greeted his friends. He seated himself, maintaining the same habitual erect posture, which made it seem impossible that he could ever lounge or slouch, and that made Hawthorne speak of him as "cast-iron,"

PLINY



and immediately began to talk in the strain so familiar to his friends. It was a staccato style of speech, every word coming separately and distinctly, as if preserving the same cool isolation in the sentence that the speaker did in society; but the words were singularly apt and choice, and Thoreau had always something to say. His knowledge was original. He was a Fine ear and a Sharp-eye in the woods and fields; and he added to his knowledge of nature the wisdom of the most ancient times and of the best literature. His manner and matter both reprov'd trifling, but in the most impersonal manner. It was like the reproof of Pan's statue. There seemed never to be any loosening of the intellectual tension, and a call from Thoreau in the highest sense "meant business."

On the morning of which we are speaking the talk fell upon the Indians, with whom he had a profound sympathy, and of whose life and ways and nature he apparently had an instinctive knowledge. In the slightly contemptuous inference against civilization which his remarks left, rather than in any positively scornful tone, there was something which rather humorously suggested the man who spoke lightly of the equator, but with the difference that there would have been if the light speaking had left a horrible suspicion of that excellent circle. For Thoreau so ingeniously traced our obligations to the aborigines that the claims of civilization for what is really essential palpably dwindled. He dropped all manner of curious and delightful information as he went on, and it was sad to see in the hollow cheek and the large, unnaturally lustrous eye the signs of the disease that very soon removed him from among us. Those who



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

remember him, and were familiar with his truly heroic and virtuous life, or those who perceive in his works that spirit of sweetness and content which made him at the last say that he was as happy to be sick as to be well, will apply to him the words of his own poem in the first number of the Dial:

“Say not that Caesar was victorious,
With toil and strife who stormed the House of fame;
In other sense this youth was glorious,
Himself a kingdom wheresoe'er he came.”

His talk of the Indians left an impression entirely unlike that of the Cooper novel and the red man of the theatre. It was untouched by romance or sentimentality. It made them a grave, manly race, intimately familiar with nature, with a lofty scorn of feebleness. The sylvan shade and the leafy realm and Arden and pastoral poetry were wholly wanting in the picture he drew, quite as much as the theory that they are vermin to be exterminated as fast as possible. He said that the pioneers of civilization, as it is called, among the Indians are purveyors of every kind of mischief. We graft the sound native stock with a sour fruit, then denounce it bitterly and cut it down. What was most admirable in Daniel Boone, he said, was his Indian nature and sympathy; and the least admirable part was his hold, such as it was, upon civilization. He seemed to imply that if Boone could only have succeeded in becoming an Indian altogether, it would have been a truly memorable triumph. Thoreau acknowledged that the Indian was not only doomed, but, as he gravely said, damned, because his enemies were his historians; and he could only say, “Ah, if we lions had painted

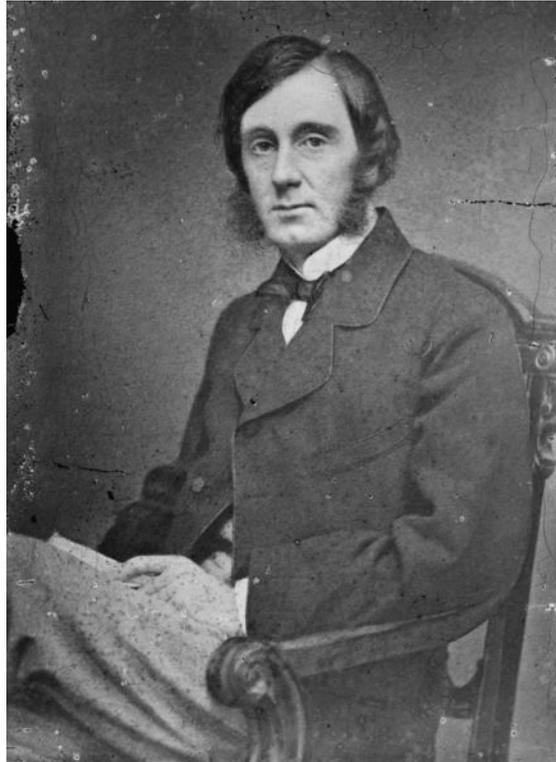


THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

the picture!"



March 7, Monday: [George William Curtis](#) lectured at the YMCA Building in Tompkinsville on Staten Island, his topic being Senator Charles Sumner.

May: The Arab [slavemasters](#) of the Belgian Congo rebelled.

On [St. Helena](#), Reverend Daine experimented with the breeding of silkworms and the cultivation of cotton.

[George William Curtis](#) made a final public address in New-York, his topic being [James Russell Lowell](#), recently deceased.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

June: Early in the month, [George William Curtis](#) became seriously ill.

While with his parents for their summer vacation in Europe, [John Robinson Jeffers](#) was enrolled in Kindergarten in [Lucerne](#).

When [Robert Frost](#) graduated from Lawrence High School, he shared valedictorian honors with [Elinor Miriam White](#).



August 31, Wednesday: After a period of acute suffering, [George William Curtis](#) died at his home in West New Brighton on Staten Island.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1895

[George William Curtis](#)'s posthumous LITERARY AND SOCIAL ESSAYS contained the information that that the "good clergyman of the town" of Concord had interested himself in the situation of Miss [Martha Emmeline Hunt](#), the suicide, but had failed to gain her confidence (presumably this reference would have been to the Reverend Barzillai Frost of Concord's Unitarian First Parish church).

We cry loudly for the poor, oppressed Slave, and well we may.
Our loudest cry is but a faint voice which should burst forth
in such anguish, as should rouse the whole earth for freedom.
But slaves are not confined to color. O, God perhaps in thy sight



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

they are least slaves. Slaves! Are we not all slaves?



This work contained nine essays that Curtis had authored during earlier years, and most of them had been previously published:

- EMERSON
- [HAWTHORNE](#)
- THE WORKS OF [NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE](#)
- RACHEL
- THACKERAY IN AMERICA
- SIR PHILIP SIDNEY
- LONGFELLOW
- OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

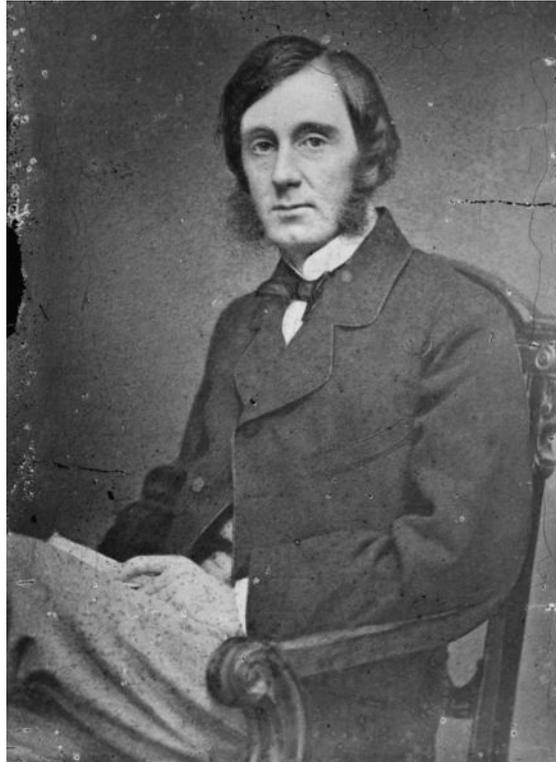


THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

- WASHINGTON IRVING





THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

1898

EARLY LETTERS OF GEORGE WM. CURTIS TO JOHN S. DWIGHT... (NY: Harper) provided an article by George Willis Cooke on [George William Curtis](#) while at Brook Farm and in Concord, along with letters from Curtis to the Reverend John Sullivan Dwight, with whom he had studied music at Brook Farm.



“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



COPYRIGHT NOTICE: In addition to the property of others, such as extensive quotations and reproductions of images, this "read-only" computer file contains a great deal of special work product of Austin Meredith, copyright ©2014. Access to these interim materials will eventually be offered for a fee in order to recoup some of the costs of preparation. My hypercontext button invention which, instead of creating a hypertext leap through hyperspace –resulting in navigation problems– allows for an utter alteration of the context within which one is experiencing a specific content already being viewed, is claimed as proprietary to Austin Meredith – and therefore freely available for use by all. Limited permission to copy such files, or any material from such files, must be obtained in advance in writing from the "Stack of the Artist of Kouroo" Project, 833 Berkeley St., Durham NC 27705. Please contact the project at <Kouroo@kouroo.info>.

"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



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN:

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN

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.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.