

**GEORGE WILLIAM
CURTIS**

**EARLY LETTERS
OF GEORGE WM.
CURTIS TO JOHN
S. DWIGHT;
BROOK FARM AND
CONCORD**

George William Curtis

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Brook Farm and Concord**

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I

The warm and active interest of the brothers in the Transcendental movement, in all its phases, led them to propose to their father that he permit them to attend the school connected with the Brook Farm Association. Permission having been granted, they became boarders there in the spring or summer of 1842. At no time were they members of the association, and they paid for their board and tuition as they would have done at any seminary or college.

At this time the Brook Farm Association had two sources of income—the farm of about two hundred acres, and the school which was carried on in connection therewith. In fact, the school was more largely profitable than the farm, and was for a time well patronized by those who were in general sympathy with the leaders of the association. George Ripley was the teacher in philosophy and mathematics, George P. Bradford in literature, John S. Dwight in Latin and music, Charles A. Dana in Greek and German, and John S. Brown in theoretical and practical agriculture. A six years' course was arranged in preparation for college, and three years were given to acquiring a knowledge of farming. The pupils were required to work one hour each day, the idea being that this was conducive to sound intellectual training.

It would seem, however, that Curtis gave only a part of his time to study, as is indicated in a letter written to his father in June, 1843, and published in the admirable biography by Mr. Edward Gary. "My life is summery enough

here," he writes. "We breakfast at six, and from seven to twelve I am at work. After dinner, these fair days permit no homage but to their beauty, and I am fain to woo their smiles in the shades and sunlights of the woods. A festal life for one before whom the great stretches which must be sailed; yet this summer air teaches sea life-navigation, and I listen to the flowing streams, and to the cool rush of the winds among the trees, with an increase of that hope which is the only pole-star of life."

At Brook Farm, Curtis studied Greek, German, music, and agriculture. The teaching was of the best, as good as could have been had in any college of the country at that time, and was thorough and efficient. Much more of freedom was allowed the students than was usual elsewhere, both as to conditions of study and recitation, and as to the relations of the pupils to the instructors. The young people in the school were treated as friends and companions by their teachers; but this familiarity did not breed contempt for the instructors or indifference to the work of the school. On the other hand, it secured an unusual degree of enthusiasm both for the teachers and for the subjects pursued. The work of the school went on with somewhat less of system than is thought desirable in most places of instruction; but in this instance the results justified the methods pursued. The teachers were such as could command success by their personal qualities and by their enthusiastic devotion to their work.

The two years spent at Brook Farm formed an important episode in the life of George William Curtis. It is evident that he did not surrender himself to the associationist idea, even

when he was a boarder at Brook Farm and a member of its school. He loved the men and women who were at the head of the community; he found the life attractive and genial, the atmosphere was conducive to his intellectual and spiritual development; but he did not surrender himself to the idea that the world can be reformed in that manner. In a degree he was a curious looker-on; and in a still larger way he was a sympathetic, but not convinced, friend and well-wisher. If not a member, he retained throughout life his interest in this experiment, and remembered with delight the years he spent there. He more than once spoke in enthusiastic terms of Brook Farm, and gave its theories and its practice a sympathetic interpretation. In one of his "Easy Chair" essays of 1869 he described the best side of its life:

"There is always a certain amount of oddity latent in society which rushes to such an enterprise as a natural vent; and in youth itself there is a similar latent and boundless protest against the friction and apparent unreason of the existing order. At the time of the Brook Farm enterprise this was everywhere observable. The freedom of the antislavery reform and its discussions had developed the 'come-outers,' who bore testimony in all times and places against church and state. Mr. Emerson mentions an apostle of the gospel of love and no money who preached zealously but never gathered a large church of believers. Then there were the protestants against the sin of flesh-eating, refining into curious metaphysics upon milk, eggs, and oysters. To purloin milk from the udder was to injure the maternal affections of the cow; to eat eggs was Feejee cannibalism and the destruction of the tender germ of life,

to swallow an oyster was to mask murder. A still selecter circle denounced the chains that shackled the tongue and the false delicacy that clothed the body. Profanity, they said, is not the use of forcible and picturesque words; it is the abuse of such to express base passions and emotions. So indecency cannot be affirmed of the model of all grace, the human body....

"These were harmless freaks and individual fantasies. But the time was like the time of witchcraft. The air magnified and multiplied every appearance, and exceptions and idiosyncrasies and ludicrous follies were regarded as the rule, and as the logical masquerade of this foul fiend Transcendentalism, which was evidently unappeasable, and was about to devour manners, morals, religion, and common-sense. If Father Lamson or Abby Folsom were borne by main force from an antislavery meeting, and the non-resistants pleaded that these protestants had as good right to speak as anybody, and that what was called their senseless babble was probably inspired wisdom, if people were only heavenly minded enough to understand it, it was but another sign of the impending anarchy. And what was to be said—for you could not call them old dotards—when the younger protestants of the time came walking through the sober streets of Boston and seated themselves in concert-halls and lecture-rooms with hair parted in the middle and falling upon their shoulders, and clad in garments such as no known human being ever wore before—garments which seemed to be a compromise between the blouse of the Paris workman and the peignoir of a possible sister? For tailoring underwent the same revision to which the whole philosophy

of life was subjected, and one ardent youth, asserting that the human form itself suggested the proper shape of its garments, caused trowsers to be constructed that closely fitted the leg, and bore his testimony to the truth in coarse crash breeches.

"These were the ludicrous aspects of the intellectual and moral fermentation or agitation that was called Transcendentalism. And these were foolishly accepted by many as its chief and only signs. It was supposed that the folly was complete at Brook Farm, and it was indescribably ludicrous to observe reverend Doctors and other Dons coming out to gaze upon the extraordinary spectacle, and going about as dainty ladies hold their skirts and daintily step from stone to stone in a muddy street, lest they be soiled. The Dons seemed to doubt whether the mere contact had not smirched them. But droll in itself, it was a thousandfold droller when Theodore Parker came through the woods and described it. With his head set low upon his gladiatorial shoulders, and his nasal voice in subtle and exquisite mimicry reproducing what was truly laughable, yet all with infinite *bonhomie* and with a genuine superiority to small malice, he was as humorous as he was learned, and as excellent a mime as he was noble and fervent and humane a preacher. On Sundays a party always went from the Farm to Mr. Parker's little country church. He was there exactly what he was afterwards when he preached to thousands of eager people in the Boston Music-hall; the same plain, simple, rustic, racy man. His congregation were his personal friends. They loved him and admired him and were proud of him; and his geniality and tender sympathy,

his ample knowledge of things as well as of books, drew to him all ages and sexes and conditions.

"The society at Brook Farm was composed of every kind of person. There were the ripest scholars, men and women of the most aesthetic culture and accomplishment, young farmers, seamstresses, mechanics, preachers—the industrious, the lazy, the conceited, the sentimental. But they were associated in such a spirit and under such conditions that, with some extravagance, the best of everybody appeared, and there was a kind of high *esprit de corps*—at least, in the earlier or golden age of the colony. There was plenty of steady, essential, hard work, for the founding of an earthly paradise upon a rough New England farm is no pastime. But with the best intention, and much practical knowledge and industry and devotion, there was in the nature of the case an inevitable lack of method, and the economical failure was almost a foregone conclusion. But there was never such witty potato-patches and such sparkling cornfields before or since. The weeds were scratched out of the ground to the music of Tennyson or Browning, and the nooning was an hour as gay and bright as any brilliant midnight at Ambrose's. But in the midst of all was one figure, the practical farmer, an honest neighbor who was not drawn to the enterprise by any spiritual attraction, but was hired at good wages to superintend the work, and who always seemed to be regarding the whole affair with the most good-natured wonder as a prodigious masquerade....

"But beneath all the glancing colors, the lights and shadows of its surface, it was a simple, honest, practical

effort for wiser forms of life than those in which we find ourselves. The criticism of science, the sneer of literature, the complaint of experience is that man is a miserably half-developed being, the proof of which is the condition of human society, in which the few enjoy and the many toil. But the enjoyment cloyes and disappoints, and the very want of labor poisons the enjoyment. Man is made, body and soul. The health of each requires reasonable exercise. If every man did his share of the muscular work of the world, no other man would be overwhelmed by it. The man who does not work imposes the necessity of harder toil upon him who does. Thereby the first steals from the last the opportunity of mental culture—and at last we reach a world of pariahs and patricians, with all the inconceivable sorrow and suffering that surround us. Bound fast by the brazen age, we can see that the way back to the age of gold lies through justice, which will substitute co-operation for competition.

"That some such generous and noble thought inspired this effort at practical Christianity is most probable. The Brook Farmers did not interpret the words, 'the poor ye have always with ye,' to mean, 'ye must always keep some of you poor.' They found the practical Christian in him who said to his neighbor, 'Friend, come up higher.' But, apart from any precise and defined intention, it was certainly a very alluring prospect—that of life in a pleasant country, taking exercise in useful toil, and surrounded with the most interesting and accomplished people. Compared with other efforts upon which time and money and industry are lavished, measured by Colorado and Nevada speculations, by California gold-

washing, by oil-boring, and by the stock exchange, Brook Farm was certainly a very reasonable and practical enterprise, worthy of the hope and aid of generous men and women. The friendships that were formed there were enduring. The devotion to noble endeavor, the sympathy with all that is most useful to men, the kind patience and constant charity that were fostered there, have been no more lost than grain dropped upon the field. It is to the Transcendentalism that seemed to so many good souls both wicked and absurd that some of the best influences of American life to-day are due. The spirit that was concentrated at Brook Farm is diffused, but it is not lost. As an organized effort, after many downward changes, it failed; but those who remember the Hive, the Eyrie, the Cottage; when Margaret Fuller came and talked, radiant with bright humor; when Emerson and Parker and Hedge joined the circle for a night or a day; when those who may not be publicly named brought beauty and wit and social sympathy to the feast; when the practical possibilities of life seemed fairer, and life and character were touched ineffaceably with good influence, cherish a pleasant vision which no fate can harm, and remember with ceaseless gratitude the blithe days of Brook Farm."

Curtis returned to the same subject in 1874, in discussing Frothingham's biography of George Ripley. Some of the errors into which writers about Brook Farm had fallen he undertook to correct, to point out the real character of the association, and its effort at the improvement of society.

"The Easy Chair describes Brook Farm as an Arcadia, for such in effect was the intention, and such is the retrospect

to those who recall the hope from which it sprang.... The curious visitors who came to see poetry in practice saw with dismay hard work on every side, plain houses and simple fare, and a routine with little aesthetic aspect. Individual whims in dress and conduct, however, were exceptional in the golden age or early days at Brook Farm, and those are wholly in error who suppose it to have been a grotesque colony of idealogues. It was originally a company of highly educated and refined persons, who felt that the immense disparity of condition and opportunity in the world was a practical injustice, full of peril for society, and that the vital and fundamental principle of Christianity was universally rejected by Christendom as impracticable. Every person, they held, is entitled to mental and moral culture, but it is impossible that he should enjoy his rights as long as all the hard physical work of the world is done by a part only of its inhabitants. Were that work limited to what is absolutely necessary, and shared by all, all would find an equal opportunity for higher cultivation and development, and the evil of an unnatural and cruelly artificial system of society would disappear. It was a thought and a hope as old as humanity, and as generous as old. No common mind would have cherished such a purpose, no mean nature have attempted to make the dream real. The practical effort failed in its immediate object, but, in the high purposes it confirmed and strengthened, it had remote and happy effects which are much more than personal.

"It is an error to suppose that many of the more famous 'Transcendentalists' were of the Brook Farm company. Mr. Emerson, for instance, was never there except as a visitor.

Margaret Fuller was often a visitor, and passed many days together as a guest, but she was never, except in sympathy, one of the Brook Farmers. Theodore Parker was a neighbor, and had friendly relations with many of the fraternity, but he seldom came to the farm. Meanwhile the enterprise was considered an unspeakable folly, or worse, by the conservative circle of Boston. In Boston, where a very large part of the 'leaders' of society in every way were Unitarians, Unitarian conservatism was peremptory and austere. The entire circle of which Mr. Ticknor was the centre or representative, the world of Everett and Prescott and their friends, regarded Transcendentalism and Brook Farm, its fruit, with good-humored wonder as with Prescott, or with severe reprobation as with Mr. Ticknor. The general feeling in regard to Mr. Emerson, who was accounted the head of the school, is well expressed by John Quincy Adams in 1840. The old gentleman, whose glory is that he was a moral and political gladiator and controversialist, deplores the doom of the Christian Church to be always racked with differences and debates, and after speaking of 'other wanderings of mind' that 'let the wolf into the fold,' proceeds to say: 'A young man named Ralph Waldo Emerson, a son of my once-loved friend William Emerson, and a classmate of my lamented son George, after failing in the every-day avocations of a Unitarian preacher and school-master, starts a new doctrine of Transcendentalism, declares all the old revelations superannuated and worn out, and announces the approach of new revelations.' Mr. Adams was just on the eve of his antislavery career, but he continues: 'Garrison and the non-resistant Abolitionists, Brownson and the Marat

Democrats, phrenology and animal magnetism, all come in, furnished each with some plausible rascality as an ingredient for the bubbling caldron of religion and politics.' C.P. Cranch, the poet and painter, was a relative of Mr. Adams, and then a clergyman; and the astonished ex-President says: 'Pearse Cranch, *ex ephebis*, preached here last week, and gave out quite a stream of Transcendentalism most unexpectedly.'

"This was the general view of Transcendentalism and its teachers and disciples held by the social, political, and religious establishment. The separation and specialty of the 'movement' soon passed. The leaders and followers were absorbed in the great world of America; but that world has been deeply affected and moulded by this seemingly slight and transitory impulse. How much of the wise and universal liberalizing of all views and methods is due to it! How much of the moral training that revealed itself in the war was part of its influence! The transcendental or spiritual philosophy has been strenuously questioned and assailed. But the life and character it fostered are its sufficient vindication."

The school at Brook Farm brought together there a large number of bright young people, and they formed one of the chief characteristics of the place. The result was that the life was one of much amusement and healthy pleasure, as George P. Bradford has said:

"We were floated away by the tide of young life around us. There was always a large number of young people in our company, as scholars, boarders, etc., and this led to a considerable mingling of amusement in our life; and, moreover, some of our company had a special taste and

skill in arranging and directing this element. So we had very varied amusements suited to the different seasons—tableaux, charades, dancing, masquerades, and rural fetes out-of-doors, and in winter, skating, coasting, etc."

In her "Years of Experience," Mrs. Georgiana Bruce Kirby, who was at Brook Farm for very nearly the same period as Curtis, has not only given an interesting account of the social life there, but she has especially described the entertainments mentioned by Mr. Bradford. Two of these occasions, when Curtis was a leading participant, she mentions with something of detail.

"At long intervals in what most would call our drudgery," she says, "there came a day devoted to amusement. Once we had a masquerade picnic in the woods, where we were thrown into convulsions of laughter at the sight of George W. Curtis dressed as Fanny Ellsler, in a low-necked, short-sleeved, book-muslin dress and a tiny ruffled apron, making courtesies and pirouetting down the path. It was much out of character that I, a St. Francis squaw, in striped shirt, gold beads, and moccasins, should be guilty of such wild hilarity. Ora's movements were free and graceful in white Turkish trousers, a rich Oriental head-dress, and Charles Dana's best tunic, which reached just below her knee. She was the observed of all observers.

"In the midwinter we had a fancy-dress ball in the parlors of the Pilgrim House, when the Shaws and Russells, generous friends of the association, came attired as priests and dervishes. The beautiful Anna Shaw was superb as a portly Turk in quilted robe, turban, mustache, and cimenter, and bore herself with grave dignity.

"George W. Curtis, as Hamlet, led the quadrille with Carrie Shaw as a Greek girl. His sad and solemn 'reverence' contrasted charmingly with her sunny ease. He acted the Dane to the life, his bearing, the melancholy light in his eyes, his black-plumed head-cover, and his rapier glittering under his short black cloak, which fell apart in the dance, were all perfect. It was a picture long to be remembered, and as long as I could watch these two I had no desire to take part in the dance myself."

Another phase of Curtis's life at Brook Farm she also mentions, and it gives a new insight into his character. The occasion described was a social Sunday evening spent in the parlor of the Eyrie:

"At supper it was whispered that George W. Curtis would sing at the Eyrie, upon which several young men volunteered to assist with the dishes. My services were also cordially accepted.... And now we ascended the winding, moonlit path to the Eyrie, where Curtis was already singing. We went up the steps of the building cautiously, lest a note of the melody which floated through the open French windows should be lost to us. Entering the large parlor, we found not only the chairs and sofas occupied, but the floor well covered with seated listeners.

"I did not at first recognize the operatic air, so admirably modified and retarded it was, and its former rapid words replaced by a sad and touching theme, which called for noble endurance in one borne down by suffering. The accompaniment consisted of simple chords and arpeggios, a very plain and sufficient background. Curtis, though not yet twenty—not nineteen, if I remember rightly—had a grave

and mature appearance. He was full of poetic sensibility, and his pure, rich voice had that sympathetic quality that penetrates to the heart.... Curtis was not ever guilty of singing a comic song. It would indeed have been most inappropriate to our intensely earnest mood. Often his brother would join him in a duet with his agreeable tenor.

"Low praises and half-spoken thanks were murmured as the grave and gracious young friend, at the expiration of an hour, swung round on the piano-stool and attempted to make his exit."

In his "Cheerful Yesterdays," Colonel T.W. Higginson has described the same life as an onlooker. Although not a member of the community at Brook Farm, he was somewhat in sympathy with it—at least, with the people of whom it was composed. At the time he was living in Brookline and teaching the children of a cousin. "Into this summer life," he writes, "there occasionally came delegations of youths from Brook Farm. Among these were George and Burrill Curtis, and Larned, with Charles Dana—all presentable and agreeable, but the first three peculiarly costumed. It was then very common for young men in college and elsewhere to wear what were called blouses—a kind of hunter's frock, made at first of brown holland, belted at the waist, these being gradually developed into garments of gay-colored chintz, sometimes, it was said, an economical transformation of their sisters' skirts or petticoats. All the young men of this party but Dana wore these gay garments, and bore on their heads little round and visorless caps with tassels."

"I was but twice at Brook Farm," Higginson continues, "once driving over there to a fancy ball at 'the Community,' as it was usually called, where my cousin Barbara Channing was to appear in a pretty Creole dress made of madras handkerchiefs. She was enthusiastic about Brook Farm, where she went often, being a friend of Mrs. Ripley.... Again, I once went for her in summer and stayed for an hour, watching the various interesting figures, including George William Curtis, who was walking about in shirtsleeves, with his boots over his trousers, yet was escorting a young maiden with that elegant grace which never left him. It was a curious fact that he, who was afterwards so eminent, was then held wholly secondary in interest to his handsome brother Burrill, whose Raphaelesque face won all hearts, and who afterwards disappeared from view in England. But if I did not see much of Brook Farm on the spot, I met its members frequently at the series of exciting meetings for Social Reform in Boston."

Other reminiscences of Brook-Farmers tell of the Curtis brothers and their active part in the amusements of the place. They were leaders among the young people, and they had those gifts of social guidance which placed them at the head of whatever entertainment was being organized. Their grace of manner and beauty of face and figure also won consideration for them, so that they were accepted into every circle and found friends on every hand. It seems that Burrill was at this time regarded as the handsomer, but in time George gained the chief place in this regard. Their courtesy led them to help those whose labors were hard, to aid the women in the laundry at their tasks, and to assist

them in hanging out the clothes on washing-days. In the evening the clothes-pins which had been thrust into a pocket found their way to the floor of the dancing-room.

One of the members of the community has written that the brothers "looked like young Greek gods. Burrill, the elder, with a typical Greek face and long hair falling to his shoulders in irregular curls," she says, "I remember as most unconscious of himself, interested in all about him, talking of the Greek philosophers as if he had just come from one of Socrates' walks, carrying the high philosophy into his daily life, helping the young people with hard arithmetic lessons, trimming the lamps daily at the Eyrie, where the two brothers came to live (my sister saw George assisting him one day, and occasionally, she says, he turned his face with a disgusted expression, trying to puff away the disagreeable odor), never losing control of himself, with the kindest manner to every person. He and George seemed very companionable and fond of each other.

"George, though only eighteen, seemed much older, like a man of twenty-five, possibly, with a peculiar elegance, if I may so express it; great and admirable attention, as I recollect, when listening to any one; courteous recognition of others' convictions and even prejudices; and never a personal animosity of any kind—a certain remoteness of manner, however, that I think prevented persons from becoming acquainted with him as easily as with Burrill."

In his "Memories of Brook Farm," Dr. John T. Codman mentions the occasional returns of Curtis to the Farm after he had left it, and says he heard him singing the "Erl King," "Kathleen Mavourneen," and "Good-night to Julia" "in his

inimitable manner." Everything goes to indicate that he was a favorite, not only with the younger persons, but with those who were older. He had already developed a mature thoughtfulness, and gave indications of his power as a writer and speaker. His fondness for music, and his enthusiastic study of it under Dwight's leadership is an indication of that aesthetic appreciation which he kept through life, and which appeared in his mastership of prose style.

At first each one helped himself to the food placed on the table in the dining-room at the Hive, or those at the table helped each other. In this way more or less confusion was produced, and the results were unsatisfactory. Accordingly, Charles Dana organized a group, including Curtis and other young men of character and good breeding, to act as waiters. Dana took his place at the head of this group of voluntary servants, who performed their duties with grace and alacrity. "It is hardly necessary to observe," says Mrs. Kirby, "that the business was henceforth attended to with such courtly grace and such promptness that the new *regime* was applauded by every one, although it did appear at first as if we were all engaged in acting a play. The group, with their admired chief, took dinner, which had been kept warm for them, afterwards, and were themselves waited upon with the utmost consideration."



While at Brook Farm, Curtis was on intimate terms with most of the persons there. He greatly admired Mr. and Mrs.

Ripley, and he frequently wrote to Mrs. Ripley and made of her a sort of mother-confessor. He also highly appreciated the scholarly qualities of Charles Dana, and his capacity as a leader. In his letters he frequently mentions "the two Charleses," who were Charles Dana and Charles Newcomb. The latter has been described by Dr. Codman as "the mysterious and profound, with his long, dark, straight locks of hair, one of which was continually being brushed away from his forehead as it continually fell; with his gold-bowed eye-glass, his large nose and peculiar blue eyes, his spasmodic expressions of nervous horror, and his cachinnatious laugh." Newcomb was for many years a resident of Providence, afterwards finding a home in England and in Paris. He was early a member of Brook Farm—a solitary, self-involved person, preferring to associate with children rather than with older persons. He read much in the literature of the mystics, and was laughingly said to prefer paganism to Christianity. He had a feminine temperament, was full of sensibility, and of an indolent turn of mind. Emerson was attracted to him, and at one time had great expectations concerning his genius. His paper, published in *The Dial*, under the title of "The Two Dolons," was much admired by some of the Transcendentalists when it was printed there; and it is referred to by Hawthorne in his "Hall of Phantasy." In June, 1842, Emerson wrote to Margaret Fuller: "I wish you to know that I have 'Dolon' in black and white, and that I account Charles N. a true genius; his writing fills me with joy, so simple, so subtle, and so strong is it. There are sentences in 'Dolon' worth the printing of *The Dial* that they may go forth." This paper was given him for

publication at Emerson's urgent request, and it is not known that Newcomb has published anything else. In 1850 Emerson said he had come to doubt Newcomb's genius, having found that he did not care for an audience.

Another person of whom Curtis speaks is Isaac Hecker, who became a member of the Catholic Church, under the guidance of Orestes Brownson. He was born in New York City, was brought up under Methodist auspices, became a baker, developed a strong taste for philosophy, and went to Brook Farm at the age of twenty-two. He remained for a few months as a student, and then tried Alcott's Fruitlands for a fortnight. He was naturally of an ascetic turn of mind, loved mystic books and philosophy, and found in the Catholic Church his true religious home. He secured at Brook Farm a kind of culture which he much needed, and his abilities were seen by those around him. After his return to New York, Ripley, and Charles Lane, of Fruitlands, wrote him in a way which indicated their faith in him as a man of judgment and liberal aims. He spent some months in Concord, had George P. Bradford for his tutor, and he rented a room of Mrs. Thoreau, the mother of Henry D. Thoreau. There again he met the Curtis brothers; but soon after he went to Holland to prepare for the priesthood, and then entered upon his life-work. A curious phase in the life of this time was the effort of Hecker to convert Curtis to his own way of religious thinking, as Curtis relates in his letters. Even more singular was the attempt of Hecker to persuade Thoreau into the Catholic Church. Mr. Sanborn has read a letter in which he proposed to Thoreau to travel on foot with him in Europe. His real purpose seems to have been to get Thoreau away

from Protestants, and among the influences of the Catholic churches and traditions, and thus to make a convert of him. In a letter printed in Father Elliott's biography of Father Hecker, Curtis gave an account of his acquaintance with the founder of the order of the Paulist Fathers.

"WEST NEW BRIGHTON, STATEN ISLAND, *February 28, 1890.*

Dear Sir,—I fear that my recollections of Father Hecker will be of little service to you, for they are very scant. But the impression of the young man whom I knew at Brook Farm is still vivid. It must have been in the year 1843 that he came to the Farm in West Roxbury, near Boston. He was a youth of twenty-three, of German aspect, and I think his face was somewhat seamed with small-pox. But his sweet and candid expression, his gentle and affectionate manner, were very winning. He had an air of singular refinement and self-reliance combined with a half-eager inquisitiveness, and upon becoming acquainted with him, I told him that he was Ernest the Seeker, which was the title of a story of mental unrest which William Henry Channing was then publishing in *The Dial*.

Hecker, or, as I always called him and think of him, Isaac, had apparently come to Brook Farm because it was a result of the intellectual agitation of the time which had reached and touched him in New York. He had been bred a baker, he told me, and I remember with what satisfaction he said to me, 'I am sure of my livelihood, because I can make good bread.' His powers in this way were most satisfactorily tested at the Farm, or, as it was generally called, 'the Community,' although it was in no other sense a community

than an association of friendly workers in common. He was drawn to Brook Farm by the belief that its life would be at least agreeable to his convictions and tastes, and offer him the society of those who might answer some of his questions, even if they could not satisfy his longings.

By what influence his mind was first affected by the moral movement known in New England as Transcendentalism, I do not know. Probably he may have heard Mr. Emerson lecture in New York, or he may have read Brownson's 'Charles Elwood,' which dealt with the questions that engaged his mind and conscience. But among the many interesting figures at Brook Farm I recall none more sincerely absorbed than Isaac Hecker in serious questions. The merely aesthetic aspects of its life, its gayety and social pleasures, he regarded good-naturedly, with the air of a spectator who tolerated rather than needed or enjoyed them. There was nothing ascetic or severe in him, but I have often thought since that his feeling was probably what he might have afterwards described as a consciousness that he must be about his Father's business.

I do not remember him as especially studious. Mr. Ripley had classes in German philosophy and metaphysics, in Kant and Spinoza, and Isaac used to look in, as he turned wherever he thought he might find answers to his questions. He went to hear Theodore Parker preach in the Unitarian Church in the neighboring village of West Roxbury. He went to Boston, about ten miles distant, to talk with Brownson, and to Concord to see Emerson. He entered into the working life at the Farm, but always, as it seemed to me, with the same reserve and attitude of observation. He was the dove