AMERICAN LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CRISIS, 1837-1842

Dissertation

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A phenomenon in the history of literature like that popularly known as the "American Renaissance" is certain to inspire conjectures as to its causes. Why did there happen to appear in America, in one concentrated moment of expression at the middle of the nineteenth century, a wealth of literary masterpieces such as has never been duplicated in any similar period? Emerson's *Essays*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of Seven Gables*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* are but a few of the mid-century classics.

Many explanations have been advanced. However, believing that what a man thinks and writes is not entirely independent of the life he leads as a social and economic animal, I felt that there might be some general relation between the peculiar social conditions of the time and the extraordinary production. Such a study had not yet been adequately made, so it was along this line that my investigation began.

In the two decades preceding the outburst of literary productivity in the middle of the nineteenth century, the United States had undergone a period of sharp social and economic change, recognized by historians as constituting a crisis in the development of the nation. The change was from the predominantly patrician culture of the beginning of the century to the democratic culture signaled by the rise of the common man. By 1837, after two terms of Jacksonian rule, the new political and social democratic enthusiasm was at its height. Also the
year 1837 marked the beginning of the worst panic the United States had yet experienced. Furthermore, in this year most of the writers who were to make up the Renaissance were in the process of developing the attitudes and philosophies which were to inform their later writings. Thus I chose this year, and the five years of depression following it, as the ideal period in which to concentrate a study of the relationship of a social crisis to the literary mind.

The results of this study were two. First, although the idealistic writers favored the freedom and the high place promised the individual in the new ideal social order, it was evident that they were dissatisfied with the way in which democracy was actually being implemented, with the way in which the bourgeoisie and vulgar equalitarian social and economic standards were being forced upon even the artistic genius. Thus they were in conflict with their society, and the resulting tensions between the ideal and the actual were instrumental in bringing out much of the literary expression of the time. This was my first conclusion. The second followed almost directly, and involved the setting up of a relatively new critical position from which to view the mid-century writings themselves. Thus, in addition to studying these writings as examples of the new-found interest in romantic, democratic, liberal individualism (as they have usually been studied), one must always be aware of the minor but ever prevalent aristocratic, reactionary feeling, either begun or strengthened in these years of crisis, which contributed to the complexity of the finished products. From this viewpoint Hester, or Ahab, or even the American "scholar"
becomes more fully understandable.

In order to make clear this bias of conservative reaction, in the literary mind, to the excesses and the vulgarities of the day, I have outlined the specific social changes themselves and then studied the reactions to them as exhibited by three authors who were relatively sure of their contempt for the democratic society of these years and who were overt in the expression of their criticism—R. H. Dana, Sr., Poe, and Cooper. Having established the point, I then have selected, from among the authors of the Renaissance, Emerson and Hawthorne as examples of the way in which more complex social tensions called forth in an author his best creative and imaginative work. Emerson and Hawthorne were already writing during the years I have selected for study; some others of the mid-century group were not. But a critical position similar to the one I have arrived at is important to an understanding of the whole group of Renaissance writers who had lived under, and reacted to, the same conditions of a raw and uncouth leveling democratic society.

J. W. N.
## Contents

**Preface**  
Preface ii

I  *The Nature of the Change: Social and Economic*  
1

II  *The Nature of the Change: Intellectual Trends*  
22

III  *The Nature of the Change: The Literary and Publishing Scene*  
47

IV  *The Overt Reaction: R. H. Dana, Sr., Poe, Cooper*  
70

V  *The Sublimated Reaction: Emerson*  
172

VI  *The Sublimated Reaction: Hawthorne*  
208

Bibliography of Works Cited  
255
Chapter I

The Nature of the Change: Social and Economic

Any generation within the short history of America might be pointed out as a period of major and sweeping change, but the years comprising the second quarter of the nineteenth century saw changes and social crises which were of great significance to the development of American society. As the interest and very center of this study lie in an analysis of the reactions of various authors to the economic and social changes of these years—especially of the years 1837-1842—it is well that we have in mind some picture of just what was happening, what some of the phenomena were that gave this era its peculiar quality of change and crisis. These phenomena were not only social and economic in character, but intellectual and philosophical as well, so that any survey of the changes in this period must take both these trends into consideration.

In general, the change in American society during these years was one from an essentially "aristocratic" to an essentially "democratic" domination. This is stated much too simply to be altogether true, as we shall see in the later refinement of the terms, but it may stand as an introduction. The cultural heritage of the American people in the first quarter of the century was an aristocratic one. The framers of the Constitution were well-educated and well-bred holders of property and wealth and were dominated still by the English standards of society and behavior. The social aristocracy of Federalism ruled in terms of politics, manners, education, literature and all else which goes to make
a civilized community. Even with the extension of suffrage about 1800 and the election of Jefferson—"an atheist in religion and a fanatic in politics"—the founding fathers still controlled the instruments which gave society its character. Madison, Monroe, and J. Q. Adams carried on the aristocratic tone which began with Washington. But after 1800 the extension of the universal suffrage theory and its adoption in state after state, the population growth, the philosophies of industrial pioneering working hand in hand with those of frontier pioneering, and the expansions in technology, manufacturing and education all worked toward the undermining of the old established forms of society. It was slow and laborious work to oust a system which had been building for centuries and had tradition to support it. The first manifestation of the rising power of the demos did not come until 1828 when it showed itself politically with the election of Andrew Jackson. In the wake of its political appearance came its evidences in economic and social structures, so that by the depression period 1837-1842, democracy was upon the nation in its most rampant and raw forms. This was the period of crisis in the trying out of a new social philosophy, the period of inevitable "cheap and nasty journalism," "get-rich-quick speculations," unscrupulous party politics, social climbing, riots, and lawlessness which resulted when a meagerly educated and enthusiastic class of people...
were suddenly told from all sides that the country was in their hands. Leveling democracy was at the helm and guiding the destiny of society.

The change, of course, was not all for the worse, as is well pointed out in corrective studies of the period. It was probably inevitable that such a gross exaggeration of principles should be necessary to uproot some of the well-founded aristocratic traditions. The grossness was a step in the establishing of the principles of democracy, and, fortunately, in most respects, the excesses have been outgrown with time and maturity. But the important fact for this study is that, at the moment of change, thinking men with genteel backgrounds—a classification which includes many of the mid-century authors—were dismayed at the conditions and at the degradation taking place. The new generation "blithely undertook the task of spreading the good things, even the choice things, of life over the whole face of society.... For the first time in history a people faced the problem—today ever with us—of whether the finest fruits of civilization can be democratized without being vulgarized." This was the problem, the complex ambiguity which produced much of the intellectual tension of this crisis. The problem is in essence still with us today, but there is not the immediate aristocratic background nor the newness and rawness of equalitarian

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2For example, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, 1945); C. H. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, American Life Series (New York, 1927).

3Fish, p. xvii.
thinking to provide the clash that existed in the first half of the
nineteenth century. The tensions, though in existence, are not so
obvious or so clear-cut, providing one explanation, perhaps, why there
is no mid-century renaissance in writing today as there was a hundred
years ago. Still we may, as R. E. Spiller says, continue to question
the direction of our material progress, and "with that questioning,
there may come, as there came to Cooper, an appreciation of the amenities
of life and an opinion that equality in all things—education, art, even
society—is alien to the principle of quality in anything." That such

^[Robert E. Spiller, *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times* (New
York, 1931), p. 317.]

opinion and such questioning do still exist is evidenced by the critical
work of men like the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, George Santayana,
T. S. Eliot, and others.

The purpose of this chapter is to present a survey of these
changes which were taking place in the years of the early nineteenth
century, changes that were undermining the political, social, economic,
and intellectual positions held by the patrician element at the begin­
ing of the century. As such, the chapter can merely outline some of the
factors dealt with more extensively by the good social and economic his­
tories of the era. It can also serve to focus attention on the changes

^[For this background material on the social and economic changes
I have relied extensively on the following works: E. L. Bogart and D. L.
Kemmerer, *Economic History of the American People*, Longman’s Economic
Series (New York, 1943); Chester W. Wright, *Economic History of the
which created the most reaction among the writers of the time, the subject which is treated in the rest of the study.

Probably the most basic of the changes and the one with the most pervading influence was the growth of the population of the United States in the first half of the century. This factor, in one way or another, determined the pattern of all the social changes. The first census—1790—recorded a population of almost 4,000,000. By 1820, the number of persons had more than doubled, there being 9,600,000. Twenty years later—1840—the number had jumped to 17,000,000 and was continuing to increase at the same astronomical rate; by 1860 there were 31,000,000 inhabitants. Most of the increase, at least up to 1840, was due to the larger numbers of births than deaths, for only in the forties and fifties did immigration grow to large enough proportions to materially affect the census figures.

This rapid population growth was accompanied by a population shift. The census of 1850 showed that almost half of the population lived west of the Alleghenies where the democratic qualities could thrive less encumbered by British domination, and where the density of population per square mile was less than on the East Coast. With this dispersion came a decrease in social intercourse and a relaxation of
the social standards of the relatively compact and cultivated Eastern society, a relaxation which seemed especially irritating to the gentleman class. Another important trend was the urban concentration of the lower class industrial workers with similar interests, the result of which was to give them more voice in setting up standards of taste. Urbanization was due in some cases to the expanding manufacturing and to the factory system which needed a large labor pool, and, in other cases, to the fact that towns became receiving and shipping centers for the greatly increased agricultural products. Whether the population movement was toward dispersion in the new West or toward urbanization, it was providing the proper social and economic setting for Jacksonian democracy.

The trend of population toward the West was only a part of the whole phenomenon of the opening of the West which was to work such a significant change on the American people. The land acquisitions and early pioneering days were by this time a part of American history, but the actual settling of the West was now in full progress. To observers the old America seemed to be breaking up and moving westward. The fever of movement was everywhere, and the resulting instability and breaking of old ties was one of the chief points of criticism among the commentators of the time. The routes into this new country were difficult at first, but with the rapid development of transportation facilities, they soon became main arteries and smoothed the way for the facile movement of anyone who felt the least impulse to get away from old standards.

This rapid spread of the people over the Western territory was important not only for its direct influence upon our economic
development (it increased agricultural exports, drained off some of the labor market to keep wages high, created a demand for expansion of transportation system), but was the dominant factor in our political and social history throughout the period. The West soon came to hold the balance of power as a political section, and asserted itself in helping to elect Jackson, the first Western president. The national social character was affected by the passion for individualism, equality, freedom, initiative, practicality, and democracy, traits which were developed to a high degree by the hardships and classless society of the frontier. Although the demand for the new democracy was not confined to the West (the rising industrial and commercial centers of the East contributed their share of wage earners to the movement), it was the West which gave it its greatest and most characteristic impetus. It was the opening of the West, too, that gave the added emphasis to the feeling of nationalism and its associated theory of "manifest destiny" which lay behind much of the optimistic thinking of the time. The 1814 extension of the Oregon territory and the 1848 Mexican annexation were material results of this spirit.

As important as the opening of the West in setting the stage for the emergence of Jacksonian democracy was the change which was being realized in the realm of manufacturing and labor. From the factories came the wage-earner and mechanic class which complemented the new farmer class of the West. Here the isolation of the class was not geographical but economic, and the division into manufacturers and workingmen with their associated social philosophies provided two
targets for criticism by those who felt that the ideals of democracy were being warped in the contemporary interpretation.

It was just after the War of 1812 that the factory system gained a foothold in the United States, appearing first in the textile industry; in Waltham, Massachusetts, in 1814, Lowell brought all the processes of spinning and weaving under one roof in "the first complete factory in the world." By 1840 the capital investment in manufactures was $250,000,000. The new banking facilities and credit plans which rose along with the factory system also aided its expansion and paved the way for the operation of capitalists of industry.

With the rapid growth of factories and industries came the labor problems. The factory system demanded an adequate supply of workers near at hand; this promoted urbanization, with all its complexities. The use of labor also extended many opportunities for the abuse and exploitation of the labor force in terms of long hours and low wages. As a result, the period from 1820 to 1840 has been called the "awakening period" of the American labor movement, one of the most significant expressions of the rise of the common man. But labor was not complaining about low wages alone. The movement really arose as a protest against the merchant-capitalist system which was reducing the master and the journeyman to a common level of wage dependency. With the enfranchisement of unpropertied workers, labor began to organize and make demands along social lines. The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations was organized in Philadelphia in 1827, the first association of separate unions for common interests. In 1834 was organized
the first National Trades' Union, including the membership of local unions from places as widely separated as Boston, Washington, and Cincinnati. The demands of these unions, at first, were for such things as free tax-supported schools, abolition of imprisonment for debt, equal taxation, a less expensive system of legal procedure, a law in favor of mechanics' liens, no religious legislation, elimination of banking monopolies, and the abolition of the compulsory militia system. Later, in 1835, came the pressure against the long hours of labor, a movement which succeeded only partially when in 1840 President Van Buren issued his famous ten-hour day order for all public offices. Also the working-men were for "hard money" in the years just before the panic of 1837, and against bank inflation which drove the price of flour from $5.00 to $12.00 per barrel in the three years between 1834 and 1837. They demanded factory legislation for women and children, but it was not until 1847 that the first legislation was passed to protect child labor; this law limited the working day in factories to ten hours for children under fifteen in New Hampshire! In 1837, the year of panic, the early labor movement ended, having been weakened by a series of adverse legal decisions which began in 1836 with the imprisonment of twenty tailors in New York charged with breaking the common law against conspiracy and combination when they went on strike. Finally, in 1842, in a historic decision, Chief Justice Shaw of Massachusetts declared that labor did have the right to organize and that strikes were legal.

Along the way the labor movement had picked up all sorts of interesting and radical schemes for economic and social betterment.
Robert Owen, a Scotchman with ideas of reform through communistic organization, came to the United States in 1825, and after lecturing to all who would listen, attempted to set up his ideal community at New Harmony, Indiana, but the project failed. Charles Fourier, a French writer, had outlined his scheme of communal living before his death in 1837, and Albert Brisbane presented it to America in a book in 1840 under the name of Associationism. The well-known system of phalanxes or industrial groups, with all participating in and thus enobling labor, diverted the attention of the country for a time, and dozens of phalanxes were established, including the famous Brook Farm. But all were short-lived and did little toward influencing the labor movement.

The close tie-up between labor and the Jacksonian Democratic party became evident when many of the early demands of the Workingmen's Party around 1830 and 1831 were taken over and brought into existence by the Democrats. Such planks as the wiping out of debtors' prisons and the establishing of the mechanics' lien drew the support of "Workies" to the Democrats. It has been observed that "the Democratic party from 1829 to 1841 was more truly a workingman's party than has been the case with that party or with any other great party since."  

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6Quoted from the economist R. T. Ely in Fox, The Decline... p. 358.

Such, then, were the two sources, the West and labor, from which the party of the Jacksonian Democrats drew a large part of their membership. It must be made clear, though, that the phenomena that the writers of this period were criticizing, as we shall see later, were not
peculiar to the Democratic Party. The equalitarianism, the materialism, the chase of the almighty dollar, the speculation, the ill manners, the irresponsible press, the continual urge to be on the move and to accept innovations in place of traditions, were qualities belonging to Whigs and Democrats alike, many of them, indeed, being even more applicable to the business Whig faction than to the Democrats. In reality, the members of the Whig Party, and the Party itself, shared in the indictment of the reaction; the thinkers and authors of the time, led by Emerson, did not express their criticism along party lines.

The two most important manifestations of change in the first part of the century—the opening of the West and the growth of manufacturing and labor—were made possible, in one sense, through the extraordinary advances in science, inventions and technological improvements. Some of these have already been noted in connection with the growth of industry; others, just as important, should be noted here as elements contributing to the changes. For example, agricultural inventions such as the steel plow, the reaper, the mowing machine, and the thresher were just coming into general use, and as a result, the economic—and political—position of the farmer was on the rise, giving to American society an element of its new character. But the development of transportation facilities in the United States was perhaps the chief factor in making these years such a great period of change. Transportation, because of the great land areas involved, was the key to the growth of cities, to the opening of the West, and to the development of agriculture and industry which depended for their growth upon having
markets and getting supplies of raw materials. There were basically three stages in the development of transportation facilities, each, of course, overlapping the other. First came the turnpikes; then the rivers, canals, and lakes; then the railroads. The years from 1837-1842 were in the center of the water transportation development era; by 1842 there were 450 steamers on the rivers of the Midwest, and canals were opening everywhere. But roads and railroads were also undergoing rapid improvement. By 1833, for example, the National Road—present U. S. Route 40—had reached Columbus, Ohio. The expansion of the railroads, approaching its height in the 1840's, was instrumental in building the United States into an industrial nation.

There were many other technological improvements and changes in such areas as medicine, home appliances, and machinery. The most important, however, was the advance which was taking place in the various forms of communication. Closely linked with transportation, communication development was probably as effective as that of transportation in bringing about the social and economic changes of the period; in bringing about the change in intellectual tone, which we will discuss in the next section, improved communications facilities were even more important. The invention of the telegraph, the first successful line being established in 1844 between Baltimore and Washington, ranked with the invention of the steamboat as the most outstanding and far-reaching advance of the age. When it is realized that until that time a man had no method for instantaneous communication, the revolutionary character of the telegraph can be recognised. The postal system, however,
remained the means of mass communication, and its improvement and extension during the period was probably of more concern to the private individual and the widening of his horizons.

Finally we come to the area of change which was especially pertinent to these specific years, 1837-1842—the area of economic organization. As these were years of panic and economic depression, it is vital to have some knowledge of the background of the financial institutions and economic causes behind the external manifestations of crisis. And in order to analyze the reaction of authors to their economic environment, we must first see clearly what this environment was.

The panic and depression beginning in 1837 was the result of several economic and social changes, some of which we have already discussed. Increasing complexity of industrial organizations and changes in technological methods of production, for example, were factors in making a panic possible. A third factor, even more obviously the result of the period of change, was the whole social psychology within the country. The unprecedented pace at which the country was developing tended to create a spirit of unlimited optimism and speculation, giving rise to a demand for credit which led to abuses in banking methods. And as these banking methods reflected the whole economic change of our period, and as abuses of banking were the most immediate causes of the depression, the background of these institutions should be outlined here.

With the expanding commerce, trade, manufacture, and farming came the growth of institutions to handle money and credit transactions and to provide a medium of circulation. Thus arose in the first part of
the nineteenth century a system of banks which had, as their three main functions, the providing of a safe place for deposit of funds, the lending of funds so that people who could most effectively put money into use could get it, and the issuing of bank notes which would become an essential part of the circulating medium. The last two functions were intimately tied together. A bank would be chartered with a prescribed amount of capital, and then would receive deposits. From this combined source it would loan money, not, as today, by crediting the borrower with a deposit against which he could draw checks, but by issuing him notes made out by the bank itself which could be negotiated because they were certificates of the holder's credit with the bank. In the absence of treasury notes, such as we have today, these bank notes became the chief circulating medium of the country. Specie, that is, gold and silver upon which the monetary system was based, was kept chiefly in the banks—except for small change—where it served as a reserve and could be obtained for making international payments or used for settling balances between banks. Obviously, then, the success of this system depended upon how sound the currency, the individual bank notes, was. And the soundness of the notes depended upon the ability of the banks to redeem the notes in specie upon demand.

By about 1830, there were two kinds of banks in the United States—state or local banks which were chartered by the States, and the Second United States Bank, which had been chartered in 1816 for a 20-year period by the federal government. In 1830 there were 330 state banks and 26 branches of the United States Bank, whose headquarters was in
Philadelphia under the directorship of Nicholas Biddle. The government had no treasury of its own, so all government funds were deposited in the United States Bank, which was really a private financial institution, and all government transactions were handled by it. Therefore it held the strongest financial position in the country, and could pretty well control not only the economy of the country, but also, through cooperation with the moneyed interest, much of the political and legislative activity. Because of this latter possibility, the United States Bank came into political conflict with President Andrew Jackson and the Democrats in the famed "Bank War." It was also at odds with the advocates of the new democracy in general, and with the adherents of the state banks in particular, because of its desire to secure a sounder national currency. This could be accomplished by the simple process of paying out as loans only its own notes, and presenting the notes of state banks, which it had received in ordinary business, to the state banks for payment in specie. This in turn would compel state banks to contract their lending. But any such contraction was bound to be unpopular in a country which needed all the money it could get for speculation in new lands and industries.

The state banks were not all unsound, but many of them were. Because of the pressures of optimism and speculation, there was a tendency on the part of many banks to neglect having on hand an adequate specie reserve to meet the demands of depositors and note holders. At one time a New England bank with $500,000 of its notes outstanding was found to possess $86.48 in cash with which to pay them. Some banks were
established for the express purpose of making huge loans to its directors and other officials. Other banks, it was said, were located purposely in remote backwoods regions where wild cats abounded, in order to make it dangerous for anybody to bring his notes to the bank for redemption; thus the phrase "wild-cat banking" was originated. A Georgia bank is said to have required anyone presenting one of its notes for redemption to take an oath of ownership before five directors, the cashier, and a justice of the peace. It may be surmised that when cash was scarce, so were the directors. Of course, in some sections, as in Boston, the banks took measures for safeguarding their issues, and some state banks, such as those of Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, Virginia, and the Carolinas, proved eminently successful and sound.

With the existence of the two systems of banks—the state banks and the United States Bank—came inevitable rivalries and conflicts. Especially in the communities of the South and West was there much latent hostility toward the United States Bank. Where branches of the Bank were located in the same towns as state banks, the U. S. Bank, because of the huge amount of government funds deposited with it, was able to make more extensive loans to the buyers of new lands. Besides, the U. S. Bank was, in a way, the first example of monopoly encountered by the believers in democracy, and democracy has always been the foe of monopolies, corporations, or the money power in any form whatsoever. Also, the largest proportion of the stock of the Bank was held in the East, only 1,800 of the 350,000 shares in 1828 being held west of the Alleghenies.

Thus, in spite of the abuses and weaknesses of many of the state
banks, the Democrats, with the election of Jackson in 1828, made an issue for them against the U. S. Bank. Nicholas Biddle, the Bank's director, became the object of the political attack and soon came to symbolize the hated idea of government controlled by moneyed interests. Headstrong and hot tempered, Biddle was certainly not the one to present the Bank's side advantageously, and the Bank War became, on one level, a clash of two personalities, Biddle and Jackson. Although the Bank's charter did not expire until 1836, Biddle determined to force the issue by demanding a recharter before the election of 1832. The recharter did pass Congress, where Biddle's men had control, but on July 10, 1832, Jackson vetoed the bill. In November, the people upheld him by re-electing him by a large margin.

With this support, Jackson felt authorized to go ahead in his attempt to crush the Bank, and he determined to withdraw the government funds, some six and a half million dollars, and deposit them with the local banks. He had to fire or promote two Secretaries of the Treasury before he found one, Roger B. Taney, who would go along with the plan. In retaliation Biddle ruthlessly curtailed the Bank's business and called in loans, purposely creating general economic distress to prove the need for a U. S. Bank. This turned public opinion even more against the Bank, and Biddle finally called off the curtailing action, and the crisis was over by late 1834. The Bank finally was rechartered as a state bank by Pennsylvania just one day before its national charter expired.
These events were partially responsible for the Panic of 1837. With the veto of the recharter bill for the Bank of the United States, and with its withdrawal from the national scene, the way was open for the expansion of the local banks, both in number and in volume of business. The speculative enthusiasm of the times, the internal improvements in canals and railroads by the States, the investments in western lands, combined with the deposit of government funds in local banks, made such expansion possible. This led to an inflation of loans and circulation on the part of the local banks far beyond sound banking practices. Between 1829 and 1837 the number of local banks increased from 329 to 788 and their circulation from $18,000,000 to $150,000,000. Loans increased in this period, the amount in 1837 being about five times that in 1830. Before 1830, land sales had averaged less than $2,000,000 per year; in 1836 the receipts from the sale of public lands were $25,000,000.

This speculative bubble was burst by the Panic of 1837, producing one of the four most severe and prolonged crises in the country's history, the others being in 1873, 1893, and 1929. There were several immediate causes for the panic. As early as July, 1836, Jackson, in order to check the land speculation, issued the famous Specie Circular which required that all payments for public lands be made in gold or silver. This, as was intended, cramped the operation of western banks which were financing the speculation through loans, and cast public suspicion on their notes, since the government would not accept them. Also the withdrawal from state banks of Federal surplus funds, the demand for specie payment by English credit firms, and the decline in cotton prices contributed to
the shaky condition. Nervousness due to all these situations increased, and in May, 1837, the New York City banks had to suspend specie payment altogether. Soon almost 600 banks all over the country had failed. Contraction and liquidation ensued, bank-note circulation falling off from the $150,000,000 high in 1837, to $58,000,000 in 1843. Twenty-five million acres of land were sold in 1836, but in 1841 the total sale had dropped to one million acres. By early 1839 specie payments had been resumed through policies of severe contraction, but the difficulties then became even worse than in 1837, and for a second time the banks suspended. This was the beginning of the lowest point of the depression.

The exigencies of the slump were felt in different areas of the country at different times. The effect on the merchants and industrialists of the South and East was almost immediate; the pressure in the agricultural West in no way compared to that of the other areas until after the collapse of 1839, but it then more than equalled the distress of the other sections. With the universal contraction of currency, spurious and counterfeit paper money flooded the market. In Illinois barter was resorted to in order to carry on trade. But in whatever section of the country, and at whatever time the hardships struck, the poor man and the laborer bore the brunt of the catastrophe. By September of 1837, nine-tenths of the factories in the Eastern states were said to have closed, with the same proportion of employees thrown out of work. By June almost two-thirds of the clerks and salesmen in the large commercial houses were without work. Almshouses and poorhouses were filled, and as the cold months came on, those unable to gain admittance died of
starvation or froze to death.

Professional and salaried classes weathered the storm better at first, as their salaries had not advanced with the increase in prices, and they had not had the opportunity to speculate and invest. But with the more widespread collapse, they suffered too. And the panic fell with equal force on the well-to-do land operators in the West and the Eastern capitalists who had speculated widely. Bankruptcies increased, and with the enactment of the Federal Bankruptcy Act of 1841 over $450,000,000 in debts was lost to creditors. All classes suffered in the general economic chaos.

Before the financial condition of the country had again reached an even keel in 1843, countless remedies—economic, political, social—had been suggested, and great splits and regroupings of political parties had taken place. There were reforms in laws governing banking, led by the Free Bank Act of New York in 1838 which permitted anyone to establish a bank if its notes were secured 100 per cent by government or valid real estate securities. President Van Buren, who had been in office only a few months when the panic hit, immediately called for the independent or sub-treasury system to prevent the use of public funds for private speculation. This system would in effect separate the government from any bank, and, by following the "hard money" provision of using only specie for receipts and expenditures, would stabilise and regulate the bank note currency. But the bill, although finally passed and signed on July 4, 1840, by Van Buren, had split the Democratic Party and helped to insure the 1840 Whig victory.
The end result of the social and economic changes outlined here was to elevate the common man to an increasingly prominent position. But it is also true that with the new spirit of the age came the excessive speculation, the unscrupulousness, the chase after the dollar, and the uncontrolled materialism which were in a large part responsible for the financial panic. Thus a writer's response to the economic distress of the time is in part his response to the seamy side of the whole new democratic emphasis in America.
The years from 1837-1842 saw the culmination of an intellectual and cultural change that had been in process throughout the first part of the century. The change in this realm was as distinct and revolutionary as were the economic and social changes, and this intellectual switch-over was of even more importance when it came to prompting the reactions of the writers of the period.

The main element in the public trend of thought was the rise of the democratic, equalitarian feeling which opposed the patrician philosophy and direction of culture in existence from the very beginnings of the country. That the country was directed by the aristocratic and well-born, even as late as 1820, does not need to be minutely argued; the fact has been quite adequately documented in many intellectual histories, even in those whose avowed purpose was to show the undercurrent of democratic thinking which existed all the time. The purpose of the

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1I refer to such studies as Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, 2nd ed. (New York, cop. 1951), which I have used extensively in this section; Ralph H. Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought: an Intellectual History Since 1815, Ronald Series in History (New York, cop. 1940); and Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1927).

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first part of this section is merely to give the flavor of this almost aristocratic milieu in which many of the writers of the early nineteenth
The 18th century had their roots of personality, temperament, and idealism. This is important in understanding their reactions which are discussed later.

After the first flush of revolutionary enthusiasm in America, the conservative bias took over and indicated its reaction. The substantial merchants and planters, and the professional men most closely associated with them—the clergy and lawyers, were the critics of the enlightenment, the French Revolution, Daniel Shays, and Thomas Jefferson. Even with the election of Jefferson, the power of the patrician conservatives was not ended. They drew English support from the ideas of Burke for authority, institutionalism, legalism, property rights, and the rule of the substantial classes; they maintained control of the intellectual and cultural life of the nation. In denunciation of violence and in defense of property the Federalists wrote against Tom Paine, Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Among the voices were those of John Adams, William Cobbett, John Fenno, Joseph Dennie, William Cliffton, Thomas Greene Fessenden (Democracy Unveiled, 1805), Richard Alsop (millionaire Connecticut merchant), and most of the Hartford Wits. Especially abhorred were the results of the French Revolution, the equalizing and leveling as well as the violence and bloodshed. "Property must be secure or liberty cannot exist," said John Adams. In The Defence of the Constitutions Adams attacked equalitarianism as unrealistic and based on a false and untenable conception of human nature. "But man differs from man almost as man from beast...a physical inequality, an intellectual inequality of the most serious kind is established changeably by the author of nature; and society has a right to
establish any other inequalities it may judge necessary and good." Again he said, "The people of all nations are naturally divided into two sorts, the gentlemen and the simplemen...the poor are destined to labor, and the rich, by the advantages of education, independence, and leisure, are qualified for superior stations." Madison, in The Federalist, emphasized the "innate diversities in the faculties of men." The respect for the

authority of the past, established institutions, and law found its expression in the judicial thought of John Marshall. William Cobbett, the transplanted Englishman who edited Federalist papers, once exclaimed, "O base democracy! Why, it is absolutely worse than street-sweepings, the filth of the common-sewers"; Alexander Hamilton's famous remark was, "Your people, Sir, is a great beast."

Although a few literary men such as Freneau and Barlow advocated the cultural possibilities of democracy, many others, such as Fessenden, Clifton and Dennie were deeply devoted to the aristocratic cause. As one Boston writer put it, "in this land, where the spirit of democracy is everywhere diffused, we are exposed, as it were, to a poisonous atmosphere, which blasts everything beautiful in nature and corrodes everything elegant in art; we know that with us the 'rose-leaves fall un-gathered'; and we believe, that there is little to praise, and nothing to admire in most of the objects, which would first present themselves to
Conventional beliefs were upheld by the conservative element against the new freedoms and infidel beliefs characteristic of the new movements. Religious orthodoxy used revivalism and decency societies to counteract dangerous French atheistical doctrines and lax morals. Satire and religious condemnation were used against new developments in medical and other sciences. All in all, the reaction which succeeded in re-establishing the control of the aristocratic, Federalist, conservative faction at the beginning of the century was as violent as were the revolutionary ideas which were sweeping across the country.

But with the collapse of the French Revolution, with the conservative reaction abroad, symbolized in the figure of Metternich, and with the change from Jeffersonian liberalism to the more moderate conservatism of Monroe and Adams, the bitterness was softened and the patrician element continued its reign in an era of "good feeling." The business and professional man could take an interest in the cultural life of the country, and the lawyers, physicians, and clergymen of the patrician class largely shaped the intellectual life of the new nation in the decades just before Jackson's election. They refused to truckle to the vulgar whim of the lower class in either ideas or taste, and set about to preserve the knowledge and culture of the past and to increase the store. In short, during most of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, a refined and cultured class of gentlemen controlled and
directed the intellectual life of the United States.

All this time, however, there were forces at work which were paving the way for the common man to challenge this patrician leadership. As we have seen, the opening of the West, the rise of manufacturing and labor, the technological improvements, and the spread of education were all preparing for the ultimate democratic upheaval and the change in the intellectual atmosphere. Although the typical Western town was still conservative in its tastes, in the West there was a freedom from the restrictions of the older regions, a freedom that attracted the champions of free thought and social experimentation. Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, became a center of liberal unitarianism. Francis Wright, a Scottish freethinker and feminist, established on the banks of the Mississippi near Memphis her community of Nashoba, where she intended to demonstrate the feasibility of emancipating slaves through the accumulated profits of their labor. Robert Owen bought the Rappite community at New Harmony, Indiana, for his communal social experiment. From the West came propagandistic statements attesting to the new intellectual atmosphere. James Freeman Clarke, a Bostonian, wrote from Louisville, "Everything there is free, open, active. To be useful one must lay aside all narrow tastes and exclusive feelings, and from pure love to humanity, plunge into the life about him." The editor of the Cincinnati Literary Gazette declared in 1825 that "there are no people, probably, in the world, who are so ready to make experiments respecting social relations and domestic arrangements, as those of the western country,—none who are so little fettered by established habits, or who are less disposed to
consider hereditary prejudices and heirlooms which cannot be parted with."

At least, this was the new popular concept of the West, although often not practiced in actuality.⁵ Men such as Timothy Flint, Judge James Hall, and Caleb Atwater felt that a new literature should be developed incorporating the moral qualities of Western homespun democracy—individuality, heroism, independence, vigor, perseverance, generosity, and enthusiasm for liberty. These and other qualities were not new; they had existed in America even during patrician times. But they were accentuated and brought to the fore by pioneer life and inevitably were carried back and added to the growing undercurrent of democratic revolt coursing through the nation.

The general rise of industrialism and technology that we have seen in the preceding section also contributed to the new intellectual trends. Free enterprise, said the industrialists, had broken down arbitrary barriers which had kept the common man from rising in accord with his abilities. Any factory worker could now leave the factory to become a manager or even a capitalist. "Neither theoretically nor practically, in this country, is there any obstacle to any individual's becoming rich, if he will, and almost to any amount that he will.... How is it possible, indeed, that the poor should be arrayed in hostility against the rich, when...the son of an Irish coachman becomes governor.

⁵Curti, pp. 263-264. But see also Lucille Clifton, "Beginnings of Literary Culture in Columbus, Ohio, 1812-1840" and Kathryn E. Utz, "Columbus, Ohio, Theatre Seasons, 1840-41 to 1860-61" (unpublished dissertations, Ohio State U., 1948 and 1952) for actual conservative tastes in a typical western town at this time.
of a State, and the grandson of a millionaire dies a pauper?\(^6\) The equality of the Declaration of Independence was interpreted as the equality of opportunity, and the liberty, as freedom from restraint. Under such "democratic" conditions, those who rose to the top did so because they were the best men.

Advances in the area of technology did much to raise the standard of living of the common man, and, in turn, the interest on the part of the masses in new discoveries did much to promote progress in invention. The application of technology to the improvement of the lot of the people provided the theoretical relationship between technology and democracy in the intellectual development of the country. The lives of the masses could be enriched; the common man could defy the authority of church, state, sect, and class by discovering for himself the secrets of nature and using them for his own well being; the artisan could elevate himself and reach undreamed-of mental heights and standards of comfort through the mastery of science and the machine. Thomas Ewbank, scientific writer, saw the machine as an instrument which enabled ordinary man to be the master of his fortunes. By reducing the cost of the comforts of life and the tools of knowledge, by freeing the common man from the necessity of toiling from dawn to dark, and by increasing the wages of intelligent and skilled labor, the machine had done much to enable mankind in general to share advantages previously monopolised by the privileged. There was, of course, much criticism of this point of
view among the writers of the day, especially from such quarters as the Transcendentalists, but technology continued to be identified with democracy.

Perhaps the most obvious and widespread change, however, was in the realm of education, where the popularization of knowledge and the spread of ideas became the gospel for those who would advance the theories of equalitarian democracy. Nothing else was so vital to the rise of the common man as to bring to him, through every means available, ideas and techniques whereby he might improve his cultural position. This movement, in terms of authors, publishers, and general literature, will be discussed in the next chapter; here we can merely survey the more formalized changes in terms of institutions and organizations devoted to education.

In the first place, many members of the established patrician society were in favor of diffusing knowledge to the masses. The reasons were many, several having been taken from the English writers on education. Such diffusion of knowledge would help prevent a crisis in class relationships if the masses understood the reasons for low wages and poverty; education might result in discoveries which would benefit all; and besides, as Lord Brougham had written, practical education of the masses would greatly reduce expenditures for charity and people would be less prone to idleness, crime, improvident marriages, skepticism, superstition, and intolerance. Mercantile and mechanics libraries and institutes were set up for men by American philanthropists; Lowell mill owners encouraged female operatives to improve their minds through
lyceum lectures and factory magazines. General libraries and institutions for scientific training were endowed during this period by such men of property and wealth as Rensselaer, Bussey, Sheffield, Lawrence, Peabody, Bates, Astor, and Tappan. To these might be added the Lowell Institute and the Cooper Institute of Boston and New York.

Free public schools in this time, however, were another question. To many, the plan to support schools through taxation sounded too socialistic, and would provide education to those "who were better suited to their station without it." In addition, there was the problem of the relation of religion to education. But these difficulties and objections were gradually overcome. The colleges in this period, on the other hand, still maintained an attitude of conservatism in spite of undercurrents of democratization such as that in 1837 when Oberlin College admitted four girls to candidacy for the A.B. degree. Religious denominations still were the overwhelming forces behind colleges; Harvard was Unitarian, Princeton was Presbyterian, Yale and Dartmouth were Congregational, Columbia and William and Mary were Episcopalian, Brown was Baptist, Georgetown was Catholic, Rutgers was Dutch Reformed, and Connecticut Wesleyan was Methodist. In 1837 there were about 100 colleges with an enrollment of 10,000. The curricula were classical and chiefly directed to the training of ministers.

It was in the realm of self-improvement that the most practical advances were made in the dissemination of information. The rising tide of democracy reinforced the conviction that every person not only possessed the right to knowledge, but the potentiality to achieve it.
William Ellery Channing in his essay on "Self-Culture" gave the characteristic expression to this democratic ideal, saying that the idea that people needed no other education than that which would fit them for their jobs was false. Thus grew up an important and widespread movement to attain culture through reading and especially through listening to lectures. In Boston twenty-six courses, all numbering over eight separate lectures, drew more than thirteen thousand people during the winter of 1837-1838. Silliman, lecturing on chemistry at the newly established Lowell Institute, attracted such crowds of people that the windows of the Old Corner Book Store, where tickets were being distributed, were crushed in. Robert Dale Owen summed up the trend of hundreds of speeches of the day on the subject of common and equal education when he said, "We must reach the minds and the hearts of the masses; we must diffuse knowledge among men; we must not deal it out to scholars and students alone, but even to Tom, Dick, and Harry, and then, as a witty female writer of the day expressed it, 'they will become Mr. Thomas, and Mr. Richard, and Mr. Henry.'"7

7Curti, p. 358.

The mechanics' and merchants' libraries and institutes and the lecture series were chiefly for the lower middle class urban populations; in other small villages and farming communities appeared another type of organization for the dissemination of knowledge, the lyceum. The purpose of the lyceum was to promote knowledge through the encouragement of the common school, the establishment of libraries, and the holding of debates
and general lectures, but it was the lecture program alone for which the lyceum soon became well known. There was much of superficialism and sensationalism connected with the program, but there was also much sound and useful knowledge that could be used by the populace in their thinking and debating. The lyceum added its influence to that of the school systems, institutes, libraries, books, and periodicals in paving the way for the common man to usurp the patrician control and direction of the intellectual tone of the country.

With all these forces at work undermining the exclusive control of the national culture by the aristocratic element, the country went through a gradual intellectual change. Only when such a change reaches political expression, however, does it become overt so that it can be chronicled in histories. In this country, the first political expression of the new democratic force was in the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1828. For the first time the George Washington "dynasty" was not able to elect one of its group; Adams was Vice President under Washington, Jefferson had served in Washington's cabinet, Madison was Jefferson's Secretary of State, Monroe served in this position under Madison, and John Quincy Adams under Monroe. Now the country had elected a Westerner, a man who symbolized the possibility of the rise of a common man of humble origin to the highest office. He stood for the social theories of the laborer and farmer against those of the businessman and merchant.

However, it must be made plain that the new political division of the country which existed after the change in intellectual domination was not strictly a division between the patrician and lower classes.
Federalism, as a social philosophy, was no longer in this period a contending force. The split in parties was between two parts of the so-called middle class, both parts of which subscribed to many of the beliefs of the era. Both, for example, had by this time accepted the phenomena of the expanding franchise and the development of industrialism. Perhaps it is unfair to ascribe the name of Jacksonianism to some of the trends which showed up in both of the new parties—the Democrats and the Whigs—but this term has been inevitably used to describe the American social thought of the second quarter of the nineteenth century which, more or less consciously, extended the boundaries of democratic thinking. It was, as has been said, primarily a middle class movement, although within the movement were two conflicting sets of ideas. In the upper middle class were the members who grouped themselves about the standards of the Whig Party, a party which took shape originally as an opposition party to the Democrats after their election of Jackson. In this party were a growing group of large-scale industrial and commercial capitalists and financiers, land speculators, and large Southern planters who were united in their opposition to executive usurpation and who were, after 1840, for programs of subsidy, protection, and monopoly. They inherited many of the Federalist and National Republican ideas, but they were not the aristocratic element as were the Federalists. The line of division was no longer class and rank, but money. In the terminology of the day, the Whigs were the "moneyed" party or "the party of privilege." The major magazines and newspapers were under their control and, appropriately,
their program called for high protective tariff, government financing of canals and roads, a strong central government, and, especially, a strong United States bank.

Around the lower middle class standards of the Democratic Party were a varied group of farmers, laborers, states rights men, "hard money" anti-bank men, and all sorts of radical elements with schemes for utopian social organizations. These were referred to as "the people," "the workingmen," or "the have-nots," and their program called for lowered tariffs, state banks of deposit or a sub-treasury, removal of special privileges, and the maintenance of states rights. Some of the old aristocratic agrarian group preferred to support this Democratic Party either because they feared the power of the rising and competitive industrial upper middle class, because they saw the time had come when the laborers could not be excluded, or because they truly believed in the ideals of individual freedom for all mankind which could best be approached through the Democratic Party. Many of the writers of the day took this latter position—Cooper and Hawthorne, among others.

The way in which the new social ideas that we have been investigating were incorporated in the politics of the country is best illustrated in studies that have been made of the developments in two key states, Massachusetts and New York. Here we can see in some detail how the
support of the people for the party of Jackson grew until it reached a high point in the Locofocoism of 1836-37. In Massachusetts, for example, Boston's wealthy merchants and bankers had directed and controlled commercial and financial affairs of the state and made up the socially elite. But with the beginning of political ferment, some powerful political figures, like David Henshaw, split off from the Federalist and National Republican Parties over controversies such as that of a free bridge for the Charles River. They then joined the Jackson forces, and with Jackson's victory, became powerful conservative Democrats. In turn, with the rise of industrialism, radical Democrats—Locofocos, etc.—united under George Bancroft, and the traditionally Republican and Whig state of Massachusetts was for a time dominated by Jackson-Van Buren forces. Likewise in New York, with the social changes democratic stirrings were felt within the National Republican party, and the splinter party, under what was known as the Albany Regency, supported Jackson and sent Van Buren to Washington as Jackson's Secretary of State. In the ensuing political controversies, both the names "Whig" and "Loco-Foco" were invented by New York newspaper editors. With the election of Van Buren, New York Democratic radicals gained prestige and split with the Democratic conservatives of Tammany Hall on the issue of the independent treasury bill. This helped the Whigs to victory in the presidential election of 1840.9

9 The key sources for this part of the background survey are D. R. Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, previously cited, and Arthur B. Darling, Political Changes in Massachusetts 1824-1848; A Study of Liberal Movements, Yale Historical Publications, Miscellany Vol. 15 (New Haven, 1925).
Of course, other political factors were involved in the election of Harrison. Both Clay and Webster had offended too many of the common people, and the Whigs realized that they needed to change their tactics and their personalities if they hoped to win. Thurlow Weed, the most prominent figure in Whig politics, was more instrumental than any other person in bringing about the choosing of the Western general. The strategy of the campaign is well known: Van Buren presented as an aristocrat importing expensive foreign materials for redecorating the White House, eating at a table heaped with gold and silver service, drinking Madeira wine, using cologne on his whiskers; a Democratic jibe about Harrison being content with a log cabin and hard cider picked up and used as a campaign theme; Webster criticized for not having been born in a log cabin, but claiming the distinction for his older brothers and sisters. The strategy worked. The real issues concerning the rich against the poor, the moneyed monopolists against the private individual, the aristocrat versus the democrat were pretty well obscured in the hoopla of the bitter contest. Although with the election of Polk in 1844 the Democrats were able to re-institute the independent treasury which had gone out under the Whigs, the issue was not a live one.

In the meantime, the aristocrats, as such, no longer took part in politics. The American people in the 'forties had become politically homogeneous, and in consequence, there was no "critical" party. That some thinking men were dissatisfied with the turn of the intellectual tone of the country is true, but they had to find other ways to express their discontent and reaction than through a political party. "As they cannot
occupy in public a position equivalent to what they hold in private life," observed De Tocqueville, "they abandon the former, and give themselves up to the latter; and they constitute a private society in the state, which has its own tastes and pleasures." Captain Marryat, after visiting the United States, reflected the attitude of some citizens when he declared that the American society would soon disintegrate unless a political aristocracy were reconstituted. "I do not mean an aristocracy of talent and power which wealth will give—an aristocracy which will lead society and purify it."¹⁰

¹⁰Fox, pp. 416-417.

In the 'forties the popular interest shifted from the threatened economic class struggle to two engrossing subjects—reform (including slavery), and nationalism and patriotism. Both these movements were part of the new spirit of democracy, and both found critics of their methods and ideas among writers of intelligence and respectability. The decade of the 'forties saw men and women inspired by the philosophy of reform to change dress and diet in the interest of health, to do away with capital punishment, imprisonment for debt, slavery, intemperance, war, and prostitution, and to agitate for women's rights, humane treatment of criminals and the insane, and even for the overthrow of family, property, and the state itself. The philosophy of reform was widespread, and was born of the same tenet of the Enlightenment that had inspired many of the other revolutionary democratic changes, the tenet that there is a possibility or even an inevitability of human improvement or progress.
toward perfection. But progress was not something to wait for passively. Albert Brisbane, the Fourierist reformer, wrote in The Social Destiny of Man, "Nature...has implanted in man an instinct of social progress, which, it is true, will lead him through a series of transformations, to the attainment of his Destiny; but she has also reserved for his intelligence the noble prerogative of hastening this progress, and of anticipating results, which, if left to the gradual movement of society would require centuries to effect."\footnote{Curti, p. 371.}

But beside these philosophical bases for reform, there were the social, economic and religious conditions at home that promoted reform movements. The depression following 1837 jarred many from their complacency concerning the condition of the workers and the special privileges of business. The new spirit of capitalistic industry and trade came in for criticism in the agrarian proposals, trade union organization, and the collectivistic communities. Brisbane's Fourierism received backing from such influential publications as Horace Greeley's Tribune, Parke Godwin's Post, and George Ripley's Harbinger. Religion, although usually quite conservative as an organization, inspired many reformers who set up the example of Christ, the doctrine of human brotherhood, and the sense of community responsibility for sin as standards in their reform crusades.

The reform movement advanced the force of democracy into the field of social relationships where it preached the levelism which many of the advocates of individual freedom deprecated. Many of the movements
were designed to inflict on everyone the standards and moralities of one group. It remained for the conservative intellectuals, including the writers used in the present study, to point out this fallacy—and others—to the reformers. To the intellectuals the individual reforms were also superficial, not getting to the heart of the difficulties, and as idealists, many would be satisfied with nothing less than the complete transformation of man's soul and mind.

The second intellectual movement eliciting the support of wide sections of the people was that toward patriotism and nationalism. Part of the ideology of American nationalism was based on geographic and economic expansion. Another part of the nationalistic and patriotic ideology grew out of emotional factors. The beauties of the physical terrain were lauded; the religious faith of the fathers was related to their heroic sacrifices for their country; historical events were commemorated in history texts, statues, and historical societies; America was seen as the great world leader in the progress toward democracy. National symbols such as the flag and the eagle were popularized, patriotic airs were composed and sung, "Brother Jonathan" and "Uncle Sam" were adopted as symbols, and Fourth of July and Thanksgiving celebrations were instituted nationwide. These emotional appeals did more, in fact, to kindle sentiments of patriotism and nationalism among the plain people than did discussion of geography, economics and literature.

In the realm of literature, the historical writings and compilations exhibited the most intensive nationalism. Also, some of the popular creative authors were incorporating essentially nationalistic elements in their writings; the most obvious of these elements appeared in the
literature that came from or was close to the common people. For example there were Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes*, Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi*, the "autobiography" of Davy Crockett, and the sayings of various characters such as "Major Jack Downing" and "Sam Slick." Many writers, however, criticised and condemned the excesses of nationalism, especially as exemplified in the Mexican War; Thoreau in his *Civil Disobedience* is a case in point.

The growth of the interest in nationalism and patriotism was closely tied to the changing intellectual tone of the country in which the common man and democracy were beginning to take over the control once exercised by the patrician. By resorting to nationalistic pride, the lowly person could make himself feel on an equal plane with all others. As Emerson remarked, "...the dusty artisan who needs some consolation for the insignificant figure his sordid habits and feelings make in comparison with the great, and in comparison with his own conscience and conceptions, is fain to remember how large and honorable is the confederacy of which he is a member and, that, however low his lot, his resources are yet reckoned an integral part of that awful front which the nation presents to the world. Hence the unaffected, boisterous enthusiasm with which any spirited allusion to the idea of Country is always received by a mixed assemblage."^12

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^12 Quoted in Curti, p. 414.
To complete this survey of the social, economic, and intellectual changes which were taking place in the United States, and to give more vivid expression to the actual sentiments which went toward making up the democratic spirit of the age, a brief sampling from some of the writers and theorists themselves should be presented. Their actual words sometimes stated more clearly and memorably the abstract ideas that are apt to be lost sight of in a survey such as this.

First there were the words of Andrew Jackson summing up the situation in regard to the Democratic Party's stand in favor of the people against the money interests, on the matter of tariffs:

The corporations and wealthy individuals who are engaged in large manufacturing establishments desire a high tariff to increase their gains. Designing politicians will support it to conciliate their favor.... The surplus revenue will be drawn from the pockets of the people, from the farmer, the mechanic, and the laboring classes of society.... It will certainly not be returned to those who paid it and who have most need of it and are honestly entitled to it. There is but one safe rule, and that is to confine the General Government rigidly within the sphere of its appropriate duties.

It will be noted that here Jackson made his overtures to the farmers and laborers; on the question of banks, he did the same. A Bank of the United States, he said, whether federally or state chartered, could "concentrate the whole moneyed power of the Union, with its boundless means of corruption and its numerous dependents, under the direction and command of one acknowledged head; thus...enabling it to bring forward, upon any occasion, its entire and undivided strength to support or defeat any measure of the Government." Such a power, as had been seen by experience, acted injuriously upon "the agricultural, the mechanical, and
the laboring classes." "The paper money system and its natural associates, monopoly and special privileges, have already struck their roots deep in the soil; and it will require all your efforts to check it further and to eradicate the evil." As to the Spoils System, Jackson thought that all men "may readily qualify themselves" for holding office, and that change did more good in government office than experience. But his remarks on social distinctions made it evident that Jackson, himself, could not be equated with equalitarianism: "Distinction in society will always exist under any just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions." Laws which add to these distinctions, however, and make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, must be opposed by "the farmers, mechanics, and laborers."¹³

¹³ Quoted from Farewell Address of Andrew Jackson to the People of the United States (Washington, 1837) in Blau, ed., Social Theories, pp. 8-18; and from the first annual message to Congress by Jackson in 1829 and the Bank charter veto message in 1832 in Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It (New York, 1948), pp. 50, 60-61.

A second spokesman for the new sentiments abroad in the country was George Bancroft, whom we have seen active in connection with the radical Democratic elements in Massachusetts. He dealt, in a speech which was delivered at Williams College in 1835, with the philosophical basis for the belief in equalitarianism and majority rule; it was the basis also of the Transcendentalists' belief in the individual, but carried more definitely into the social realm:

Reason exists within every breast. I mean not that faculty which deduces inferences from the experience of the senses, but that higher faculty which from the infinite treasures of its own consciousness originates truth and
asserts to it by the force of intuitive evidence.... There is not the difference between one mind and another which the pride of philosophers might conceive....

In questions of practical duty, conscience is God's umpire, whose light illumines every heart.... And this admirable power, which is the instinct of Deity, is the attribute of every man; it knocks at the palace gate; it dwells in the meanest hovel.... Conscience, like reason and judgment, is universal....

If it be true that the gifts of the mind and heart are universally diffused, if the sentiment of truth, justice, love, and beauty exists in everyone, then it follows, as a necessary consequence, that the common judgment in taste, politics, and religion is the highest authority on earth and the nearest possible approach to an infallible decision....

If reason is a universal faculty, the universal decision is the nearest criterion of truth.... Thus there can be no continuing universal judgment but a right one.

Therefore, said Bancroft, the best government rested on the people and not on the few "because the munificent Author of our being has conferred the gifts of mind upon every member of the human race without distinction of outward circumstances." That there were voices being heard at variance with this popular trend in ideas is suggested by the way Bancroft took pains to refute counter-philosophies:

There may be those who scoff at the suggestion that the decision of the whole is to be preferred to the judgment of the enlightened few. They say in their hearts that the masses are ignorant; that farmers know nothing of legislation; that mechanics should not quit their workshops to join in forming public opinion.... It is hard for the pride of cultivated philosophy to put its ear to the ground and listen reverently to the voice of lowly humanity; yet the people collectively are wiser than the most gifted individual, for all his wisdom constitutes but a part of theirs.\[11\]

\[11\] Quoted from Literary and Historical Miscellanies (New York, 1855) in Blau, pp. 268-269.

Here in plain, persuasive language, is presented one side of a
conflict over the place of the individual in society—a conflict which was to produce tensions out of which came the greatest literature of the American Renaissance.

One other typical utterance of the day appeared in the first issue of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, a periodical established in 1837 as an organ of the Democratic Party in politics and literature. John L. O'Sullivan, part owner and political editor of the Review, was the probable author. In a well reasoned argument for the democratic principle, he recognized the existing objections and reactions. In this respect the selection is valuable in helping to present the somewhat reactionary point of view which we find among so many of the writers of the period. A person, he said, of "anti-democratic" persuasion would reason as follows:

Though the main object...is undeniably as stated by the democrat, "the greatest good of the greatest number," yet it by no means follows that the greatest number always rightly understands its own greatest good. Highly pernicious error has often possessed the minds of nearly a whole nation; while the philosopher in his closet, and an enlightened few about him, powerless against the overwhelming current of popular prejudice and excitement, have alone possessed the truth.... And if the larger proportion of the more wealthy and cultivated classes of the society are found on the side of the minority, the disinterested observer may well be excused if he hesitate long before he awards the judgment, in a difficult and complicated question, in favor of the mere numerical argument.

The writer, however, then returned with his answer to this "something more than plausible" position. In the first place, the greatest number was more likely to understand its own greatest good than was the minority. Secondly, a minority was much more likely to abuse power selfishly at
the expense of the majority, and the social evil thereby was proportionately greater. And in the third place, the writer declared that with the diffusion of education, the free press, and the facility of access to all knowledge existing at that time, there just naturally wasn't any such superiority of a minority class above the great mass of the community in intelligence and competence. This, of course, was the crux of the whole problem, and the very point that could not be established by saying "It is so" or "It isn't so." As far as what he said about politics was concerned most of the thinkers of the day would have agreed with O'Sullivan's principles; but such principles applied to social and ethical matters, some thought, were tyrannous.

As for literature, the writer for the Democratic Review felt that the literature of the United States lacked the vital principle of democracy. "As it is now, we are cowed by the mind of England.... We give back but a dim reflection, a faint echo of the expression of the English mind.... Our 'better educated classes' drink in the anti-democratic habit of feeling and thinking from the copious, and it must be confessed delicious, fountain of the literature of England; they give the same spirit to our own, in which we have little or nothing that is truly democratic and American." This he felt was the main cause of that "extensive anti-democratic corruption of sentiment" which he admitted to exist in the minds of a portion of the people—especially the young:

It has lately been a topic of newspaper remark that nineteen-twentieths of the youth of one of the colleges of Virginia were opposed to the democratic principles. The very exaggeration is good evidence of the lamentable truth; and it is well known that a very large proportion of the young men who annually leave our colleges carry with them a decided anti-popular bias, to swell the ranks of that large majority of the "better classes" already ranged on that side, and to
exercise the influence of their cultivated talents in a
cause at variance with the genius of our country, the
spirit of the age, the best interests and true dignity
of humanity, and the highest truths of the science of
political morals.\footnote{15}

\footnote{15} Quoted from the "Introduction" to The United States Magazine

Actually, among the ranks so maligned by the Review writer were
the author-critics of democracy, including literary figures such as
Emerson, Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville whom the Young Americans around the
Review were claiming as their own.\footnote{16} But theoretical, political democracy

\footnote{16} John Stafford, The Literary Criticism of "Young America"; A Study
in the Relationship of Politics and Literature, 1837-1850 (Berkeley, 1952),
p. 33.

was not the object of the attack by these literary figures so much as the
social and economic applications of the equalizing standards of democracy.
As Melville said in Mardi (1849), political freedom was good, but only as
the means to individual, personal freedom, uprightness, justice, and felici-
ity. These were qualities not to be shared or won by sharing; they were
virtues either born with the individual or won and held by him, and him
alone. No matter how loudly the thrall yelled out his liberty, he was still
a slave. And Melville was speaking for many when he wrote that an individ-
ual was more likely to be free, upright, just, and happy under a single
monarch than if he were exposed to the violence and whims of twenty
million monarchs, even though he be one of them.
Chapter III

The Literary and Publishing Scene

In the meantime, while the United States was going through this period of social and economic change from a patrician to a democratic society, literature, too, was undergoing a democratization. Various factors—including technological improvements in bookmaking, the state of the copyright law and pirating practices, the phenomenon of literary journalism, and the expansion of the reading public as a market—made possible, for the first time, cheap book production, a necessary prerequisite for the democratization of literature. The taste trends of this new reading public, partly shaped and partly followed by the critics, began to determine what the editors and publishers would put into print; the common man became, in these years, the patron of both the author and publisher, and his desires became a shaping force for much of the literary output. Especially was this true in the years of depression when editor, publisher, and author alike were often on the brink of financial disaster. This literary environment, then, even more directly than the general social and economic environment, inspired the reactions shown by many authors to the new "democratic" attitudes.
First of all, the period under consideration lay in the middle of a technological revolution in bookmaking,¹ a fact which made possible the publishing of a book at a price within the reach of a large audience. In the early nineteenth century came the improvements in the construction of presses, the first basic changes since the days of Gutenberg. Iron construction, screw type pressure, fulcrum pressure, and finally cylinders instead of flat beds all came into use in this period. Steam power came into general use by 1836 when the Adams press began to find wide adoption, and from that time until after the Civil War, 90 per cent of the good book and magazine printing was turned out on the Adams power-driven bed-and-platen presses. The substitution of cylinders for bed-and-platen devices did not begin generally until the Hoe Type Revolving Machine was put into operation in 1847 in this country, and then it was used chiefly as a newspaper press. Stereotyping, electrotyping, type casting and setting machines, paper making machines all were coming into use during these years and affecting the economics of the book trade by cheapening the price of books. The effect of this cheapening on the attitudes held by literary men we will examine later.

A second factor affecting the publishing in these years was the absence of an international copyright law. This helped to cheapen the price of books, to encourage the periodical trade, and even to hasten the development of the short story form in the United States. It did all this by making possible the pirating of books by American printers and publishers. The familiar story is briefly this. The American copyright law of 1790 provided for copyright protection only for American citizens. Publishers thus had to make arrangements to buy the copyright or pay royalties to the American author before they could publish his work. English authors, on the other hand, had no legal protection at all in this country, and publishers had only to get a copy of an English book in order to publish whatever they pleased free of charge. Why, then, publish an American book, and especially when English books were more in demand at the time anyway? From the author's side, and this is even more important, when English reprints were selling at twenty-five or fifty cents because of pirating competition, American books had to sell at the same price to circulate in quantity. How could an author possibly get a
reasonable return for his time and talents, even though he did receive the normal 10 per cent royalty, with his books selling so cheaply? The hardship worked on the American author is obvious. Not only did he have to produce something more popular than the English reprints in order to assure a large sale, but his published books had to meet the price competition of the cheaper non-copyrighted publications. The encouragement to periodicals, which could publish English novels serially—or all in one outsized edition—at the price of a few cents, and to the American writers to write for the relatively higher paying periodicals, is also obvious. As the position of the periodicals was enhanced, the demand grew for stories which could be completed in one number, and the short story began to take form as a genre.

The copyright situation had long been protested by both English authors, who could make not a pound on the American returns from their works, and American authors, who suffered from the English competition. ¹

¹Cooper very early recognized the injustice and tried to aid Sir Walter Scott's cause. James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, American Men of Letters (n.p., cop. 1919), pp. 54, 64.

But in spite of scattered protests from writers such as Cooper, John Neal, Tom Paine, Bryant in the New York Evening Post and Willis G. Clark in the Knickerbocker, very little action was taken in the United States prior to about 1837. And even then, though increased agitation was marked by such actions as the presentation of the British Author's Petition and the formation of the International Copyright Association, little legal action
The opponents of the bill were organized and presented their reasons for not passing an international copyright bill. First and foremost was the appeal to the purse-minded public in favor of retaining the cheap books; then the point was made for the idealistic public that such a law would undermine democracy by retarding the education of the masses and by depriving the people of cheap books. The opponents further cited the increased fame and circulation provided the English authors by the American reprints, the "fact" that Americans were not writing worthwhile or popular books, the injury to the book trade that would result from copyrights, and the tendency toward monopoly that would be encouraged by such a law. The issue was confused with the protection of manufacturers, and many protectionists opposed it on this basis. And there was also some doubt as to whether the inspired writing of an author was not the property of mankind in general rather than the private property of the writer. In truth, there was a general indifference and lack of interest in the whole problem by the public and Congress, and, since the book trade petitions against the bill outnumbered those for it by two to one, the Congressional committee reported adversely in 1838 and the bill was dropped.

Evert Duyckinck recognized that the people would not soon give up their cheap reprints, and in 1843 organized a "copyright club" to wage the fight. "Diary," December 27, 1842, p. 57 and August 31, 1843, p. 137. (MS in Duyckinck Coll., New York Public Library, hereafter, NYPL).
Sporadic agitation was continued, but the only tangible result was a sort of system of "trade courtesy" adopted by the publishers, under which the publisher receiving advance sheets first from England had his rights respected. This was a self-motivated movement to keep the industry from being completely ruined by cut-throat competition, and was a far cry from adequate copyright laws.\footnote{For details of this "trade courtesy" agreement, see J. H. Harper, The House of Harper: A Century of Publishing in Franklin Square (New York, 1912), pp. 110-112. An early example of how an English author, Tennyson, benefitted from the agreement is pointed out in Warren S. Tryon and William Charvat, The Cost Books of Ticknor and Fields, and Their Predecessors, 1832-1858 (New York, 1949), pp. 52-53.}

Thus, during these years, an author was continually involved with inadequate copyright protection. He was enabled to see, from first-hand experience, an example of how the pecuniary interest overshadowed any other in this new democracy. He was made aware of the forces which had come to control pretty much what and how he should write if he wanted to be published. The copyright situation, together with some of the other phenomena of the literary world discussed later in this section, was important in shaping a writer's attitude toward the new democratic trends.

As a direct result of the lack of international copyright, pirating, or the unauthorized publication of an author's work without payment to the author, became a standard practice throughout the nineteenth century. It was during the years under consideration here, however, that the practice reached an infamous high point and became one of the outstanding practices affecting the literary scene.
The mechanics of pirating make up an absorbing story in the history of publishing during these years. Although an American publisher could publish without royalties any English work he could get hold of, he had no assurance that several other houses were not doing the same thing. This led to competitive races and scheming to see who could get the works to the public first at the lowest prices and thus get the cream of the sales. In 1836, for instance, Carey & Hart, of Philadelphia, published Bulwer's *Rienzi* at great speed after receiving early sheets, and in order to put it on the New York market before the rival Harper's edition, they hired all the seats of the New York mail stage and filled them with five hundred copies of the novel. They thus obtained the lucrative first few hours sale of the popular novelist's latest. 8

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8 Incidents summarized in Eaton, pp. 99-100.

By 1838, with the great increase in the number of readers, the popular demand which had been built up for English novels, and the advent of regular steam-powered Atlantic Ocean crossing, the "game" had become wholesale and cut-throat. Dickens, Bulwer, Lever, Marryat, Ainsworth, James, Mrs. Gore, Miss Pardoe were only the better known of the English authors being pirated. Much bad work was reprinted, as well as good, to take advantage of the conditions. In a letter written on Christmas Eve of 1838, N. P. Willis outlined the prospectus for a new magazine which he boldly proposed to call The Pirate:
It is our design, as editors...to take advantage, in short, of the privilege assured to us by our piratical law of copyright; and in the name of American authors (for our own benefit) "convey" to our columns, for the amusement of our readers, the cream and spirit of everything that ventures to light in France, England, and Germany. As to original American productions, we shall, as the publishers do, take what we can get for nothing (that is good), holding, as the publishers do, that while we can get Boz or Bulwer for a thank-ye or less, it is not pocketwise to pay much for Halleck and Irving.

In the letter, which was addressed to his partner, T. O. Porter, Willis went on to say, "If anybody says the name is undignified, tell them there are very few dignified people in the world, and still fewer lovers of dignity, and by the Lord, we must live by the many." These obviously slanted statements were designed to call attention to the existing conditions so that some one would do something about them, but they do accurately reflect what was going on in the publishing world. Even crime entered into the disorderly picture. Burglary and arson were attempted in order to obtain first sheets or prevent another publisher from obtaining early publication profits. In his diary Duyckinck reported that Harper's establishment was burglarized, but not, this time, set on fire. "What a compliment to English authors that every new novel of more than usual attractiveness sends abroad a whole brood of felony.... Now they [the newspapers] are in quest of Bulwer's 'Last of the Barons' which they have been announcing for the last three months in hopes to get hold of it by some windfall. Harpers pay for the early sheets." The peculiar

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10 December 27, 1842, p. 57.
and abnormal conditions which literary pirating had imposed during these years were widespread, and were among the most repugnant of the situations besetting an author in a period filled with economic depression and change.

Because of the unsettled and unfavorable conditions existing in the book publishing field, many of the American writers turned during these years to the periodical as a medium of expression. The second quarter of the century has been termed "The Golden Age of Magazines," and it is true that the expansion and activity in the magazine world was at its height. In 1825 there were less than one hundred magazines in existence, but by 1850 there were over six hundred. Improved printing facilities, new and larger reading audiences, and pirated material—combined with the new democratic enthusiasm for popular education—contributed to the magazine success story.

But for probably the greater portion of the periodical ventures, the "Golden Age" was hardly even copper when it came to finances, especially during the hard times which lasted through the period of our interest. The average life of a magazine over the whole twenty-five years from 1825 to 1850 was about two years. That would indicate that perhaps four or five thousand different periodicals were launched. ¹¹ Mott's bibliography

lists 117 magazines existing at some time during the period 1837-1842, and these are but the more important. With a record such as this, it is obvious that there were many launchings, failures, mergers, and changes. The most outstanding thing, then, about the magazine world that the authors turned to was the miscellaneous jumble of periodicals and editors all striving to catch the common public fancy in order to exist financially. Those who did succeed paid the best for contributions; thus in this magazine realm we can see most obviously the effect of the new democratic taste in shaping the literature of the day.

Financial instability was one of the elements which made for the "fluid" conditions of the journalistic world. Only a few magazines, which will be discussed later, were able to pay authors well enough to tide them over in this period of low income. The Knickerbocker Magazine, edited by the Clark twins, Lewis Gaylord and Willis Gaylord, was infamous for its low and slack pay.12 Other New York magazines of repute were in similar circumstances; Horace Greeley's New Yorker, by the end of the panic year 1837, was losing an average of $100 per week.13 The Arcturus,

12 The owners had to borrow, threaten, and request indulgence from their contributors. Leslie W. Dunlap, ed., The Letters of Willis Gaylord Clark and Lewis Gaylord Clark (New York, 1940), pp. 13-14, 97, 100, 108, 109-110, 115.

13 Merle M. Hoover, Park Benjamin, Poet and Editor (New York, 1948), p. 86. A statement of how poor the magazine was is in Benjamin's letter to a contributor, M.S. letter dated 23 Dec, 1838 (Park Benjamin Coll., Columbia University Library, hereafter, CUL).
a late comer to the New York scene, was established hopefully in 1840 by
Cornelius Mathews and Evert Duyckinck and received many excellent notices,
but lasted for only eighteen numbers.\[^{11}\] Outside of New York there were
troubles too. The Southern Literary Messenger tried to publish good
original material from voluntary contributions. But the survival formula
for magazines (the Messenger lasted until 1864) was contained in the advice
given to editor and owner T. W. White in late 1836. Wrote the corre­
respondent and contributor,

\[
\text{I very much regret, but am not surprised to learn that you are} \quad \text{much in want of copy.} \quad \text{I have long been satisfied, by repeated examples, that a Journal such as yours, cannot be sustained for a long period by gratuitous contributions of original matter.... Some periodicals here [Philadelphia] and in New York depend wholly on selected matter, and if it be made with good taste and judgement, they succeed. Would it not be advisable for you to continue to receive & to seek good & interesting original writing, but to make up the deficiency with selections principally from foreign publications?}^{15}
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\[^{15}\] M.S. letter dated 11 Sept. 1836 from J. Hopkinson. Another editor in Herkimer, New York, writes a typical complaint about lack of subscription and advertising: M.S. letter dated 2 Aug. 1838 from Obadiah A. Bowe to Griswold (Griswold Coll., Boston Public Library, hereafter BPL).

Park Benjamin was typical of the editor tribe who contributed
also to the "fluidity" of the current journalistic picture. Between 1835
and 1839 he was in editorial positions on the New England Magazine, the
American Monthly, the New Yorker, the Brother Jonathan, the Evening Tatler,
the New World, and the Evening Signal. Rufus W. Griswold, another
prominent magazinist, was in some editorial capacity on ten different magazines before he succeeded Poe as editor of Graham's Magazine in 1842.

This latter magazine was one of a few popular periodicals which emerged with amazing success for a depression period. The proprietors and editors of these publications seemed to have somehow sensed the direction of the popular taste, and, by reflecting and promoting it, managed to command circulation figures of, for that time, gigantic proportions. Thus they became the only profitable source of income for authors in the midst of otherwise lean years. It was through these successful publications—journals such as Graham's, Godey's Lady's Book, Brother Jonathan, and the New World—that the periodical press exerted its two chief influences on the literary scene: first, it acted as a medium for shaping an author's product to the taste of the new literary patron—the democratic public; and second, it helped bring about the phenomenon of cheap books in the United States.

With a good financial basis (Graham claimed a circulation of 40,000 in 1842) these magazines could dictate, in many cases, just what kind of writing they would use, and their contents were shaped for the new, wide audience—the common man. This audience was, for the most part,
dated 8 Aug. 1842; and from J. S. Kidney, the poet, to Griswold dated 21 Mar. 1843 (Griswold Coll., BPL).

part, content with the short fiction, the beautifully tinted plates, and the patriotic and sentimental tastes of the amateur writers. A contributor to *Graham's Magazine* wrote that he had an "Ode for the 4th of July" which he was sure would be popular in the July number, and the poet Hosmer wrote to Griswold enclosing some poems for *Graham's*: "I think you will be pleased with the lines to my dear little daughter. The poet is fulfilling his high vocation when he throws the halo of poetic light around any object or incident of home." All this is not to say that magazine editors consistently filled their pages with such drivel; they also acted as literary midwives for many of the best stories of Poe, Hawthorne, and the whole range of English writers. Longfellow's poetry and some of Irving's and Cooper's work appeared for the first time in magazines; but the staple of the periodical diet was the ephemeral sentimentality that the masses thrived one.

The second type of periodical which gained success in this period, the mammoth weekly, was no less influential in shaping and reflecting public taste, but instead of providing a lucrative source of income, these papers, by publishing complete English novels, precipitated the movement toward cheap literature and consequent low author-incomes. It was not the cheap books, as such, that hurt the American writer, but the insane competition which developed between the old-line publishers and the
new journals in the pirating of English authors. In the excitement, books were sold below cost, making a farce of the whole publishing business.

The two best known and most typical of the mammoth papers were Brother Jonathan and the New World. At first the gigantic size was a popular novelty among a population that was imbued with the idea of size and expansion and believed America first and foremost in all things; the New World reached dimensions four feet long and eleven columns wide, twice the size of a modern metropolitan daily. Sensational publicity methods also paid off in phenomenal sales figures. But the biggest attraction

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19 Hoover, Park Benjamin, pp. 120-137. This is one of the best accounts of the New World. Claims of the "wild-fire" sales are in Park Benjamin's M.S. letter dated 10 Sept. 1839 to Lafayette S. Foster (Benjamin Coll., CUL), and Brother Jonathan, April 18, 1840, p. 2.

was the low cost at which the ordinary reader could obtain the popular fiction which was the staple of these "news" papers; and the dramatic battle between the two weeklies and the publishing houses hastened the "Great Revolution in Publishing." At first the papers serialized the novels, chiefly pirated from England, but when serial publication of writers like Bulwer and Dickens became too slow and publishers were getting the full novels out before they were finished in the periodicals, the newspaper editors, using to the full their rotary presses, cheap paper, high-pressure sales systems, and low newspaper postal rates, began to publish complete novels, calling them "supplements" or "extras." These were unbound and paper covered, running in length up to forty-eight pages.
Under these special conditions whole novels were sold for as low as 18-3/4 cents, 12 1/2 cents (a shilling), and even 6 1/4 cents. And the new reading public was avidly grabbing up this cheap reading matter; the fact that it was poorly printed and often materially altered did not seem to matter. From the beginning of this practice, with Lever's Charles O'Malley in July, 1841, to sometime in 1841 when this type of publication was abandoned, hundreds of novels appeared at ridiculously low prices.  

A list of sixty-five novels appearing as New World extras is included in Hoover, Park Benjamin, pp. 201-206.

The effect on the regular publishers of this widespread journalization of literature has been mentioned. The newspaper editions selling boldly for less than twenty cents were throwing the industry into a turmoil. Park Benjamin reflected the popular sentiment when he wrote to the reading public, "You are not so green as to give a dollar for what you can get for eighteen pence or a shilling—not you." And the editors of Brother Jonathan commented, "if we give Master Humphrey [Dickens' novel], in addition to about ten times as much more matter besides, for half the price at what the numbers are sold, it may be the booksellers' misfortune—but the reader will hardly consider it our fault." Thus the publishers

Brother Jonathan, May 2, 1840, p. 3.
were forced to try to undersell with uniform paper-backed editions, and cheap books came into existence to stay. By 1841 Mathew Carey was writing to William Gilmore Simms that there was little hope for American belle-lettres while the market was "glutted with periodical literature, particularly the mammoth weeklies."  

In general, then, when the writer who was a democratic idealist came into contact with the magazine world, and asked, "What has democracy accomplished here?" he was apt to recoil at the standards and ethics then in vogue.

The literary criticism of the years 1837 to 1842 was developing in accord with the new political and social lines and was therefore a focal point of reaction for writers with standards of excellence differing from those of the new critics. The criticism appeared chiefly in the periodicals, whose politics often determined the tone of the criticism. Furthermore, the critical writing was influenced by the rise of the new book reading audience and the new economics of publication that we have seen. This influence played mainly into the hands of a group of critics and their friends who called themselves Young America.  

23 Quoted in Mott, Magazines, p. 361.

24 John Stafford, The Literary Criticism of "Young America"; A Study in the Relationship of Politics and Literature 1837-1850 (Berkeley, Calif., 1952). This group of literary critics grew out of the Tetractys Club of New York which was formed in the late thirties. It is not to be
confused with the political Young America movement of the 'fifties led by George N. Sanders, though the two groups had many affiliations. The chief members of the Young America critics were E. A. Duyckinck, William A. Jones, John L. O'Sullivan, and Cornelius Mathews; others prominently connected were Parke Godwin, William Leggett, J. B. Auld, Samuel D. Langbree, John Irman, Joel T. Headly.

allied itself generally with the Democratic Party and with the popular inclination to judge anything according to its appeal to the "common man." The Young America critic could find many American authors and books to praise, a practice which the new nationalistic movement condoned. He often wrote about "literature for the people," "poetry for the mass," and "the reading democracy," thus identifying himself with the equalitarian sympathies of contemporary democracy. In the words of Longfellow


there was developing a whole "Loco-foco politico-literary system," and this system laid exaggerated claims to most of the top-rank writers of the day.

William A. Jones, who wrote primarily for the Democratic Review, was the chief of the Young America critics. He developed more fully than anyone else the theory that the true genius would reflect in his work the "spirit of the age," and since that spirit was democracy, only "Poetry for the People" was acceptable as true poetry. He spoke also of "...pure Democracy, the only atmosphere in which the plant of genius may expand and grow." Jones and his cohorts, taking such a dogmatic theory as their

\[26\] Stafford, pp. 68-69.
guide, fell into a good many errors of judgment. For example, O'Sullivan, one of the editors of the Democratic Review, in reviewing Griswold's Poets of America, commented on the astonishing quantity of "very decent verse which is poured forth by every day's fresh issue of its fresh periodicals of sorts." It was true, he said, that large quantities could be collected each year "all rising up just so high and no higher—all intolerably tolerable," but as a Young American, he couldn't afford to disapprove. The large number of American poets, he said, was one of the results of the spreading of "a certain degree of education" and of the "influence of republican institutions" which suggested the "sentiment of equality which scorns to shrink from what other men, named Milton, or Shakespeare, or Byron, or Shelley, or Wordsworth, or Bryant, have attempted and achieved"; such poets must not be discouraged by criticism.27 Charles

27 Stafford, p. 43.

Fenno Hoffman was another example of those critics who fell victim to current nationalistic exuberance. His biographer concluded, "His criticisms were not, however, uncolored by his feeling that even writers who had not achieved excellence sometimes deserved encouragement, and that he should give their works as favorable a review as possible."28


Thus we find a new criticism developing along with the new popular democracy. It was not all bad criticism by any means, but it was bad when prompted only by "party line." "Young America did not always avoid the
pitfalls that its tolerance opened before it," said the historian of this
critical movement; "taking as its task the encouragement of even medioc-
rity in American literature, it sometimes fell into an easy literary
democracy which approved of anything written by an American or, at
least, an American Democrat."^{29}

^{29}Stafford, p. 120.

On the other hand, co-existing with the excessive liberalists of
Young America, were the literary figures representing the conservative
patrician culture of the earlier part of the century.^{30} These men,

^{30}Some of these were Lewis Gaylord Clark of The Knickerbocker,
Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Fitz-Greene Halleck, Richard H. Dana, Sr., George
represented in such periodicals as the Knickerbocker, the North American
Review, and the New York Review, struggled to maintain the high standards
of the past, those which they believed to be the only true standards.
The New York Review, for example, commenting on Catharine Maria Sedgwick's
popular "rights of man" novel Live and Let Live (1837), objected to the
"ultra-democratic sentiments." The people, it said, should be instructed
in the duties of liberty, not the rights; too easily people develop
"the licentious spirit of Liberty above Law, begetting discontent with
established and necessary distinctions and subordinations, and hatred
toward the richer classes." It felt that the democratic element should
be restrained, purified, and guided into "safe and rational channels."
In 1831, Samuel D. Langtree, one of the founders of the Democratic Review
and an ardent Young American, became so bold as to approach even John
Quincy Adams for an article. Adams' entry on the incident in his Memoirs
Long evening visit from Mr. Langtree—a fulsome flatterer. He urged me to write for his Democratic Review and Magazine; but I told him that literature was, and in its nature must always be, aristocratic; that democracy of numbers and literature were self-contradictory. It is obvious that these people were concerned over the fact that, as G. W. Peck, one of their number, put it, "authors less and less address themselves to a judicious few, and more and more to an unreflecting many." 31

31 These quotations from Stafford, pp. 83, 121, 5.

Paradoxically, even Evert A. Duyckinck, nominally one of the leaders of the Young America critics, found the contemporary untamed expression of "democracy" a bit too rash to deserve unmitigated praise. "I question whether now-a-days and from the condition of literature here...it is not wiser for a man to write to please himself and the love of his friends than to be jostled in the vulgar race for popularity," he wrote to his friend W. A. Jones in 1838. The next year Duyckinck advised Jones not to give up the possibility of a professorship for an exclusively literary life, for "it is better a thousand times to humor the dogmatism of an old President of a College than to be piping to a sparse vagrant flock of magazine subscribers for their patronizing six cents and a quarter per number." 32


These comments are but a few samples of the spirit that informed
many of the conservative literary critics and their friends during this
critical period of change. It was, in a way, a spirit of protest because
it was an incomplete acceptance of the dominant social and literary
standards of the age. How this same spirit involved and stimulated many
of the creative authors of the time will be the subject of later chapters.

In general, both schools of critics—Young America and the con­
servatives—fell prey to two faults which were to be especially noted by
the writers in this study in their characteristic reaction to the criti­
cism of the day. First, there was the widespread unscrupulousness of
much of the criticism; books were puffed for publishers in return for
certain considerations—sometimes in return for copies of the book, some­
times in expectation of similar favors. The second fault common to most

33 See William Charvat, "James T. Fields and the Beginning of Book
Promotion, 1840-1855," Huntington Libr. Quar., VIII (Nov., 1944), 75-94.
Other examples of "you puff my book, I'll puff yours" can be found in a
letter from Greeley to Griswold dated 20 Feb. 1841, in William W.
Griswold, ed., Passages from the Correspondence and Other Papers of Rufus
W. Griswold (1898), p. 59; and in letters from Park Benjamin to G. P.
1842 and 5 Nov. 1842 (Benjamin Coll., CUL). The originals are at the
Yale University and Pennsylvania Hist. Soc. Libraries, respectively.

published criticism was the acceptance of the popular sentimental moral
standards as criteria for judgments. Brother Jonathan, admiring Longfellow's
"There is a Reaper Whose Name is Death," said this voice was from "the
depths of a childless mother's heart...and no woman who has ever lost her
child has read it without recognizant tears. This...is not merely poetry—
it is the highest point of our contact with divinity." In the same issue
some of Mrs. Gore's stories and sketches were described as trash:

Skimming over one or two of them, we found them clever and amusing—but upon farther examination discovered two of the assortment at least, unfit to be carried into a family. In each, the denouement turns upon the offspring of adultery.

There is no good lesson whatever to be learned from such trash.... No pure mind could originate such horrid fancies; and no pure mind should be contaminated by their perusal. The Romans left parricide unprovided with a penalty in their code of laws—not deeming the crime of possible occurrence. A like omission should be made in books intended for the fireside. The idea of no vice should be suggested, which would be undreamed of, but for such mischievous promptings.34

34Brother Jonathan, Dec. 19, 1840, pp. 1, 2.

Even a more adequate critic such as E. A. Duyckinck was sometimes opposed by, and gave in to, this contemporary taste. Submitting a critical review of Lockhart's Life of Walter Scott to the New York Review, he was told by the editor, C. S. Henry, that the article could not be printed because Duyckinck had appraised Scott merely as a literary figure, and the readers of the Review would want such a critical notice to contain a judgment either for or against the moral value of Scott, from the Christian point of view. For, said Henry, there were multitudes of good Christian people who condemned both Shakespeare and Scott. "The question has been often asked: How are we, in the light of Christianity, to look upon a man passing his whole life, in manufacturing novels &c...which, if they have, incidentally, the quality of instructiveness, are yet in their main purpose & influence, at the best, only harmlessly agreeable, innocently amusing?" And Duyckinck, himself, commenting in his diary on a novel of Bulwer's he had just finished reading, admired the remarkable
sincerity and truth in the delineation of character, but concluded, "sentences and parts of this novel go beyond propriety and delicacy—as a picture of life the plot may be defended against immorality but even as such a true picture it wants severity of moral tone."\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\)M.S. letter from C. S. Henry dated 7 June 1838, and M.S. "Diary" entry March 1839, pp. 403-405 (Duyckinck Coll. NYPL).

These scattered excerpts, though not pretending to be a full picture of the criticism of the times, help to suggest the directions of the literary comment in this crucial period of change. The feeling of alienation toward this literary scene on the part of some of the first-class writers of the day is not difficult to understand.
There were, of course, a great number of people producing literary work during the period we are considering. Among them were some who seemed to have taken upon themselves, at one time or another, the task of openly, and sometimes viciously, attacking the elements of the democratic society that they disliked. They differed, in their basis for criticism, in their beliefs as to what would be most desirable, in their methods of attack, and in their virulence. It is fortunate, however, that there were some literary men who came out in open defiance; they give us an opportunity to better understand the thinking of other authors living, reacting, and writing in the same period—authors with only an undercurrent of aristocratic, conservative bias—who were presenting this bias chiefly in symbolic creative writing.

The American author whose reaction against the American society of this time was most obvious was perhaps the crusty old Richard Henry Dana, Sr. A product of the aristocratic, patrician society of early Cambridge and Harvard, he did not like the democratic social changes that were taking place in the first part of the nineteenth century, and he
simply and unconfusedly said so. He looked with longing toward the past and the idealized virtues of distinct classes and monarchistic orders which, from the present confused times, seemed so desirable. His desires were earnest enough, but so out of place in the United States that Dana himself was never able to communicate successfully with his society, and lived most of his life as a literary recluse.

Dana was born in 1787, and was fifty years old at the beginning date of our study. But for most of his life he had been upholding the conservative interests against the liberal invasion. He was a member of one of the Brahmin families of Massachusetts, his progenitors having been among the first families of the country.\(^1\) His ancestors had settled in Cambridge, where his grandfather and father had both graduated from Harvard. Dana's father had been active in the Revolution, especially as a diplomat, and was a good friend of Washington and Adams. Later he had served as Chief Justice of Massachusetts. The impressive mansion that he built on Dana Hill between Boston and Harvard College was the birthplace of R. H. Dana, Sr. Dana's mother was the daughter of William Ellery, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.\(^2\) Thus, Dana belonged to one of the patrician families which had long guided the destiny of America.

\(^1\) See H. W. L. Dana, The Dana Saga: Three Centuries of the Dana Family in Cambridge (Cambridge, 1941), for the account of his ancestors.
\(^2\) The Dana Saga, pp. 20-33.
Dana too went to Harvard, but didn't get a degree until many years later, because of his participation in a rebellion over bad food. But his friendships and connections all remained conservative. His study of law, in which he was deeply interested, led him in his later thinking to show always a respect for the absolute authority of the law. He was admitted to the bar in 1811. All of this background is significant, because it is typical of the background of many of the young literary men of that time.

At twenty-four Dana was the Federalist representative to the Massachusetts State Legislature, but four years later, in 1815, he decided to abandon law and politics for literature, and, as he had been one of the members of the anthology club out of which grew the North American Review, he became associated with Edward T. Channing in this conservative periodical. Already his withdrawal from the life of his times had begun.

The story of Dana as a literary man in a country which was becoming alive to the possibilities of an equalitarian democracy is a study in anachronism. But it is instructive for our purposes. He was the person, it may be recalled, who, upon hearing Bryant's "Thanatopsis" read in 1817, broke out saying, "That was never written on this side of the water." This
was an example of his general opinion of American literary ability. Informed that the piece was written by Bryant's father, Dana went to the Senate to see the man, and, although he had "a finely marked and highly intellectual looking head," not at all like a businessman, Dana still could not see "Thanatopsis" in it.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Recalled in his letter to Jones, 1846. See note 3.

An early literary venture by Dana was the publication of a review in 1821 called The Idle Man. For it he wrote legends similar to those of Irving's Sketch Book. But even at that early date his writings did not have much of a market; after seven numbers the work proved unprofitable, and was dropped. In 1833 a new edition was attempted, but his conservative bias had even less chance of succeeding than in the earlier period. Typically, he wrote in the introduction to his later edition that "the opinion of the many is of less weight with me than the few."\(^6\)

\(^6\)Bryant and His Friends, pp. 189-191.

This was his characteristic attitude, and, as a result, he was never able to make a living from his writing, although he tried. The Dana family estate and fortune was dissipated by the unwise speculation of one of Dana's brothers,\(^7\) and Dana had to turn from writing to lecturing and teaching to support himself in Cambridge, at least until his famous son was able to buy him a home on the coast. In 1835, for example, he
wrote to his friend C. S. Henry that he had taken a class of young females for reading poetry. "I detest reading poetry for the purpose of talking about it; but still, as it gives me a bite at that root called the root of all evil, I endure it...." And he said that unless the financial bonds were taken off his spirit he would probably never write more poetry. Just that morning, he wrote, he had been excited over having received $32 for an article in the Quarterly Observer; this, he continued, added to the $10 he had recently received for a Fourth of July address in Salem, was almost half as much as the $100 he had made on the publication of his Poems and Prose Writings in 1835. Since that $100 had just made up for his original loss on The Idle Man, his net profit to date was $42. By

8Letter printed in Bryant and His Friends, p. 200-201.

1839-1840, the worst years of the depression, Dana was lecturing on Shakespeare, giving a series of eight lectures in several eastern cities. But he never could make a literary success of himself with the "new" democratic public. It is true that from the conservative critics, and even from some of the "Young America" critics, he did receive high, if temporary, praise as one of the most important of American writers. Henry Norman Hudson, an important Whig critic, dedicated a series of Shakespearean criticisms (1848) to Dana, indicating the latter's recognized position as a conservative critic of Shakespeare; in Griswold's Poets and Poetry of America (1843), Dana held the central position in the ornate frontispiece; in Cheever's Poets of America (1847) the editor wrote, "We are disposed to rank Mr. Dana at the head of all the American
poets, not excepting Bryant; and we think this is the judgment which posterity will pass upon his writings"; W. A. Jones ranked him along with

Hawthorne, Cooper, and Poe as one of the "genuine originals" in the telling of tales; and a Democratic Review critic put Bryant at the top of the list of American poets, with Dana second. But Dana himself realized his lack of general appeal. In 1850 he wrote complaining that in the thirty years of his publishing he had cleared less than $100; and later, in 1876, he stated that he had never done anything by publishing in Boston or New York but lose money.

Even though the quality of Dana's writing was acceptable to the critics, his personal habits and political beliefs were reason enough for his unpopularity. He was not a congenial person. An old inhabitant of Cambridge reported that during fifty years of concurrent residence there with Dana, he had not met the man five times. Dana had a certain indolence which, his descendant H. W. L. Dana said, made him sit around like a disgruntled genius "immersed in profound conversation and wreathed in clouds.
of tobacco smoke." A grandson once wrote in a journal, "Today Grandfather was not more despondent than usual." Although in virtual retirement most of the ninety-two years of his life, he published only twenty poems and a small quantity of prose. James Russell Lowell, in A Table for Critics, wrote,

That he once was the Idle Man none will deplore,
But I fear he will never be anything more;\footnote{The Dana Saga, pp. 36-38.}

Further, his ability to say the wrong thing at the wrong time characterized his whole career, personal and literary. His contempt for the modern democratic experiment was obvious to all throughout his life. It was implicit in his actions and writing in the earlier years, explicit in the later years when the crisis became more acute. He continued through the years to make a somewhat untimely but defiant and romantic plea for a return to the past, to monarchy and aristocracy, to "established orders" and "established church." In the Salem Fourth of July speech for which he had received ten dollars, he took the opportunity to advocate a hereditary monarchy and a House of Peers.\footnote{Ibid., p. 36.} In 1838 he wrote to his friend, C. S. Henry, that he had not read the works of Catharine Maria Sedgwick, an advocate of the new rights of the common man, because "she never interests me in her books. She wants refinement, deep thought, knowledge of human nature...her views, political and religious, are superficial and erroneous." Dana himself, though his family was Unitarian,
abandoned Unitarianism and became, successively, Congregational, and Episcopal, and joined in the struggle against Unitarianism.\textsuperscript{14} Once, in 1845, when Duyckinck was editing Wiley & Putnam's Library of Choice Reading, he wrote to Dana asking him to contribute a book to the series. Dana was skeptical about the whole idea of a series, and saw in it an example of the "intermeddling with one another" which is "the great curse of that great Curse, Democracy."\textsuperscript{15}

Almost anything "new" he had an aversion to. On one occasion he wrote that he had "an indefinable horror (mixed with something like anger and hatred) of steamboats. I hate them partly because, like all 'modern improvements' they have destroyed so much beauty." He spoke of the steamboats as being "monsters, 'hot from hell,' smelling of it foul and stenchy."\textsuperscript{16}

The politics of the day he called "that vile blackguard squabble." His close and continuing friendship with Bryant was a strange relation, each admiring the other's poetry but hating his politics. To Bryant in 1837 Dana wrote, "Keep eye and heart upon poetry, all that you can amid the bustle and anxiety. As to reforming the world, give all that up.
It is not to be done in a day, nor, on your plan, through all time.

Human nature is not fitted for such a social condition as your fancy is pleased with." Dana was forever bemoaning to Bryant the lack of loyalty and obedience in an equalitarian society. When Bryant wrote to Dana during the European revolution of 1848, Bryant saw hope in the movement, and, after asking Dana to visit him, warned him not to make melancholy faces at what was going on in France. Bryant agreed that obedience to a civil magistrate was necessary, but felt that somehow it must be incorporated in a popular government, not a monarchy or aristocracy. But, wrote Bryant about the proposed visit, "You shall talk as long as you please about loyalty and obedience and the higher rule symbolised in earthly governments, and I will agree to at least half of what you say." 17

17 Parke Godwin, A Biography of William Cullen Bryant; with Extracts from his Private Correspondence (New York, 1883), I, 236, 356; II, 36.

Dana's condemnation of the modern trends was outright, simple, and complete. But as a substitute he seemingly had nothing better to offer than a romantic conception of monarchy. This lack of a positive vision for an ideal democracy was what kept Dana from ever becoming a part of the consciousness of America, and what differentiated him from some of the other writers who actually shared many of his criticisms of contemporary democracy. Bryant saw things amiss as did Dana, he wrote to Dana in 1862, but he didn't see how a change in the form of government would help matters. "You like the British form of government, but you see its operations at a
distance," he added. And it is true that Dana did admire the British class system. He and Fitz-Greene Halleck represented the extreme opposites of the "Young Americans." Halleck had been described by Bayard Taylor as an anachronism, an alien in the modern world," neither republican, democratic in the ordinary sense, Protestant nor modern," but "congenitally monarchial, feudal, knightly, Catholic, and mediaeval." That Dana shared many of Halleck's views was indicated in a letter written by Dana in 1866 to W. A. Jones:

After dinner Halleck and I talked monarchism, with nobility and a third order—enough to prevent despotism, nothing more. Bryant sat by, hearing us. 'Why,' said he, 'you are not in earnest?' 'Never more so' was our answer. Bryant still holds to simple democracy, I believe.... For myself, I am only better than ever satisfied what an incorrigible creature man is to govern under the wisest adopted forms. But man will have to come to orders and degrees at last.

Here Dana was voicing the belief in man as an essentially sinful creature, a belief common to all true conservatives. Dana's manifest admiration of English government and society and his condemnation of his own came out also in a letter to C. S. Henry in 1846 where he praised a certain letter, from a Lady to her Queen, which had evidently been published somewhere. "That was a fine specimen for you—a combination worthy of a truer age—
the subject's sense of obedience with the noble Lady's quick sense of insult and wrong...." Later, in 1853, he wrote that everyone who went to Europe seemed to return dissatisfied with the character of society at home, and some of his friends wished themselves across the sea again. "I cannot feel in sympathy with what is distinctively American in us," he wrote. "All I can say is I wish my country were better than it is—less blustering, boastful, grasping, sharp, vulgarly ostentatious, less absorbed with things physical, less dead of sense to our finer natures." And the next year his heart yearned for Old England, he wrote, although somewhat less since the Reform Bill and the death of Coleridge. "I do wish well to my country, and trust that the Lord will lift it up at last. But as it is now, I cannot find that in it I most long for."21

21 Ibid., pp. 212, 214.

In his personal beliefs, Dana presented one of the purest examples of an aristocratic bias. In his writings, too, he forthrightly outlined the philosophy of the conservative literary mind in this period of change. This philosophy, which is pertinent to our further study, was set forth in three of his essays: "Old Times," written in 1817 for the North American Review; "The Past and the Present," written in 1833 for the American Quarterly Observer; and "Law as Suited to Man," written in 1835 for Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer.

In the first essay, Dana clearly exhibited his sympathies with the older times, not argumentatively, but in a reminiscent manner; the era of change was not yet well upon the nation. His opening protest was
against remodeling of the family house and the clearing out of the old furniture. He bewailed the "pert, insignificant, and raw" look of the changed home. From that incident he moved into an unabashed and un-apologetic encomium of the old times. He was quite sure about the advantages of the old times over the new (even though the qualities of both eras seem to have been conjured up at his desk in his study). The old days were the age of strong character and warm feelings marked by individuality of character. "Would that this over-wise age had something of its childlike simplicity, something of its rough and honest manliness..."

He reminisced rather sadly about the warmth of greetings on former Christmas and New Year's Days, and about the friendliness of the April Fool's Day tricks, now "out of style." No longer could he force out the bright holiday blessings "to bring them forward to the ridicule of the affected refinement and cold rationality of this enlightened age." "But old things are passed away; all things are become new." Even the seasons were changing; people no longer could pick flowers on May Day, and instead of greeting the earth with glittering ice and snow, the New Year came in with a naked and sleepy dankness. Without the modern false elegance and constrained politeness, "men were left to an independent individuality of character and conduct." Taste was not "pampered and vitiated"; one could travel with the touch of breezes on his cheek, not as now, with the modern inventions, grabbing furtive glances through the carriage windows at the scenery "as if he were a stranger to it and would
Such was the tenor of the elder Dana's feeling for the past. In later essays he worked out, in more abstract terms—and in poorer writing—the philosophical basis for such an attitude. For example, in "The Past and Present," he presented in detail the advantages of the spirit of the past and the disadvantages of the present. A vivid spirit of the past gave oneness, individuality to character; it gave a spiritualized life to material things—things that were mere lifeless objects if considered only in the present; it imparted a stability to character; and most important, it fostered a spirit of reverence, of calmness, of simplicity which was so lacking in the world about him. A too exclusive attention to the present, on the other hand, had a materializing effect which narrowed and deadened the soul. The imagination was bounded by the visible and the actual, and its creative power held in check. An exclusive attention to the present thus weakened the power of generalizing, and drew a small circle around even the philosopher, who then could not see the unity or connection of things. To the person shut out from the calm past, the "short-sighted, unstable, exaggerating present" turned objects into monstrous deformities. It caused "a want of true self-acquaintance, and from this, again, an over-estimate of the good in us, and an under-estimate of the ill." This complacency was fatal to the spirit of reverence, and was the cause of the hated overweening bumptiousness which was the chief
characteristic of the age. And, said Dana in ending the essay, it was this self-pride, this decay of reverence, which made man discontented with his natural gradation of ranks. And it was a "natural" gradation, for did not God, in his creation of the harmony of the heavens and earth, set rank over rank from top to bottom?\(^2\)

\(^2\)Writings, II, 14-49.

In the third essay, "Law as Suited to Man," Dana took up his prejudices, already outlined, in relation to the form of social organization. Here, as one would suspect, he found the equalitarian, classless principles of democracy quite odious and in conflict with the natural gradation of men into Orders or classes. The Law, then, that would be suited to man, would recognize such ranks, and would reinstitute the humility and obedience that man had learned from God. France, he said, tried to do away with "differences," but found they would not stay smoothed out. Man, in the present day, was trying to form the Law, appoint those who would administer it, and then expect himself to reverence it. But if he looked upon the ministers of the Law as creations of the Law, "as servants of the Law, and not as servants of the people," then there would be "a more willing Obedience, a feeling of fitness in gradations, a kindly relationship in Orders, a natural connection from the head to the foot."

The whole idea of established classes, Dana felt, would call out a more felicitous society, more in accord with the natural distinction among mankind. Kindly interchange between Orders, based on the deference and respect of the master-servant relationship, and equality within Orders.
would contribute to a more harmonious existence than was then possible with society all "jumbled together, without affinities, into one huge, unsocial mass, and called—the people," where everyone was disputing and jealous over everyone else's place. He saw the idea of Equality in the disrespect of youth for age; in the scheme of education where "each expects to rise to the top as naturally as cork in water" and "the thousand are educated for that which possibly may be the good luck of one"; and in the tyranny of opinion which left no man the freedom of his own words, thoughts, or acts—"the despotism of the mad many over the considerate few."

As this principle [Equality], when applied to our social state, places all on a level, and as, on the contrary, the course of things is to inequality, man, instead of doing what is best in his condition, is discontented in it, and restless after something lying beyond it. Moderation in his desires and aims being annihilated, his scrupulousness about means to ends is endangered. His eagerness after the unattained is increased, and the ties of customs, habits, local associations, and the countless little attachments so congenial with what is thoughtful, gentle, affectionate, social, cheerful, in his nature, die out. In short, the sentiment and poetry of his being—the highest state of being—are suffocated in the dust and sweat of the eager and selfish race of life.\(^2\)

\(^2\)Ibid., II, 50-98.

Edgar Allan Poe's background was quite different from that of Dana, but Poe too illustrated a relatively pure aristocratic reaction to the times in which he lived. The grounds for Poe's reaction were not a desire for a return to the past or to a monarchic class hierarchy; his desire, in society as well as in literature, was for a recognition of the
genuinely excellent and beautiful, as determined, of course, by Poe's peculiar standards. This recognition, he found out, was not to be had in the America of his day, and Poe was thus constantly at odds with his society. His solutions, however, were not based on a deep faith in the principles of democracy, as were those of some other writers. Poe's thinking on ideal social organization seldom reached a sounder or more concrete position than that expressed in "Israfel" where he wistfully suggested that perhaps only by dwelling in Heaven could an acceptable existence be attained.

While Poe was not born into an aristocratic family (his parents were traveling actors), his early adoption by a well-to-do Richmond merchant, John Allan, was destined to bring out in Poe any latent tendencies toward an aristocratic bias. As one critic has stated it:

In his views on society and government Poe took on inevitably the color of his environment. It must be remembered that he always regarded himself as a Virginia gentleman, that he was reared in the expectation of becoming heir to one of the wealthiest men in Richmond, that as a youth at the University of Virginia he mingled on a footing of ostensible equality with the drinking and dicing young bloods whose families constituted the aristocracy of the South. He was conscious, moreover, of superior powers of imagination and intellect. Hence, it was easy and natural for him to assume an attitude of superiority to the rabble.... When his break with John Allan put the world of Virginia society out of his reach, he was constrained to assert with threefold vehemence the feelings of an aristocrat.25


From this conservative, aristocratic bias, Poe exhibited a passionate resistance to change, and a contempt for the undisciplined mob to which is
given the control of society in a democracy. He thought the current literature was, on the whole, poor, and that the vulgarity of the public taste helped to make it that way. If he himself truckled to popular taste, at times, it was either to make a living or to get his name before the public in the hope of becoming a famous magazine editor in a position where he could do something about raising the public taste through criticism.  


The years from 1837 to 1842 were of central importance in Poe's development, and afford us an adequate opportunity to study his reaction to the conditions accompanying the change from a patrician to a democratic culture. At the beginning of this period, Poe was just completing his work on the *Southern Literary Messenger*. His brief and disappointing stay in New York with his new bride and her mother during the height of the 1837 Panic was followed by his return to Philadelphia in 1838 where he was caught up in the very midst of the magazine turmoil, one of the most vivid expressions of the results of the new culture. Here for the next six years Poe was to be connected with popular magazines like Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine*, Graham's, and the *Saturday Museum*, all the while pursuing optimistically his hope of establishing a really superior five-dollar magazine himself (at first it was to be called *The Penn*, later, *The Stylus*), a magazine which would appeal to a select superior audience and which would ignore the "rabble." This high idealism pervaded Poe's thinking in all areas--critical, social, personal—and helps us understand the current of aristocratic idealism prevalent among some of the better writers of the day.
In examining Poe's reaction, the periodical world with which he was so intimately connected is the logical starting point. Here, where Poe was trying to make both his reputation and his living, he came into contact with some of the most despicable traits of his society. He felt that personal grudges rather than objective critical standards lay behind much of the criticism that was directed toward him as an editor. The charges against him for "indiscriminate cutting and slashing" in his position as Southern Literary Messenger reviewer were all leveled by other editors, he wrote, whose works he had criticized. For example, he had criticized Colonel Stone's Ups and Downs in the June, 1836, Messenger; and Theodore S. Fay's Norman Leslie in the December, 1835, number. In return both these editors had replied in their papers—the Commercial Advertiser and the New York Mirror, respectively—charging Poe with "indiscriminate venom." 27 Especially, he felt, was he the object of attack from the North, which was jealous of the reputation of Southern magazines:

"Here lies the true secret of the spleen of the little fish." 28 Again,

as editor of Burton's Gentleman's Magazine he could not notice favorably the new magazine of his friend Snodgrass because Poe's employer, Burton, was a good friend of Nathan Brooks, who had just had a falling out with

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28 Poe to J. Beauchamp Jones, a Baltimore journalist, Aug. 8, 1839, Letters, I, 114. Poe was at this time editor of Burton's Gentleman's Magazine in Philadelphia.
Snodgrass. Poe wrote to Snodgrass, "I am obliged to decline saying any­thing of the 'Museum' in the Gent's Mag: however much I feel anxious to oblige yourself, and to express my own views. You will understand me when I say that I have no proprietary interest in the Gentleman's Mag: and that Mr. Burton is a warm friend of Brooks—verb. sap. sat."  

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Besides this frustrating personal bias which dominated the magazine world, there was much which Poe considered to be the result of the lowered standards of society. Poe had to explain to a contributor, for example, how a poem sent to Poe for his proposed Penn Magazine finally ended up in the Saturday Evening Post with the words "written for the Post" after the title. Poe exonerated himself, blaming an editor with a part interest in the Post, saying the "written for The Post" was "a downright falsehood on the part of Mr. P. which nothing can extenuate—a falsehood wilfully perpetrated—of a kind which he is in the habit of perpetrating, and which have before involved me most disagreeably."  

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Poe to Lewis J. Cist, of Cincinnati, Sept. 18, 1841, Letters, I, 182.

wished to like Park Benjamin (he wrote in 1842), he could not bring him­self to do so, for, as typical of the tribe of editors, Benjamin was "too thorough-souled a time-server."  

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But the greater dishonesty was in the whole system of "puffing" then so widespread, both in the periodicals and in other realms of literature. Here Poe felt that the love of gain, if only in getting a free copy of a book or staying on the good side of a publisher, was put ahead of critical honesty. Sometimes too, it was a narrow sectionalism or even nationalism—which had no place in literature—that was made to overshadow good critical judgment. Therefore, Poe was never accepted as a "Young America" critic. In an article on "Puffing" in the Columbia Spy for November, 1844, usually attributed to Poe, he described how puffing, or systemized praising of certain men, had developed into a science, and how "celebrated men" and "distinguished writers" were manufactured in extremely short time. In this article, addressed to the small town paper in Pennsylvania, he especially accused the country editors of the villany. He cited the example of Neal's Saturday Gazette which set out to make a "great man" of its editor. Neal was pointed out as the author of the Charcoal Sketches;
This, Poe went on, was only one type of puffery. At other times praise was obtained through personal friendship, or through "other" means, but seldom through actual ability and talent.  

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33 Doings of Gotham; Poe's Contributions to "The Columbia Spy," compiled by Jacob E. Spannuth (Pottsville, Pa., 1929), pp. 103-106.

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Poe was certainly sincere in his reactions to this general humbuggery among the periodicals, but he too was in the fray and had to make his living under the conditions as he found them; he himself was not above the practices he condemned. Writing to Snodgrass in 1839, Poe asked him to write a notice, in Baltimore, of the Gentleman's Magazine, of which Poe had just become editor, and to include an extract (from a St. Louis paper) which praised Poe in such terms as "there are few writers in this country...who can compete successfully, in many respects, with Poe. With an acuteness of observation, a vigorous and effective style, and an independence that defies control, he unites a fervid fancy and a most beautiful enthusiasm. His is a high destiny." This Poe brazenly asked Snodgrass to insert. "If you will do me this great favor, depend upon any similar good office from me, 'upon demand'." 34 Three years later, this time just after he had withdrawn from Graham's Magazine, Poe again asked Snodgrass to insert a notice, editorially, which Poe himself then proceeded to compose, about how "Mr. Poe" had not written a certain critical article he had been accused of, and how he could never have
written such an absurdity. "Mr. P. would never be guilty of the grammatical blunders, to say nothing of the mere twattle, which disgrace the criticism."\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\)June 4, 1842, Letters, I, 202.

One other incident indicated Poe's paradoxical participation in the skulduggery which he took every opportunity to condemn. When Griswold's Poets and Poetry of America appeared in 1842, Poe wrote to Snodgrass on June 4, "Have you seen Griswold's Book of Poetry? It is a most outrageous humbug, and I sincerely wish you would 'use it up'." To Daniel Bryan, postmaster at Alexandria, Virginia, he wrote on July 6, "I shall make war to the knife against the New-England assumption of 'all the decency and all the talent' which has been so disgustingly manifested in the Rev. Rufus W. Griswold's 'Poets & Poetry of America'." In the Saturday Museum in 1843 Poe wrote a stinging review of the book: "As a critic [Griswold's] judgment is worthless...one of the most clumsy of literary thieves, who, in his wildest aspirations, never even dreamed of an original thought.... in giving it our unqualified condemnation, we only cite the opinion of all."\(^{36}\) But in June of 1842, Poe wrote a review for Graham's Magazine beginning, "This is the best collection of the American Poets that has yet been made, whether we consider its completeness, its size, or the judgment displayed in its selection," and when Griswold, thus expecting a friendly notice, bribed Poe to write another for the Boston Miscellany, Poe

accepted, but wrote the notice with several objections to Griswold's evaluations and omissions which he knew at the time would not please Griswold. Yes, Poe came into contact with the dishonesty of the periodical world—and at first hand. He still did not like it.

The low pay offered by the periodicals was scandalous, Poe thought. As editor of the Gentleman's Magazine, in November, 1839, Poe wrote, "It grieves me much that I can say not a word touching compensation for articles in Maga. The intense pressure has obliged Mr. B. with nearly every, if not every, publisher in the country, to discontinue paying for contributions. Mr. B. pays for nothing—and we are forced to fill up as we can." Poe to Snodgrass, Letters, I, 122.

When he was able to offer the best pay in the country as editor of Graham's Magazine, he was happier: trying to entice Mrs. Sigourney into writing for his columns, Poe, in 1841, promised her that her "compensation—for the days of gratuitous contributions are luckily gone by—will be at least as liberal as that of any other publisher in America." But still the position and pay offered for literary production in the United States was one of Poe's chief criticisms against his times. In 1836 he had written that the French and English surpass us in extent of subject and tone.
because "We are so circumstanced as to be unable to pay for elaborate compositions—and, after all, the true invention is elaborate.... The few American Magazinists who ever think of this elaboration at all, cannot afford to carry it into practice for the paltry prices offered them by our periodical publishers." This was one of the reasons why we were so far behind in a branch of literature which "in the end (not far distant), will be the most influential of all the departments of Letters." 40 When a German wrote about America and said "Authors of really able productions are liberally rewarded in America," Poe took exception in a review of 1845, saying perhaps the author had in mind Prescott's oft cited six thousand dollars for The Conquest of Mexico, a work which took many years and thus in the end paid Prescott "little more than any common scavenger might have earned in the same period, upon our highways." 41

40 Works, XIV, 73-74 ("Peter Snook," a review).

41 Works, XIII, 15 (Von Raumer's "America and the American People," a review).

The most effective of Poe's criticisms of the system of periodical pay, that I have seen, 42 is contained in the essay "Some Secrets of


the Magazine Prison-House," which appeared in 1845. Here, he gave due recognition to the those magazines which had managed to keep paying the writers who had been forced to them by the want of an International
Copyright Law. But then, with bitter satire, he pointed out that, perhaps, after all, we could not let our poor writers starve, "while we grow fat, in a literary sense, on the good things of which we unblushingly pick the pocket of all Europe"; and perhaps this is the reason, he concluded, that magazines, and a few publishers, provided a dollar here and there for the poor author. But Poe didn't blame the illiberality of magazines so much as he blamed "the demagogue-ridden public" who allowed orators against International Copyright to convince them that it was beautiful and convenient to rob literary Europe and that authors had no title or right to the products of their brains.

But why, Poe continued, if the magazines do pay, do they not pay promptly? He related the tale of the young author who was promised that he would be "handsomely paid" for an article. Enraptured, he starved through a month of writing. Six months after sending the article in, he had no reply, and called on the editor, whom he could not find in for four more months. He finally demanded the article back, but the editor said it was in print, and reminded the youth that the rule was not to pay until six months after publication. He decided to wait, but in the meantime died of starvation, while "the fat 'editor and proprietor' is fat henceforward and forever to the amount of five and twenty dollars, very cleverly saved, to be spent generously in canvas-backs and champagne."

Poe added that he hoped his readers would not think he was referring to himself or "to any Magazine publisher now living, it being well known that they are all as remarkable for their generosity and urbanity, as for their intelligence, and appreciation of Genius."*43

*43 Works, XIV, 160-163.
These were rather vivid criticisms of the relative rank, as indicated by money, accorded the literary man in America. But Poe saw the vulgar mediocrity of the periodicals in other respects too. In a letter telling of his resignation from *Graham's Magazine*, Poe cited his "disgust with the namby-pamby character of the Magazine—a character which it was impossible to eradicate—I allude to the contemptible pictures, fashion-plates, music and love tales." Three months later he wrote, "Should I go back to Graham I will endeavor to bring about some improvements in the general appearance of the Magazine, & above all, to get rid of the quackery which now infects it." Later, from New York in 1842, he spoke of the *Lady's Companion* as "the ne plus ultra of ill-taste, impudence, and vulgar humbuggery," and found the name itself enough to damn it: "Could any title possibly have been invented, more mawkish, more silly, more unmeaning, more flat? Who but a milliner's apprentice would even let into the house such a thing as a 'Lady's Companion'?" N. P. Willis, Poe reported to the *Columbian Spy* from New York, might have accomplished much for both himself and posterity had he been able to remain in retirement, "but, chained to the oar of a mere weekly paper, professedly addressing the frivolous and the fashionable, what can he now hope for but a gradual sinking into the slough of the Public Disregard? For his sake, I do sincerely wish the 'New-Mirror' would go the way of all flesh."
All of these complaints by Poe about what was happening on the periodical scene in the years of change were summed up in "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq." which appeared in the Southern Literary Messenger for December, 1844. In this at times clever but at times overdone satire, the whole magazine world was lambasted for all its absurdities. It was supposedly the relation, by himself, of the way in which Thingum Bob, Esq. had become a famous literary figure (Mr. Bob had thought of calling the paper "Memoranda to serve for the Literary History of America"). His first step on the road to fame was when his father, a barber, gave him a garret, pen, ink, paper, a rhyming dictionary, and a copy of the Gad-Fly, a contemporary periodical, so that he could become a poet. After submitting passages copied from Dante and other famous authors to such magazines as the Hum-Drum, the Rowdy-Dow, the Lollipop and the Goosetherumfoodle (who returned them with quite similar egregious condemnation of their quality), Thingum Bob came up with an Ode on his father's hair-oil invention, as follows:

To pen an Ode upon the "Oil-of-Bob"
Is all sorts of a job.

This was sufficient to make him a great name. The ensuing situations gave Poe the opportunity to satirize all the imams and trite things being written at the time in periodicals, and to indicate his disgust at the lack of originality, the dishonesty, the methods of puffing, the foolish quarrels and feuds with which he himself had become so well acquainted during the preceding six years.¹⁶

¹⁶ Works, VI, 1-27.
Journalism, Poe's chief occupation through the period of crisis, gave him little reason to see worthwhile possibilities in the new democratized America. Only his strange and persistent faith in his own ability to transcend all of this with a superior magazine seemed to keep him going. Out of this hodge-podge he still retained his vision of this publication which was to be absolutely independent in its criticism, to be guided only by the purest rules of Art, to be held aloof from all personal bias, and not to be intimidated by the anonymous cant of the Quarterlies, or the arrogance of the cliques which "manufactured" pseudo-public opinion. This was a high ideal, one destined for failure in Poe's America.

As a professional critic, Poe, during these years, was also close to literary production and criticism outside the periodicals. But here he found conditions as little suited to his temperament and ideals as in the journalistic realm. As elsewhere, there was too much trivial dishonesty, cant, and personal bickering in evidence. In the writing about American writers, literary nationalism had been carried to absurd extremes, especially in regard to the early writers; "gratitude, surprise, and a species of hyperpatriotic triumph have been blended, and finally confounded with mere admiration, or appreciation," he wrote in 1842. This habit of indiscriminately praising all American writers had favored the dunces at the expense of true merit in literature. Now, he thought, "we have, at length, arrived at that epoch when our literature may and
must stand on its own merits, or fall through its own defects. We have snapped asunder the leading-strings of our British Grandmamma, and, better still, we have survived the first hours of our novel freedom,—the first licentious hours of a hobbledehoy braggadocio and swagger. At last, then, we are in a condition to be criticized..." And Poe himself did criticize our American letters, relentlessly. But he did not find this to be the case universally. In a later criticism of Bryant (1846) he reiterated his opinion about how reputations were built. If a person of influence wrote a book, the publisher would immediately send him a hundred copies to distribute to the press, which thereupon would publish a hundred good notices—sometimes written by the author himself, and the man's name was made. On the other hand, a little known author, or one who was not such a "toadie" or a "quack" as to carry out the effrontery, was "utterly overwhelmed and extinguished in the flood of the apparent public adulation" bestowed upon the others.  

Daily Poe saw books being admired in this way. This practice, he felt, was doing damage to the American literary reputation, and he struck out against it. Early in his career, in a review of Morris Mattson's Paul Ulric (in the Southern Literary Messenger for February, 1836), Poe declared the book as being without merit, but he wanted to expose it in that it was "a portion of our daily literary food—as an American work published by the Harpers—as one of the class of absurdities
with an inundation of which our country is grievously threatened..."
Such works, he wrote, bring discredit upon our national literature. "We
have no right to complain of being laughed at abroad when so villainous
a compound...of incongruous folly, plagiarism, immorality, inanity, and
bombast, can command at any moment both a puff and a publisher." It

will be noted that Poe blamed the publishers and critics as much as the
writer. When earlier he had come upon a satire on the literary scene
written by L. A. Wilmer, The Quacks of Helicon, he was delighted and
employed the review as an occasion to "use up" the practices of the day.
To Snodgrass he wrote, "I have made it the text from which to preach a
fire-&-fury sermon upon critical independence, and the general literary
humbuggery of the day." In the review, which appeared in 1841, he

pointed out the truth of the accusations of cliquishness, chicanery, and
corrupt criticism. The intercourse between publisher and critic, he said,
was one of either blackmail or bribery. So far established was the sys-
tem of puffing that the publishers kept on hand assortments of commenda-
tory notices to forward with the books sent out. Thus there could be no
greater difference than that between the reputation of certain littéra-
teurs as current among the people who read the newspapers, and these same
reputations as deduced "from the private estimate of intelligent and
educated men." But this was not surprising, Poe thought. An editor, of
course, could never read and pass judgment on all the books he pretended
to review, so he retreated, usually into obsequiousness, big phrases, temper, and generalities. "The prevalence of the spirit of puffery is a subject less for merriment than disgust. Its truckling yet dogmatical character, its bold, unsustained yet self-sufficient and wholesale laudation, is becoming, more and more, an insult to the common sense of the community." But so continually had it been practiced that the critics of the day had come to think of it as duty. Therefore, said Poe, it was necessary for every critic to hold severely to truth, and care not for the personal attacks that were sure to follow any adverse criticism— if American literature were to overcome the stigma which had grown up around it.\(^\text{52}\)

\(^{52}\) *Works, X, 182-195.*

Other comments by Poe on the general literary scene were on the lack of copyright law. He advised a friend in 1842 to print his poetry at his own expense; "I feel sure that you will get no publisher to print it, except on your own account. Reason—Copy-Right Laws." The same year he also wrote, "Literature is at a sad discount. There is really nothing to be done in this way. Without an international copyright law, American authors may as well cut their throats"; and "the present state of the Copy-Right Laws will not warrant any publisher, in purchasing an American book." Later, in 1844, he wrote to Lowell, "How dreadful is the present condition of our Literature! To what are things tending? We want two things certainly:—an International Copy-Right Law, and a well-founded Monthly Journal, of sufficient ability, circulation, and character,
to control, and so give tone to, our Letters. In a note to the


Columbia Spy in 1844, which may have been written by Poe, the pirating practices due to lack of copyright were discussed. An unnoticed piece of American writing, picked up, translated and published in Germany as original, was then translated back into English, published in Blackwood's Magazine, and finally published in this country as something extraordinary.

54 Doings of Gotham, p. 111.

Many other faults of the contemporary literature were pointed out by Poe in his voluminous literary criticism, but only a few more of them can be noticed here. He was, for instance, as critical of literary subserviency as he was of exaggerated literary nationalism. In 1836 he wrote that there was a time when we cringed to foreign opinion, but now, in the revolution, "we are becoming boisterous and arrogant in the pride of a too speedily assumed literary freedom....we get up a hue and cry about the necessity of encouraging native writers of merit—we blindly fancy that we can accomplish this by indiscriminate puffing of good, bad, and indifferent..." 55 In an introduction to his "Critical Notices" in

55 Works, VIII, 276-77 ("Drake-Halleck," a review).
And the dinner in Fum-Fudge honoring the writer of an absurd

treatise on "Nosology" was written into one of the earliest of Poe's
satires on the literary world, the tale "Lionizing" having been one of the
"Tales of the Folio Club" written before 1835. All in all, the reaction

of Poe toward that part of contemporary society represented by the litera-
ture of the day was sharp, of long standing, and well documented.

A large part of Poe's alienation from his society in these years
was due to his extreme poverty. Of course many others were experiencing
hardship during the years of depression, but Poe's personality caused him
to be more adversely affected than were others. When the panic struck in
1837, Poe was in New York. Perhaps due to uncertainty of financial con-
ditions, and perhaps due to Poe's unpopularity in New York, he managed to
place only one criticism and two short stories. Returning to Philadelphia,
he continued to write, and sell stories. He also did some hack work on
The Conchologist's First Book, a textbook. But his income was so slight
that he was willing in the spring of 1839 to take an editorship with
Burton's Gentleman's Magazine at fifty dollars per month. This still

See Poe to Burton, June 1, 1840, Letters, I, 131.
did not suffice; in December, 1839, Poe had to apologize to John C. Cox for not being able to repay a loan of fifty dollars made over a year earlier. A collection of Poe's stories, Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, was brought out in an edition of 750 by Lea & Blanchard in December, 1839, but in spite of Poe's wishful thinking (thirteen days after publication he wrote, "I am happy to say that the edition is already very nearly exhausted"), it did not sell well. When in 1841 Poe proposed to Lea & Blanchard another collection of tales, they turned him down, adding that they had not yet "got through the edition of the other work." This in spite of the fact that Poe said he would "be glad to accept the terms which you allowed me before—that is—you receive all the profits, and allow me twenty copies for distribution to friends." Plainly Poe was getting no returns on his publishing.

After breaking off with Burton in June, 1840, Poe began earnestly trying to establish his own Penn Magazine. This whole venture was the story of lack of financial resources. First the Penn was advertised in June, 1840, to appear on January 1, 1841; the "delay being rendered necessary by my want of capital." But it did not appear in January; Poe was ill. "The worst result of this illness is that I am forced to postpone the issue of the first number of the Mag. until the first of March next...."
But it did not appear in March either; on April 1, 1841, he wrote, "The
Penn, I hope, is only 'scotched, not killed.' It would have appeared under
glorious auspices, but for the unexpected bank suspensions. In the mean­
time, Mr. Graham has made me a liberal offer, which I had greatest
pleasure in accepting." Part of the reason for Poe's going in with Graham
was that Graham had promised to back Poe's magazine at the end of six
months or a year. But by the end of a year, in July of 1842, Poe had
discovered the bitter truth: "The result has proved [Graham's] want of
faith and my own folly." But the hopeful Poe added, "I am making earnest
although secret exertions to resume my project of the 'Penn Magazine,'
and have every confidence that I shall succeed in issuing the first number
on the first of January [1843]." January first came and went, and there
was still no Penn. In February, 1843, Poe wrote to a friend, "On the
outside...you will see a Prospectus of 'The Stylus'—my old "Penn" revived
& remodelled under better auspices." This time Poe had actually signed
articles of partnership with the editor of the Saturday Museum, Thomas
Clarke, and the magazine was to appear July 1, 1843. But on June 20,
Poe wrote to Lowell, "Alas! my Magazine scheme has exploded—or, at
least, I have been deprived, through the imbecility, or rather through
the idiocy of my partner, of all means of prosecuting it for the present.
Under better auspices I may resume it next year." The next year, 1844,
Poe wrote again to Lowell describing a plan for a coalition of the elite
among the men of letters, to establish a magazine toward which each
would subscribe originally $200, and then supply the articles.64

64 Poe to Charles W. Thompson, June 28, 1840; to T. J. Cist, Dec.
30, 1840; to Snodgrass, April 1, 1841; to Daniel Bryan, July 6, 1842; to
Frederick Thomas, Feb. 25, 1843; to J. R. Lowell, June 20, 1843; to Lowell,
March 30, 1844: Letters, I, 110, 150, 157, 205, 224, 234, 247.
nothing ever did come of this long continued desire on the part of Poe for a magazine of his own. In 1846 he was still talking of the Stylus as the one great purpose of his literary life. In 1848 he was planning to go through the South and West to get 500 subscribers.

The continual financial frustrations and the public disinterest in his high-minded project were points at which Poe came most often into conflict with his times.

Throughout his life Poe's income from his journalism and literary work was insufficient to keep him out of dire poverty. Even during the most successful period of his life, while working with Graham (his salary was only $800 per year), he thought of availing himself of the Bankrupt Act. His poverty later, in New York, was much worse. But in the very same letter where he mentioned bankruptcy, he felt confident of receiving a Custom-House appointment. This suggests the second of the unsuccessful contacts with society brought on by the hard times—Poe's political job hunting.

As regarded politics in general, Poe was quite violent in his denunciation. In his satirical sketch "Some Words With a Mummy" (1845), Poe pointed out that the mummy who had come to life couldn't understand our modern word "polities" until one of the questioners sketched "a little carbuncle-nosed gentleman, out at the elbows, standing upon a stump, with his left leg drawn back, his right arm thrown forward, with
the fist shut, the eyes rolled up toward Heaven, and the mouth open at an angle of ninety degrees. In 1844, Poe wrote from New York that

because of politics—and the spoils system—Third Avenue was left in darkness for a fortnight; the lamplighters would not work because their jobs were political appointments, and they knew they were going to be replaced since their party had lost an election. One of the New York hotel keepers Poe scorned because he was so ready to change his signs to accord with the political winds. But when it came to getting a political appointment himself, Poe was ready to concede that a regular salary might be just what he needed in order to be free to do his best work. In 1841, when the Whigs were in power, Poe began his fruitless quest for a political job. His friend Frederick Thomas had just stepped into a $1000 job in Washington. "Would to God, I could do as you have done," wrote Poe. He added that he had worked for Harrison's election, had some slight acquaintance with Tyler (who was then in office), and was a Virginian. "For the rest, I am a literary man—and I see a disposition in government to cherish letters." At least, as did other writers, Poe thought that a democratic government should aid the cause of letters. Poe thought his having been at West Point might help him, too. Thomas advised him to write to J. P. Kennedy at the House of Representatives in Washington, which Poe did. Even a $500 job could be
acceptable, Poe said. "To coin one's brain into silver, at the nod of a master, is to my thinking the hardest task in the world"; Poe wanted to get some relief from such an existence. But the matter became bogged down in Washington and no appointment was made in 1841. Later, in 1842, Poe again received some encouragement from Thomas and began as usual to consider the appointment as already made. By September, the Collectorship had been given to Thomas Smith, and no further appointments made, but Poe was still certain he was to obtain a post, for Robert Tyler, son of the President and a literary man, had interceded in Poe's behalf. Late in September Poe wrote to Chivers, "it has been hinted to me that I will receive the most effectual patronage from Government, for a journal which will admit occasional papers in support of the Administration.... Of the government patronage, upon the conditions specified, I am assured that this alone will more than sustain the Magazine." Here Poe was compromising his one ideal goal, the Magazine, to obtain his second goal, government patronage. But Poe was to be disappointed. In November he wrote to Thomas describing how Smith had given him the "brush off," and incidentally describing his own reactions to the whole boorish political scene:

You can have no idea of the low ruffians and boobies—men, two [sic] without a shadow of political influence or caste—who have received office over my head. If Smith had the feelings of a gentleman, he would have perceived that from the very character of my claims...he should have made my appt. an early one. It was a gratuitous favor intended me by Mr. Rob Tyler—and he (Smith) has done his best to
deprive this favor of all its grace, by delay. I could have forgiven all but the innumerable and altogether unnecessary falsehoods with which he insulted my common sense day after day—"  

Poe, using terms such as "ruffians" "gentleman," "gratuitous favor," "grace," and "insults," betrayed the innate unfitness for participation in government positions of the sensitive, aristocratic, literary temperament.

In 1843, still keeping his eye open for a political appointment under Tyler, Poe went to Washington. He had not gone before because he had never had enough cash to make the trip. But borrowing money from his new partner, Clarke, for the purpose of getting subscriptions for the proposed Magazine, Poe arrived in Washington. He expected, through Thomas, to see the President, but Thomas was sick, and Poe got drunk. Another friend wrote to Clarke saying he had better come to Washington to take Poe home. Thus ended Poe's attempt to escape poverty through government appointment. In a way the story was typical, being only a bit more disastrous and unsuccessful than the experiences of many of the literary men in attempting to obtain literary patronage through the existing governmental spoils system of appointment.
Toward modern change, science, and invention Poe had no animus except as these things conflicted with his idea of beauty or individualism. But in the uniformity and standardization of taste brought about by modernity, in the lowered standards of business ethics, and in the false conceptions of equality which tended toward loss of individuality, Poe saw the degrading influences of a materialistic democracy. This he expressed in many stories and essays. "The Devil in the Belfry" (1839), for example, satirized the little Dutch town, the ideal of uniformity, orderliness, and decorum. Every house was like every other, every person doing the same thing in every house. The lack of taste was exhibited by the emphasis on cabbages—every house had just twenty-four cabbages in front of it, and the woodwork was carved in unvarying patterns of cabbages and clocks. The mania for clocks in the town symbolized the excess of orderliness, and when the devil got into the central bell tower, which regulated the whole life of the town, and caused the clock to strike thirteen—the town went to pieces. The venerable old belfry man was used as a seat by the "devil" who gleefully rang the bell with his teeth, played a big fiddle out of time and tune, and created havoc in general. Poe's sympathy was obviously with the little dark man.73

73 Works, III, 247-257.

In architecture, the author of "The Fall of the House of Usher" naturally deplored the passing of old, time-worn buildings to make way for the new tasteless monstrosities. Once he remarked specifically on
"our anti-romantic national character." He also applauded the remarks

\[7^4\text{Works, X, 30 ("Undine: A Miniature Romance," a review, 1839).}\]

of Mrs. Trollope: "she ridiculed our innumerable moral, physical, and social absurdities with equal impartiality...our national soreness of feeling prevented us, in the case of her work on America, from appreciating the real merits of the book..."\[7^5\text{Works, IX, 17 ("Paris and the Parisians," a review, 1836).}\]

New York to the Columbia Spy in 1844 gave Poe a good opportunity to comment in a Trollopean fashion himself. On the east side of Mannahatta (Poe didn't like the "de-euphonizing" of the true name), the magnificent mansions were doomed—"The spirit of Improvement has withered them with its acrid breath." In thirty years, Poe wrote, "the whole island will be desecrated by buildings of brick, with portentous facades of brown-stone, or brown-stonna, as the Gothamites have it." Likewise in Brooklyn the majority of residences "are several steps beyond the preposterous. What can be more silyly and pitifully absurd than palaces of painted white pine, fifteen feet by twenty?" The harbor of New York had been disfigured by atrocious displays of landscape and architectural taste. "If these monstrosities appertain to taste, then it is to taste in its dying agonies." Especially repugnant to Poe was the fountain at the Bowling Green. "The water was designed to fall and flow naturally, over natural rocks. And how has this design been carried into execution? By piling some hundred nearly rectangular cubes of stone, into one nearly rectangular cube. The whole has much the air of a small country
jail in a hard thunder shower." 76

76 Doings of Gotham, pp. 25, 26, 59, 65.

The skulduggery of modern business ethics was satirized in "The Business Man" (1840) and in "Diddling Considered as One of the Exact Sciences" (1843). In the former, the "business man" was all for method and order in the dishonest rackets he was engaged in; anything that did not fit into a system he disliked. "If there is anything on earth I hate, it is a genius. Your geniuses are all arrant asses...Especially, you cannot make a business man out of a genius...The creatures are always going off at a tangent into some fantastic employment, or ridiculous speculation, entirely at variance with the 'fitness of things'." In the latter tale, all the ways of extracting money fraudulently were related. Poe must have seen these schemes in action in the New York and Philadelphia society of the day; they form a regular dictionary for the confidence man. 77

77 Works, IV, 122-133; V, 210-223.

Peculiarities of modern democratic society included the worship of money and the defiance of law. In "The Philosophy of Furniture" (1840) one of the things Poe commented upon was the Yankee lack of taste in decoration. "How this happens, it is not difficult to see. We have no aristocracy of blood, and having therefore...fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars, the display of wealth has here to take the place and perform the office of the heraldic display in monarchical countries....
In short, the cost of an article of furniture has at length come to be, with us, nearly the sole test of its merit in a decorative point of view." In an editorial ascribed to Poe appearing in the Philadelphia Public Ledger in 1841, satirical jibes were taken at the new omnibus and its associated manners; "the word omnibus, translated, means, every body for himself." Explaining how one should behave in the new conveyances, Poe wrote, "As Americanism partakes largely of a defiance of law, just now, you might occupy yourself by pitching the framed twenty-five ordinance out of the window.... In consideration of the indignity the cabman offers you...you may very properly refuse to pay him a cent. If he ventures to bring the matter before the authorities, he will have to pay the costs, because the sympathy of republican power is never with extortion and aristocracy."  

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78 Works, XIV, 101, 120; Doings of Gotham, p. 85.

On the subject of the possibility of progress, reform, and equality, favorite ideas of the day, Poe had several comments. In one story, "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" (1841), Monos recalled, from a place somewhere beyond death where all truth was known, that one or two of the truly wise men on earth in his time "had ventured to doubt the propriety of the term 'improvement,' as applied to the progress of our civilization." This principle, which was apprehended by some vigorous intellects, "should have taught our race to submit to the guidance of the natural laws, rather than attempt their control." Another odd idea, said Monos from his place of vantage, was the idea of universal equality,
"and in the face of analogy and of God—in despite of the loud warning
voice of the laws of gradation so visibly pervading all things in
Earth and Heaven—wild attempts at an omnipresent Democracy were
made." Speaking of reform in his "Marginalia" for 1849, Poe said that

in our efforts to soar above our nature, we invariably fell below it.
"Your reformist demigods are merely devils turned inside out." The new
philosophers, he remarked in 1845, had Charles Fourier as the High Priest
of the East, and Horace Greeley as the High Priest of the West, and their
only common bond was Credulity—"let us call it Insanity at once, and be
done with it." In "Some Words With a Mummy" (1845) the doctors bragged
to the Mummy about their present day metaphysics, and "sent for a copy
of a book called the 'Dial,' and read out of it a chapter or two about
something which is not very clear, but which the Bostonians called the
Great Movement or Progress." The Mummy merely replied that in his time
they had been bothered by that sort of thing, too, but there never was
any real Progress. And in "Mellonta Tauta" (1849), Poe had one of the

Works, IV, 201, 203.
Works, XVI, 161 ("Marginalia," 1849).
Works, XIV, 179 ("Fifty Suggestions").
Works, VI, 136.
persons who was sailing along in a balloon a thousand years hence remark that she rejoiced she lived "in an age so enlightened that no such thing as an individual is supposed to exist. It is the mass for which the true Humanity cares." Here Poe jibed at the new communitarian movements from which, he felt, individualism was in great danger. About a thousand years ago, the commentator continued, there was a philosopher called Furrier (because he kept a shop for cat pelts) who began the whole idea. In fact, she said, many years ago people foolishly regarded Wars and Pestilence as calamities. "Were they so blind as not to perceive that the destruction of a myriad of individuals is only so much positive advantage to the mass!"^{83}

^{83} Works, VI, 199, 200.

Other slight comments are scattered throughout Poe's work, evidencing the annoyances presented to a temperament like Poe's in an atmosphere as raw and uncultivated as that of America in the 1830's and 40's. The foibles of the church-going, dance-going, theatre-going, card party-going society were outlined in "The Man That Was Used Up" (1839). The upstart quality of the lower class, "the rise of the common man," was satirized in "Why The Little Frenchman Wears His Hand in a Sling" (first published in Tales, 1840) where an Irishman put on the airs of nobility and thought of himself as the height of gentility, "for every inch o' the six wakes that I've been a gentleman, and left aff wid the bog-throthing to take up wid the Barronissy, it's Pathrick that's been living like a houly imperor, and gitting the iddication and the graces."
The lack of street cleaning in New York in the days of horse transportation disgusted Poe (a company of market gardeners would be induced to accept a contract wherein they would receive the sweepings for their pay); the lack of proper paving and the resulting discomfort and noise was the subject of several of Poe's writings (he advocated the use of treated wooden block paving); the popularity of various unscientific fads, such as hydropathy, irked Poe (he was interested in phrenology himself, though); the stupidity of the police and the republican courts in handling a murder case called for comment; the "Snook Farm Crazyites" were well-read persons who could do no harm and who had honorable purposes, as far as anyone could understand them.

In general Poe was acutely aware of what was going on in the modern democratic society around him, and did not like it. His reaction was simple, his theoretical solutions nil. His criticism, like that in the book of Frederick Von Raumer which he reviewed in 1836, laid bare our individual errors, brought us to "look for the source of our greatest defects in a variety of causes." In a review of Cooper's Sketches of Switzerland Poe wrote, "We are a bull-headed and prejudiced people, and it were well if we had a few more of the stamp of Mr. Cooper who would feel themselves at liberty to tell us so to our teeth."

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Poe had little faith in the value of public opinion; the ideas of the cultured few were always acceptable over those of the public. This seemed to be true for Poe not only in social realms, but in political as well. In his thorough-going aristocratic belief Poe was different from some of the other writers. As an artistic genius and critic, he saw that mediocre standards were being set up and accepted by the public, and his reaction was at times violent. But whether violent or subdued, the reaction by Poe against majority rule was evident in much of his writing.

Poe's favorite terms for "the people" were "the rabble" or "the mob." And, although he was closely connected with "the mob" as the editor of two popular magazines, and was able to increase the circulation of these magazines among "the mob" by many times (Graham's Magazine's subscription list, he wrote, jumped from 4,500 to 40,000 while he was editor86), Poe's critical theory placed little value on public opinion.


Writing to Philip P. Cooke in 1839, Poe said about "Ligeia," "Your word that it is 'intelligible' suffices—and your commentary sustains your word. As for the mob—let them talk on. I should be grieved if I thought they comprehended me here." His advice the next year to his friend Thomas was to go ahead and write, and "send the public opinion to the devil, forgetting that a public existed, and writing from the natural promptings of your own spirit."87 In the preface to Narrative of A.

87 Poe to Cooke and Thomas, Sept. 21, 1839 and Nov. 23, 1840, Letters, I, 118, 148.
Gordon Pym (1838), Pym said that Mr. Poe had insisted on his publishing the narrative, no matter how roughly it was got up; "its very uncouthness...would give it all the better chance of being received as truth."\(^88\)

\^88\ Works, III, 2.

Describing the effect of the "Balloon Hoax" which he had published in the \textit{New York Sun} in 1844, Poe pointed that the more intelligent people believed the story, while the rabble didn't. Whereas "twenty years ago, credulity was the characteristic trait of the mob, incredulity the distinctive feature of the philosophic; now the case is exactly reversed." And this was just, said Poe, since the internal evidence of the story for those who knew their Natural Philosophy was so perfect that there were no grounds for disbelief. Speaking of N. P. Willis in 1844, Poe wrote that with his agreeable talents, but with no profundity or genius, "he is well constituted for dazzling the masses." In New York in 1844 Poe noted that the Gothamites, "not yet having made sufficient fools of themselves in their fete-ing and festival-ing of Dickens, are already on the \textit{qui vive} to receive Bulwer in a similar manner. If I mistake not, however, the author of 'The Last Days of Pompeii' will not be willing to 'play Punch and Judy' for the amusement of an American rabble." Bulwer had too many high qualities of character for this.\(^89\)

\^89\ Doings of Gotham, pp. 33-34, 43, is the source of comments on "The Balloon Hoax," Willis, and Bulwer.

Often in his criticism Poe pointed out the lack of public recognition of high merit. In reviewing Marryat's \textit{Joseph Rushbrook} in
1841, Poe expanded on the old saying that "the success of certain works may be traced to sympathy between the author's mediocrity of ideas, and mediocrity of ideas on the part of the public." He agreed that "there exists an excellence too excellent for general favour." The greatest "hit" is seldom, or never, made by the highest merit. Marryat had always been a popular writer in the most rigorous sense of the word. "His books are essentially 'mediocre.' His ideas are the common property of the mob...." To properly estimate such ideas, Poe felt he had to bring himself into a sort of identification with the mass sentiment. Sometimes works were purposely written for the masses by a man of superior intelligence, but "usually they are the natural exponent of the vulgar thought in the person of a vulgar thinker." And often such writing was claimed to be nationalism. Poe wondered "whether this nationality in letters is a fit object for highminded ambition...." Such works as Henry Cockton's *Stanley Thorn*, which Poe reviewed in 1842, were acceptable "to men whose animal spirits are high, whatever may be their mental ability.... To the uneducated, to those who read little, to the obtuse in intellect (and these three classes constitute the mass)" these books are the only acceptable kind. They repel and dissipate reflection, provide a tingling physico-mental exhilaration like that of a cold bath or a horseback gallop, but are not literature or works of art. Reviewing the *Ballads and Other Poems* of Longfellow in 1842, Poe began by quoting the French maxim, "One would be safe in wagering that any given public idea is erroneous, for it has been yielded to the clamor of the majority." The most false public idea of all, Poe wrote, was that "any one person has as just right to consider his own taste the true, as has any other one."
Thus, those who condemned Longfellow for trickeries, novelty, etc., because their taste was for the "old school," were operating on feeble critical principles. And in Poe's famous criticism of Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil," he said that the obvious moral, put into the mouth of the dying minister at the end, smothered the insinuated one, and "to the rabble its exquisite skill will be caviare." Critical opinion has, by the way, not always upheld Poe in his interpretation of this story.

Poe's own personal reaction, other than as a literary critic, was set forth in several places. In "William Wilson," one of the most autobiographical of Poe's tales, the narrator apologized for his name, "for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob." Later he said, "I had always felt aversion to my uncourtly patronymic, and its very common, if not plebian, praenomen." (It must be taken into account, however, that Poe was perhaps arranging the situation to make the appearance of a second William Wilson more believable). The only time the wise were permitted to rule the people, Poe wrote in "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmian" (1839), was when fear had overcome their own braggadocio—in this instance, fear of the coming of a comet. (Poe may have observed this fear in the people of Baltimore during the "rain of meteors" in 1833 or at the time of Halley's Comet in 1835). The "business man" in the sketch by that name,
was forced to abandon one of his rackets because the "American streets are so muddy, and a Democratic rabble is so obstrusive...." The observer in "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) was scrutinizing the mob from his window—a mob which was "full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye." In "The Landscape Garden" (1842) Poe described how the negative merit of the natural style of gardening, without the creation of any special wonders or miracles, was "a proposition better suited to the grovelling apprehension of the herd, than to the fervid dreams of the man of genius." In "The Philosophy of Furniture" (1840), Poe said that the old tasteless carpets with huge designs, stripes, and colors—made by the money-lovers, the "children of Baal and worshipers of Mammon"—were still to be found in the homes of the rabble. From New York in 1844, Poe wrote about the recent "apprehensions of danger from the mob-disorder which so lately beset Philadelphia"—a reference to the Fourth of July disturbances of the anti-Roman Catholic and anti-foreigner organization of "Native Americans." The recent ten-mile foot race at the Beacon Course also disgusted Poe, for the "ten miles per hour" feat was overrated; Poe said he had accomplished it himself, and the only reason it was so admired was that "the most active men—those in the highest physical condition—are seldom to be met with among 'the lower classes' of society—among those who alone ever contend, in public, for the honors of the athletae."  

But these allusions reflected only Poe's minor, personal, dislikes of people in the mass. A man of such temperament, however, could not well be in sympathy with the principle of majority rule on a larger scale, as was to be found in the new democracy. And Poe did find occasion, especially in his later years, to make most violent objections to the high place accorded the uneducated masses in a democracy.

In one of his "suggestions," ("Fifty Suggestions," 1845), he said he was beginning to feel that the only thing the people should have to do with the laws was to obey them. In another place ("Marginalia," 1849), he distinguished between what he called "the people" and "the mob." "A people aroused to action," he said, "are a mob; and that mob, trying to think, subside into a people." In an earlier tale (1845), the Mummy said that in his time, too, man had tried the experiment of combining thirteen provinces into a free, democratic sort of union, as an example to the rest of mankind; "the thing ended, however, in a consolidation of the thirteen states, with some fifteen or twenty others, in the most odious and insupportable despotism that ever was heard of upon the face of the Earth." The name of the usurping tyrant was, as well as the Mummy could recollect, "Mob." And in "Mellonta Tauta" (1849), the writer in the future remarked upon the absurdity that the ancient "American" believed in—that all men were created equal. This proved to be against all nature, and when this fancy was carried out, letting every man "vote," as they called it, soon there was no government at all, fraudulence predominated, and the people found "that a republican government could never be anything but a
rascally one." Then a fellow by the name of Mob took over—"a giant in
stature—insolent, rapacious, filthy; had the gall of a bullock with the
heart of a hyena and the brain of a peacock." This taught the people
one thing—"never to run directly contrary to the natural analogies."
And the only natural analogy to a republican form of government was, per­
haps, a community of prairie dogs, which would seem to demonstrate "that
democracy is a very admirable form of government—for dogs."\(^{93}\)

\(^{93}\)Works, XIV, 184 ("Fifty Suggestions"); XVI, 161 ("Marginalia");
VI, 136 ("Some Words With a Mummy"); VI, 207-209 ("Mellonta Tauta").

On the other hand, calling forth and informing Poe's frequent
criticism of his society, was an innate aristocratic taste and a desire
for the "beautiful," a combination which was almost bound to lead to
frustration in a bourgeoisie, leveling society. This taste and desire
for the rich and the beautiful was strangely at odds with Poe's actual
poverty stricken condition. Perhaps the indigence and lack of recogni­
tion which beset Poe in this country made his penchant for fantastic
surroundings even stronger. At least in his stories many of the settings
were indicative of a taste exceptionally unfitted to a democratic cul­
ture. The castle-like atmosphere of the House of Usher, the carvings
on the ceiling, the sombre tapestries on the walls, and the armorial
trophies along the halls were cases in point. Poe heightened the im­
pression with the poem "The Haunted Palace" where floating banners,
thrones, and music were in evidence. The description of the gorgeous
vaulted and fretted bridal chamber of the Lady of Tremaine in "Ligeia,"
with its candelabra, Oriental couches and canopies, and its massive
gold cloth tapestries covered with arabesque designs, seemed to be
somewhat more than necessary to provide an effect of terror. In "The
was a similar delight shown in describing rich and decorative settings.
In "William Wilson" much emphasis was put upon the "large, rambling,
Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a
vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were
excessively ancient." The village, with its deep shadows and sullen
church-bell, thrilled the narrator with delight. The house was quaint,
old, and irregular. All of this, in a story where it seemed to play no
integral part, suggested the impressions that Poe's youthful days in
England had made on him. Even the cabin of the whaler described in the
Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym partook of a delicacy and luxury far re­
moved from the Yankee whaling industry of the day.

In "The Philosophy of Furniture" (1840), this positive aristo­
cratic taste of Poe was most clearly outlined. After noting that wealth
seemed to be the arbiter of taste in the United States, and that "there
could be nothing more directly offensive to the eye of an artist than
the interior of what is termed in the United States... a well-furnished
apartment," Poe went on to describe in detail his ideal of a decorated
room: oblong in shape, windows to the floor, crimson-tinted glass, rose­
wood framings, crimson silk curtains fringed with gold and lined with
silver, held by thick gold ropes, crimson carpet trimmed with gold,
glossy silver wall-paper with Arabesque designs in crimson, many paintings
of fairy grottoes and dismal swamps with richly carved frames, a circular
mirror, gold flowered crimson sofas, a piano-forte, gorgeous vases, tall

candelabra emitting perfumed odors, shelves with golden edges hung with
crimson silk cords with gold tassels and containing two or three hundred
magnificently bound books, an Argand lamp with a crimson tinted ground-
glass shade—this was the "beauty" that Poe had failed to find in
America.⁹¹

But Poe's aristocratic ideal was not confined to furniture and
room furnishings. Carried over into the human sphere, the desire made
Poe long for a society in which the genius—the individual man of rare
sensitivity, imagination, intelligence, and taste—would be recognized
and respected. In his writings he continually sketched these people of
intelligent, sensitive, and sometimes strange natures, and put them into
conflict with the life about them. Practically all his heroes were of
this stamp; even Julius Rodman, who headed an expedition to the West,
and Arthur Pym, who went on the whaling voyage, were included. Rodman,
Poe wrote, had a peculiar romantic character, a hereditary hypochondria,
which prompted him to take the trip in the first place. Whenever he
would come to a new spot, he would want to go on—beyond the extreme
bonds of civilization—to satisfy his visionary and romantic soul.

Arthur Pym, too, started on his adventure because of "a somewhat gloomy,
although glowing imagination" which delighted in the tales of shipwreck,
famine, torture and the like.⁹⁵ Many of the most familiar of Poe's


⁹⁵ Works, III, 17; IV, 10, 77.
characters had even more exaggerated sensibilities: Roderick Usher suffered from "a morbid acuteness of the senses," but also had a "lofty and spiritual ideality"; William Wilson was a descendant of a race whose "imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable"; even Monsieur Dupin's superior powers were "the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased intelligence."  

But in the tale "Eleonora" (1842), Poe discussed the ambiguous line between genius and madness. "Men have called me mad," said the narrator in the opening lines; "but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence—whether much that is glorious—whether all that is profound—does not spring from disease of thought—from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect." But whether the superiority exhibited by Poe's characters was due to moods or to intellect, Poe continually reflected his preoccupation with the exceptional mind.

In his own life of editing and criticism Poe maintained the highest theoretical standards. The persistent failure of the Penn Magazine to get a first number published was not due to lack of capital alone; the rigid standards were too high to be successful in Poe's time. With the first prospectus for the Penn, Poe wrote that he felt confident of success; "The world is fond of novelty, and in being absolutely honest,
I shall be utterly novel." But this was just the novelty the public then didn't want. Two months later he wrote to a cousin that his plans would "meet with support of the more desirable and intelligent portion of the community." To another correspondent he wrote that his ambition in the Penn was "to serve the great cause of truth, while endeavoring to forward the literature of the country." Later he said, "I am anxious, above all things, to render the journal one in which the true, in contradistinction from the merely factitious, genius of the country shall be represented." In a circular letter, in June, 1841, Poe tried to get an exclusive contract—in which the writers would pledge to write for no other American magazine—from Irving, Cooper, Paulding, Kennedy, Longfellow, Bryant, Halleck and Willis. 98 Such visions were lofty, to be sure, but far above the practicality of the day.

In his literary criticism Poe was equally demanding, and was zealous in protecting the high position of genius. But he was also bitter about the way the individuality of genius was destroyed in a society where a man had to write what the public demanded. Poe, in a review in 1841, distinguished between genius and talent, saying that genius was never mediocre—it must either boldly soar or sadly sink. But to "write well, the man of genius must write in obedience to his impulses." If forced to write, he might produce "platitudes of the most pitiable description." In his "Marginalia" for 1841 Poe said, "A man of genius, if not permitted to choose his own subject, will do worse, in letters, than if he had

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98 Poe to Snodgrass, June 17, 1840; to William Poe, August 15, 1840; to Washington Poe, Aug. 15, 1840; to Daniel Bryan, July 6, 1842; to Washington Irving (et al.), June 21, 1841; Letters, I, 138, 141, 143, 206, 163.
talents none at all. And here how imperatively he is controlled! To be sure, he can write to suit himself—but in the same manner his publishers print. From the nature of our Copy-right laws, he has no individual powers." Later in his "Marginalia" for 1849, Poe questioned, "Is it, or is it not a fact, that the air of a Democracy agrees better with mere Talent than with Genius?" Poe had felt the inevitable problem posed to all the writers of the age; his answer was but a negative reaction.

But still the creative artist retained the highest place in Poe's thinking, and, in spite of pressures, such an artist must never give in to mediocrity. There is something personally pathetic in Poe's picturing of Ellison in "The Landscape Garden" (1842). This young man was from an illustrious family, exceeded all men in personal grace and beauty, had a lovely and devoted bride, and, in addition, fell heir to a huge fortune of four hundred and fifty million dollars. As a creative artist, Ellison was therefore able to employ his genius in the proper fashion. He used the money in the improvement or exaltation of Nature in a Landscape-Garden, an improvement which was possible for the true genius to make, not by improving Nature in detail, but by adding human creativeness to the arrangement of Nature. "A mixture of pure art in a garden scene, adds to it a great beauty."
But this was a unique instance: an artist without the need for earning a subsistence. Poe did not find himself in such condition. His ideal, however, remained high; in reviewing in 1842 the popular Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon by "Harry Lorrequer," he lashed out at those who would praise a book on the basis of its popularity, or write one for the low purpose of popularity. It was obvious, Poe wrote, "that a book may be exceedingly popular without any legitimate literary merit.... The truth is, that the popularity of a book is prima facie evidence of just the converse of the proposition—it is evidence of the book's demerit, inasmuch as it shows a 'stooping to conquer'—inasmuch as it shows that the author has dealt largely...in matters which are susceptible of appreciation by the mass of mankind—by uneducated thought—by uncultivated taste, by unrefined and unguided passion." In the present condition of society, Poe continued, no popular book could be a work of high merit in regard to those things about it that made it popular. It may be necessary, in the author's own interest, to insert popular appeal in addition to the high quality, as Dickens did, but still, Poe wrote, any man does a "grievous wrong to his own genius in appealing to the popular judgment at all. As a matter of pecuniary policy alone, is any such appeal defensible.... The higher genius is a rare gift and divine.... The holy—the electric spark of genius is the medium of intercourse between the noble and more noble mind. For lesser purposes there are humbler agents.... It is, in brief, the duty of all whom circumstances have led into criticism...to uphold the true dignity of genius, to combat its degradation...." In the colloquy after death ("The Colloquy of Monos and Una," 1841), Monos recalled that there
occasionally had appeared in the world a few poetic intellects, "the intellect which we now feel to have been the most exalted of all," and they, the poets, "living and perishing amid the scorn of the 'utilitarian'—of rough pedants" were able to perceive the truth of beauty. Some time later, about a year before his death in 1849, Poe wrote to Mrs. Whitman, "Would it not be 'glorious' to establish, in America, the sole unquestionable aristocracy—that of the intellect—to secure its supremacy—to lead and to control it?" 101


These are some of the details in the story of Poe's conflict with democratic America during the years of crisis. When he did not find recognition and respect in the society of the new democracy, he had no deep faith in the ultimate good of that form of social organization to fall back on or to use as a basis for compromise. In this respect, he differed from some of our other mid-century writers. But for our purposes, Poe constituted an excellent illustration, albeit exaggerated, of the effect of the society of the 'thirties and 'forties on a sensitive soul.

James Fenimore Cooper was also among those writers who wrote down their overt reactions to the contemporary social scene. Very little of Cooper's outraged protest got into his best writings. But some of the authors with whom we are to be later concerned were just beginning
to develop attitudes and philosophies, rather than just finishing their careers in these years; they were subjected to similar tensions and did, I believe, consciously or unconsciously, weave into their best works attitudes toward the individual and his relation to society which stemmed from their own reactions to the contemporary crisis. Therefore, a study of what Cooper, an author who turned to open criticism, felt in regard to specific social changes going on about him will be an aid in establishing an intellectual atmosphere common to other writers in similar conditions.

Cooper felt a genuine concern for the success of the experiment in democracy in this country, but his concern was for the success of a democracy as he visualized it, a democracy where the aristocratic gentleman, having attained his position on the basis of his merit, would be as free as anyone else, his way of life and his property insured against the demands made by the standards of the majority.\(^{102}\)


Actually, as has been pointed out in Cooper scholarship since about 1930, the prime motivation of a large part of his career was a social rather than any purely literary interest. And for the person investigating the relationship between a literary mind and its social milieu, the view which sees Cooper as an energetic and tireless fighter for the instituting in America of what he believed to be true democracy is the one which provides the most valuable approach to the problem.
The reasons behind Cooper's intense interest in the social problems of the day are not too difficult to find. Through his background he had become accustomed to certain high standards of living, and basic in Cooper's character, as in the characters of many of the writers of this mid-nineteenth century group, was a belief in the possibilities of individual expression and growth provided by the ideals of democracy. But as his background had provided him the standards of a "gentleman," he felt that even a so-called aristocratic gentleman should be accorded the rights of individualism; this was his interpretation of democracy which ultimately led him into conflict with the press and much of the public which at the time was advocating a leveling and conformity in social realms as well as in political. As Cooper saw it, democracy in his day emphasized only freedom to conform, and was thus violating the basic ideals of individual rights.

Cooper had emerged from a society of New York aristocracy which had existed before the Republic. Old Dutch and English elements had combined to make a ruling class that was aristocratic, agricultural, and conservative and which continued to wield its power through the Federalist Party even until the 1820's. This company of gentlemen held the long-established belief that those who had money, "the few, the rich, and the well-born," were the only logical ones to control the government and politics; after all, they had a "stake in society" and would therefore necessarily be the most concerned with the proper function of a government whose business it was to protect property. Alexander Hamilton, Governor John Jay, Rufus King, and Gouverneur Morris were typical of this group of Federalist leaders in New York who believed,
in the words of Jay, "that those who own the country are the most fit persons to participate in the government of it." Other statements, some of which are prophetic of Cooper's own thinking some years later, show the kind of thinking which prevailed among New York rulers even after the Constitution had opened the way for democratic government and Jefferson, a professed Democrat, had been elected. Hamilton predicted that such giving in to popular democracy would soon lead to despotism, "for a courtier and a demagogue differ only in forms, which, like clothes, are put on and off as suits the occasion." In like manner Cooper later spoke about the dictatorship of the masses; he too, as we shall see, put the chief blame on the demagogues. Other Federalist spokesmen remarked, in 1806, "Among the evils, which periodically flourish amongst mankind, is a spirit of innovation, which has lately gained strength in our borders, and now counteracts the best tendency of regular habits," and, in 1804, "Reason, common sense, talents and virtue, cannot stand before democracy. Like a resistless flood, it sweeps all away; and it has, probably, not yet spent its force." These could be words from Dixon Ryan Fox, The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, Columbia U. Studies in Hist., Econ., and Public Law, Vol. 86 (New York, 1919), pp. 6-9.

Cooper himself, thirty years later.

His father, Judge William Cooper, was an aristocratic, Federalist country gentleman who owned much land in New York State. As a land owner, he was in the company of the rich social leaders of the countryside, where Federalism and aristocracy remained entrenched even longer than it did in the cities. Old Dutch families headed by such leaders as
Stephen Van Rensselaer (the Patroon), General Philip Schuyler (who owned some six thousand acres), Abraham Van Vechten, Johan Jost Dietz, Dirck Ten Broeck, and Hermanus Bleeker surrounded Judge Cooper's estates around Cooperstown; and Otsego Hall, "a great rectangular stone house with castellated roof and gothic windows, surrounded by box hedges and wide lawns trimmed precisely by black gardeners, far surpassing any other house in the old west" was the citadel of Federalism. Judge Cooper himself was a typical Federalist squire, at one time claiming proudly that "there were 40,000 souls holding land, directly or indirectly, under me," and in 1800 setting up the claim that he had placed the plough upon more acres than any other man in all America. Judge Cooper later became a Federalist Congressman. 104

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104 Fox, The Decline..., p. 136.

In this patrician environment James Fenimore Cooper was reared. His mother, Elizabeth Fenimore, was an English heiress who brought such pride in the name to the family that Cooper later changed his own name to Fenimore-Cooper. His teacher at the school in Albany was an Englishman with a profound respect for the king and nobility, and a contempt for dissenters and democrats. As a son of an American gentleman, Cooper was sent to Yale University, and, although he was dismissed in his third year, had the background and associations which can be obtained at an outstanding school. In 1809 his father died and Cooper inherited $50,000 cash and an interest in a $700,000 estate. Two years later he married Susan A. DeLancy, granddaughter of the former Royal Lieutenant Governor
of New York and daughter of a captain in the British army who had fought against the colonists in the Revolution. This marriage was to bring Cooper an additional sum of money in the form of inherited stocks which promised a steady income. 105


It is little wonder, with this environment and financial prospect, that Cooper would interpret the meaning of democracy in the manner he did; the only surprising thing is that he managed to come as far as he did from the influences under which he had his start. It is significant that in his intellectual development Cooper never subscribed entirely to the basic concepts of his father's Federalism. He did, of course, hold to certain conservative standards in regard to religion, ethics, and art, and the patrician culture carried over into his ideas on social manners and tastes. But he never believed in the "stake in society" theory of politics; in the political realm, Cooper, like the writers considered later in this study, was a thorough-going democrat. It must be kept clearly in mind that when these authors condemned democratic leveling, they were not referring to political franchise. Political equality was one of the concepts they felt to be necessary to the functioning of an ideal democracy; it was when the people attempted to extend this desired political equality into all other realms of life—social, economic, and intellectual—that our writers found themselves in conflict with the society about them. Cooper was not an aristocrat in politics. Therefore, he could not go along with the Federalists in
saying that the rich and well-born should rule. A man must have the freedom and opportunity to achieve whatever superiority his innate capacities might permit, unhindered by favoritism of class, rank, or wealth. Thus Cooper, as did the others, cast his lot with the Democratic Party in politics, but this is not to say, as some have tried to make out, that the authors were a part of the social and intellectual equalizing movement represented by the new democracy.\(^\text{106}\) They were too

\(^{106}\) See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1946), Chapter XXIX, "Jacksonian Democracy and Literature." Even John Stafford, who, in *The Literary Criticism of Young America* claims many of the writers to be in sympathy with the "Young America" group, recognizes their rejection of Cooper (p. 33).

passionately concerned with the essential nobility of the individual and his right to be free to countenance any arbitrary dictation either by the democratic majority or by the aristocratic few.

With his faith in political democracy and in the "sound heart of the people," Cooper did not believe that the general leveling of society was necessarily inherent in American development, and did not throw his fundamental belief in democracy overboard. Rather than the form of government or the people in general, he blamed chiefly the journalists and demagogues who were taking advantage of the form of government and the enthusiasm of peoples just newly released from centuries of class subserviency. But Cooper's own personal attack—as vigorous as it was in his libel cases, in his satirical, unpopular social novels, and in his biting newspaper articles—was a hopeless one, for America was not yet ready to be criticized for its new-found vulgarity. Once the democratic dogma had entered the consciousness of the American
public, and time enough had elapsed for the common man to begin to act in accordance with this dogma by electing Jackson in 1828, no individual protest would avail. 107

107 John F. Ross, The Social Criticism of Fenimore Cooper, University of California Publications in English, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Berkeley, Calif., 1933), Chap. V.

Cooper was a literary figure writing about American class manners and attitudes in the period in which they were undergoing a change. The political revolution of Jacksonian Democracy had brought about a revolution in social tone, and it was at this point that thinkers became concerned for the quality of the democratic experiment. The manufacture of public opinion by the few demagogues was no less undemocratic merely because it succeeded in convincing the many; success only made the tyranny over social opinion more complete. Thus the critical reaction contained in some of Cooper's correspondence in these years and in his social writing, was typical of the reaction felt by many others toward a stage of American development.

A few items from Cooper's private correspondence will serve as an introduction to his attitudes toward the events of the day. To Horatio Greenough, the sculptor, Cooper wrote on June 14, 1836, respecting one of Greenough's art works:

As respects your statue, talk not, touch not, think not. You are in a country in which every man swaggers and talks, knowledge or no knowledge; brains or no brains; taste or no taste: They are all ex nato connoisseurs, politicians, religionists, and every man's equal, and all men's betters. In short, you are to expect your own matured and classical thoughts will be estimated by the same rules as they
estimate pork, and rum, and cotton. Luckily you get a pretty good sum, and the statue that has cost them $20,000 may stand some chance. Alas! my good Greenough, this is no region for poets, so sell them your wares and shut your ears. The foreigners have got to be so strong among us that they no longer creep but walk erect. They throng the prisons, control one or two of the larger cities, and materially influence public opinion all over the Union. By foreigners, I do not mean the lower class of Irish voters, who do so much at the polls, but the merchants and others a degree below them, who are almost to a man hostile in feeling to the country, and to all her interests, except as they may happen to be their interests.\footnote{Correspondence of James Fenimore-Cooper, ed. James Fenimore Cooper (New Haven, 1922), I, 358; hereafter referred to as \textit{Corr.}}

\footnote{During the period under consideration, Cooper was almost constantly on the move between Cooperstown, New York, and Philadelphia, looking after his publishing interests. The comments in his correspondence with his wife also help to explain why he felt as he did toward the contemporary expression of democracy. His inherent fastidiousness was well illustrated when, upon arriving in New York by boat from New Haven early in 1837, Cooper wrote Mrs. Cooper that he had thoroughly enjoyed the trip aboard the \textit{Mediator}, and remarked, concerning the reason, "No swearing or coarseness is allowed in the ship." A week or so later he wrote from Philadelphia deploring the contemporary trend toward movement, instability, and the breaking of traditional ties and roots. From Washington in March, 1837, Cooper wrote concerning both the architecture and the politics represented by that city. The capitol appeared rather magnificent, and afforded him more pleasure in that way than he had had since returning from Europe. But, "Still the building is not half large enough, is mean in many respects, and has a bad style,"}
although the improvement in the grounds gave it a nobler quality. As to politics, the intellectual duel being carried on between Clay and Calhoun seemed but "pitiful personal wrangling"; and the social customs were most amazing of all: "The women dress a good deal, and many a village belle, who is not even receivable in her own country, poses here as a prodigy in consequence of political rank. It is amazing how politics colour everything. Vulgarity is made genteel; dullness, clever; and infamy, honest, by means of its magic."

In March, 1839, Cooper was still commenting upon the lack of moral integrity of the "New Democracy." He wrote to Paul Fenimore Cooper, who was in school at Cooperstown, reproving the boy for some minor deceit, and went on to say that "hypocrisy and deceit are failings that abound in this good nation of ours. Neither is a gentlemanly sin." He then remarked upon Paul's generosity in giving some valuable old coins to his mother, and added, "Had it been less true and more vulgar, the newspaper would undoubtedly have commemorated the event."

The Naval History which was published in 1839 seemed to have aided Cooper's recognition in the right circles. From Philadelphia he wrote in October that he had just attended a very handsome dinner at which the hosts and guests were "exceedingly civil," and the Senator from New Jersey invited him to meet the President at dinner, which he refused to do because he did not wish to seek the preferment for which his way was clear. He was evidently pleased at the "civil" behavior being accorded him, but still recognized the gross materialism of the age: "The hostile feeling which exists between N. York and Philadelphia, at this moment, amounts almost to war. The pockets of the knaves are
touched, on both sides, and that is touching all the principles they have. God protect the country that has nothing but commercial towns for capitals."

Individual knavery did not go unnoticed in Cooper's letters to his wife. In December of 1839 he wrote that a businessman of his acquaintance from Paris "thinks this country in a most deplorable state, and says Welles has gone back disgusted, with a determination to quit business and cut America. His wife is in the same mood. I do not know that they are wrong, for every hour reveals some scene of fearful roguery." The holidays were unlucky times to be trying to get the Pathfinder into print because the printers "get drunk one day and sober the next.... I am amazed and shocked with the drunkenness that appears in the streets of Philadelphia today. I have seen nothing like it, before, since our return home. Most of the drunkards have been young men, too--apprentices apparently--and roaring drunk."

Enlightening on Cooper's architectural preference was a letter written by him in April, 1840, to Herman Bleecker who was visiting in Holland. The circumstances naturally called to mind Cooper's own European travels, and he wished he could once more look at the noble churches and quaint old houses of Antwerp. "Can you fancy that the people who built the old church at the junction of State and Market Streets [in Albany], actually reared the towers of Mechlin, Antwerp, and the Hotel de Ville of Brussels?" He himself, he wrote, had just been revolutionizing the Christ Church of Cooperstown, substituting bona fide oak for the pine "and erecting a screen that I trust, though it may have no influence on my soul, will carry my name down to posterity. It is
really a pretty thing—pure gothic, and it is the wonder of the country round."

Finally, two letters near the end of this five-year period will serve to show that Cooper was still quite profoundly disturbed by the social degradation that he found about him. To Paul Fenimore Cooper he wrote again in November, 1810: "Depend on it, my son, we live in bad times, and times that threaten a thousand serious consequences, through the growing corruption of the nation. If public virtue be truly necessary to a republic, we cannot be one, but, unknown to ourselves, must be something else." And to Mrs. Cooper in September, 1811, he reported "a thousand rumors" about war with England and said, "I believe we shall have war before all things are settled, but, so wrong headed are our people, that I fear they will fight on a question in which they are wrong, when we have so many causes of quarrel in which we are right." Going on to comment on the terrible effects of the depression, he came to a peculiarly typical Cooper conclusion: "This town [Philadelphia] is sadly cut in the way of fortunes; more so than I had believed. One of the Coxes, who had half a million a few years since, has not one tenth of his means left. Many others, out of business, have suffered in equal proportions.... This affair of the Bank is worse than that of the Great Fire. Is not all this done to rebuke a country that thinks, eats, talks, drinks, and dreams dollars?" 109

One of the reasons Cooper was chosen to be studied in this chapter was that he by no means confined his remarks concerning society to his private correspondence. In Cooper's early critical writings, before leaving for Europe in 1826 and during his stay there for the next seven years, he praised America and its democracy for what he believed it to be. But upon his return, he found that the actual practice of democracy left no room for the freedom of the individual who believed that some intellects, tastes, and sensitivities were naturally superior to others. In the new popular enthusiasm for the religion of equality, Cooper found what he believed to be a dogmatic dictatorship over private lives, an insistence upon a democratic leveling which was a degradation of the true democratic principle. As a result, for the next few years—in fact, until the end of his life—he wrote novels and tracts recording his social criticism for the purpose of bringing about a democratic society which would conform more closely to his ideal. From these writings we can reconstruct the attitude of a literary mind toward the changes which were taking place in American society.

Toward such institutions as the bank and press, for example, Cooper directed criticism because they had overstepped their proper boundaries. Paper money was necessary for a circulating medium in a commercial country like America, but the abuse of the system, the unrestrained issue of paper money, kept the value of property unsettled, created bankruptcies and pressures, and produced the instability which was so characteristic of American trade.110

Cooper's quarrel with the irresponsible press was bitter and prolonged. When Cooper gained national notoriety through the Point Controversy, the Whig press saw in him an opportunity to capitalize upon its new line—that of making out the Democrats to be sophisticated snobs who wanted to follow the aristocratic tastes of Van Buren in carrying on King Andrew's dynasty. Cooper, as a professed democrat, was a made-to-order target. He had just had a set-to with the citizens of his own community, and the nature of the quarrel and of Cooper's background was such that it made Cooper appear to be fighting against democratic equalitarianism in defense of a rich and selfish aristocracy. Some of the local upstate New York papers started the ball rolling. Ellis Pellet of the Chenango Telegraph published at Norwich, Andrew Barber of the Otsego Republican edited at Cooperstown, and Theodore Gold of the Oneida Whig published at Utica were some of the editors who entered the squabble early. When Cooper himself nationalized the issue by

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111 Ethel R. Outland, The Effingham Libels on Cooper...1837-1845, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 25 (Madison, 1929), pp. 5-6.

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incorporating it in a novel, the big New York Whig newspapers took up the cry. James Watson Webb of the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer led off the attack on Cooper on November 22, 1838, very soon after Home As Found was published. Webb called Cooper an aristocrat and identified him with the Edward Effingham of the novel. Webb claimed that one of the fundamental purposes of the book was to create the impression abroad that Cooper came from a long line of noble ancestors. The indication in the book that an American gentleman of good family and breeding was the
equal of the dukes and princes of Europe—a necessity, Cooper felt, if a democracy were to exist as such—was interpreted by the reviewer as applying only to Cooper himself. Thurlow Weed of the Albany Evening Journal and Park Benjamin of the New York Evening Signal and its weekly compendium The New World took up the Webb review and carried on scurrilous comments in their own columns. Benjamin said that Cooper's purpose was not, as Webb declared, a desire to make his books sell in England, but that it was merely his nature to be a blackguard, and he was "the craziest loon that was ever suffered to roam at large without whip and keeper." 112

112 Grossman, pp. 132-133.

These papers thought that they were not taking much of a chance in thus libeling Cooper because almost every popular institution had come in for its share of criticism in Home As Found. Besides, the reading public was not happy that Cooper had quitted his Indians and sailors to turn to social criticism. But in the teeth of public sentiment Cooper fought on for years against the vicious statements made against him, and was successful in one libel suit after another. In 1841, even Horace Greeley entered the lists, and, understanding the whole problem of libel, crystallized much of the opinion against Cooper with sound, well-reasoned criticism. On November 30, 1841, Cooper's old friend, Samuel F. B. Morse, wrote to Cooper at Cooperstown, "Be assured the good sense, the intelligence, the right feeling of the community at large are with you. The licentiousness of the press needed the rebuke which you have given it,
and it feels it too, despite its awkward attempts to brave it out.\footnote{113}

\footnote{113}{\textit{Corr.}, II, 461.}

But Cooper's retaliation was not in libel suits alone. In his writings he explained that one of the ways in which the people of America were being led astray was through the corruption of the press which played such a substantial part in the molding of public opinion in a democracy. While there were more newspapers in America than in Europe, they were generally of a lower character. Cooper cited several "reasons" for this, reasons which reflected his general attitude toward the press. First, the lack of capital among owners contributed to the high mortality rate of the journals, and to the general inaccuracy of their information. Furthermore, the stiff competition caused editors to be reckless and impatient in printing information that was no more than rumor. "Discreet and deserving men have questioned, whether, after excluding the notices of deaths and marriages, one half of the circumstances that are related in the newspapers of America, as facts, are true in their essential features; and, in cases connected with party politics, it may be questioned if even so large a proportion can be set down as accurate." With such a large coverage as the press now had in America, Cooper wondered whether the nation, breathing such an atmosphere of falsehood, could long exist in safety. Behind the impersonality of the editorial character, men were prone to throw off misstatements with little regard for the consequences. Political, literary, and personal puffs were some of the tools that were used by a false press to influence opinion. "As the press of this country now exists, it would seem to be expressly devised by the great agent of
mischief, to depress and destroy all that is good, and to elevate and advance all that is evil in the nation." But even the insidious influence of the press could be offset by a citizenry aware of this tyranny that the press exercised. "The people that has overturned the throne of a monarch, and set up a government of opinion in its stead, and which blindly yields its interests to the designs of those who would rule through the instrumentality of newspapers, has only exchanged one form of despotism for another."

\[114\] The American Democrat, pp. 121-127.

The politics of the day were subjected to Cooper's satire often, but never more bitterly than in his novel The Monikins (1835). In this unwieldly and rather difficult allegory, Cooper described the adventures which befell a party of human beings in a world of monkeys. One of the countries in this allegorical world was a paradise of leveling democracy, Leaplow, in many ways like the United States. Here, for example, existed two parties, the Perpendiculars and the Horizontals, and skill in gymnastic exercise was an indication of party loyalty, especially if one could exercise a right-about-face at the request of his leader. Candidates were chosen who had no qualification for office or knowledge of institutions—who, indeed, were newly naturalized foreigners. The parties were split over the resolution "That the color which has hitherto been deemed to be black, is really white"—an argument which finally ended in a compromise that the color black was really lead-color. A problem arose over the collection of reparations which another country,
Leapthrough had agreed to pay Leaplow, and in the resulting discussion, four plans were presented to the Great National Council: 1, that Leaplow should pay itself from its own public funds; 2, that Leaplow should collect the money from Leapthrough even if it meant forcible seizure of Leapthrough goods; 3, that Leapthrough should be offered ten million dollars to say no more about the matter; and 4, that everytime a payment was due, Leapthrough should give Leaplow a promissory note for a less amount, to be received in full satisfaction for the payment—by which procedure the debt would be gradually abated over a period of years and finally reduced to nothing. These incidents paralleled actual Congressional debates and compromises of the time on such questions as slavery and French reparations, and represented Cooper's attitude toward legislation based upon party politics rather than on reasonable and clear-headed thinking. Elsewhere Cooper condemned the political party system for leading men astray in judging character, causing men to support the party rather than the national welfare, leading to corrupt and unprofitable legislation for the purpose of defeating the other party, bringing to power incompetent persons, giving the rule to those who could manage to control the party, and overshadowing truth and justice by feeding the passions and exciting personal interests. 115

115 Ibid., pp. 171-172.

A democracy, because it was controlled by the will of the people, was especially vulnerable to the danger of demagoguery, Cooper thought. And against the demagogue, who worked through both the press and politics,
Cooper raised his loudest warnings. "The peculiar office of a demagogue," he wrote, "is to advance his own interests, by affecting a deep devotion to the interests of other people.... The true theatre of a demagogue is a democracy, for the body of the community possessing the power, the master he pretends to serve, is best able to reward his efforts.... The man who is constantly telling the people that they are unerring in judgment, and that they have all power, is a demagogue.... In this instance, the people are flattered, in order to be led; as in kingdoms, the prince is blinded to his own defects, in order to extract favor from him." The demagogue puts the people before the constitution and the laws, when the people have actually put the constitution and the laws before themselves. "He who would be a courtier under a king, is almost certain to be a demagogue in a democracy.... Travellers have often remarked, that, Americans, who have made themselves conspicuous abroad for their adulation of rank and power, have become zealous advocates of power and supremacy, on returning home. Several men of this stamp are, at this moment, in conspicuous political stations in the country, having succeeded by the commonest arts of courtiers."

Through such demagogues, then, ideal democracy had become corrupted. The process was easy: "Democracies are necessarily controlled by publick opinion, and failing of the means of obtaining power more honestly, the fraudulent and ambitious find a motive to mislead, and even corrupt the common sentiment, to attain their ends. This is the greatest and most pervading danger of all large democracies...." 116

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116 Ibid., pp. 92-94, 63.
Steadfast Dodge, in *Home As Found* (1838), was the example of a scheming demagogue, the newspaper editor who was responsible, in part, for leading the public in its erroneous ways.

Cooper's reaction to the literature of his day was also evident in several comments, the most amusing being that in *Home As Found* where he described a literary evening held by one Mrs. Legend. Here the fads and patent falsities of the contemporary literary scene were broadly satirized by Cooper. Mrs. Legend, in order to make this a truly memorable occasion, had invited nearly all the wits, writers, artists, and literati of New York. To have all languages represented she was obliged to invite a gin dealer from Holland, a German linen merchant, an Italian who sold beads, and a Spanish master. Among the ladies at the gathering were Miss Annual, Miss Monthly, Mrs. Economy, S. R. P., Marion, Longinus, Julietta, Herodotus, D. O. V. E., and Mrs. Demonstration. Then there were the authors of "Lapis Lazuli," "The Aunts," "The Reformed," "The Conformed," "The Transformed," and "The Deformed." There were the editors of The Hebdomad, The Night Cap, The Chrysalis, The Real Maggot, and The Seek No Further. Also in attendance were "Junius," "Junius Brutus," "Lucius Junius Brutus," "Captain Kant," "Florio," the author of *The History of Billy Linkum Tweedle*, and the celebrated Pottawattamie Prophet, "Single Rhyme," a genius who had prudently rested his fame in verse on a couplet composed of one line. As the evening progressed, Captain Trucks, who had been mistaken for a celebrated English author, was plied with a variety of questions. "Is it commonly thought in the English literary circles, that Byron was a development of Shakespeare, or Shakespeare a shadowing
forth of Byron?" "Do you think that the profane songs of Little have more pathos than the sacred songs of Moore; or that the sacred songs of Moore have more sentiment than the profane songs of Little?" (To this Captain Trucks replied, "A good deal of both, marm, and something to spare. I think there is little in one, and more in the other "). "Which is the most ecstatic feeling, hope or despair?" (Captain Trucks mistook the word "ecstatic" for "erratic" and, thinking of some of the roving maniacs he had seen in his life, promptly and firmly answered, "Despair, out and out," an answer that was roundly applauded and agreed with on all sides because of its fundamental truth). Other such questions as, "Is Gatty (Goethe) really dead, or is the account we have had to this effect, merely a metaphysical apotheosis of his mighty soul?" and "Does the Princess Victoria smoke?" served to end the evening, and not until they were later assembled privately at an oyster supper did any of the amused guests break out in laughter. The New York literati never did become aware of the farce and remained "just as vapid, as conceited, as ignorant, as imitative, as dependent, and as provincial as ever."117

Although a property holder and a relatively wealthy man himself, Cooper condemned the vulgar idolization of the dollar. If wealth were combined with merit and culture, it was acceptable. But the wealth obtained through trade, commerce, exploitation, and speculation was ugly
and shabby and boorish. The Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief (1843) illustrated the profit motive in action: first there was the exploitation of the shabby seamstress who made the handkerchief; then there was the inflated $100 price on the New York market, where a speculator bought the handkerchief on shaky credit, in order to make a show. The flourish of honesty exhibited by the speculator in returning the unpaid-for item when the crash came enabled him to effect a dishonest settlement with many of his creditors; and finally the "blessings" of trade and the wealth it brought were contrasted ironically with the exploited seamstress.

In general, Cooper felt that too much of the population was purse-proud, and of all the sources of human pride, mere wealth was the basest and most vulgar-minded. Real gentlemen, he wrote, were almost invariably above this low feeling, and "A people that deems its possession of riches its highest source of distinction, admits one of the most degrading of all influences to preside over its opinion." Wealth was only a means, "and he who lives as if the acquisition of property were the sole end of his existence, betrays the dominion of the most sordid, base, and grovelling motive, that life offers." The cause of much that was obviously wrong with the country was the commercial depravity, speculation, and money-worship which abounded. Cooper incorporated this idea in Home As Found in an incident based on the contemporary phenomenon of land speculation which had reached such a high peak before the panic of 1837. John Effingham took Sir George Templemore to see the functioning of the Wall Street Exchange which made the Parisian public gambling look small indeed. One of the auctioneers gave them the history of a particular piece of land consisting of some fifty acres from which
the Volkert Van Brunt family had been making a livelihood for more than a century by selling milk. Two years before, Van Brunt's sons had sold the land for $5,000. The next spring the new owner sold it for $25,000, and it was resold within a week for $50,000. A company then bought it immediately for $112,000 cash, and just a few months later it was sold out in lots at auction for a gross sum of $300,000. In the sales room "scores were eagerly bidding against each other, in the fearful delusion of growing rich by pushing a fancied value to a point still higher. One was purchasing ragged rocks, another the bottom of rivers, a third a bog, and all on the credit of maps." Effingham said he had seen many excesses in the way of speculation, but none so fearful or widespread as this. "Money has got to be so completely the end of life that few think of it as a means. The history of the world, probably, cannot furnish a parallel instance of an extensive country that is so absolutely under this malign influence, as is the fact with our own at this present instant. All principles are swallowed up in the absorbing desire for gain..." The community, said Effingham, was in the situation of a man in an exhilarating state of intoxication who kept pouring down glass after glass thinking he was merely sustaining nature. "The desire to grow suddenly rich has seized on all classes. Even women and clergymen are infected, and we exist under the active control of the most corrupting of all influences, 'the love of money.' I should despair of the country altogether, did I not feel certain that the disease is too violent to last, and entertain a hope that the season of calm reflection and of repentance—that is to follow—will be in proportion to its causes."
Immediately following this conversation, the fire bells began to ring, and a fire which had begun in the heart of the Exchange district, grew rapidly into a huge, destructive conflagration. Whether or not Cooper intended this fire (one actually did occur in New York in 1835) to symbolize the financial panic of 1837, I do not know, but his description can be read, almost point for point, as a metaphor of the real panic. The conflagration extended in all directions from the central Exchange buildings, the water failed, and even the New York firemen who had experienced all kinds of disasters, had to stand by in awe as little more than passive spectators. "Here is a fearful admonition for those who set their hearts on riches," said Sir George. "What, indeed, are the designs of man, as compared with the will of Providence!" At the height of the flames, those who knew the area began to speak of natural or accidental barriers, such as waterways and wide streets, as the only possible means for arresting the destruction. At this point a party of seamen appeared bringing kegs of powder with which they proceeded to blow up house after house, thus making the flames less ungovernable. It was another day and night before the fire could be said to be fairly under control, and weeks, and even months, passed before the ruins ceased to send up smoke from the burning deep within. "The day that succeeded this disaster was memorable for the rebuke it gave the rapacious longing for wealth. Men who had set their hearts on gold, and who prided themselves on their possessions, and on that only, were made to feel its inanity; and they who had walked as gods so lately, began to experience how utterly insignificant are the merely rich, when stripped of their
possessions." If this did, indeed, represent Cooper's essential
reaction to the panic of 1837, it was closely similar to that of Emerson,
and others, who, as we shall later see, chortled over the just deserts
that the speculators received in the financial collapse. As has already
been pointed out, in one of Cooper's letters to his wife in 1841 he had
compared the depression to the Great Fire and suggested that it was a
purifying punishment for vice.

Cooper's criticism of another phenomenon of American society—
that of change, impermanence, and movement—was also best delineated in
Home As Found. Accompanying almost all the incidents was a comment by
Cooper on this characteristic of the American people. For example, in
describing Mrs. Hawker, Cooper said that she was "as near the head of
fashion in New York as it was possible to be in a town that, in a moral
sense, resembles an encampment, quite as much as it resembles a permanent
and long existing capital." In describing the changes in the town of
Templeton, Aristabulus Bragg, the American lawyer, said that many of the
old inhabitants had contracted the Western fever and had joined that part
of the population known as the regular movers. Sir George was amazed at
this, saying that in England men love the trees, the roofs, the firesides
that their forefathers had loved. Bragg thought this very poetical, but
"it must be a great check to business operations, however, in your part
of the world, sir!... A nation is much to be pitied that is weighed
down by the past, in this manner, since its industry and enterprise are
constantly impeded by obstacles that grow out of its recollections.... I have been told, Sir George Templemore, that in England, there are difficulties in running highways and streets through homesteads and dwellings; and that even a railroad or a canal is obliged to make a curve to avoid a churchyard or a tombstone?... A human being is not a cat, to love a locality rather than its own interests." Later while traveling by boat up the Hudson, Sir George was surprised that more traces of the Dutch settlers were not to be found in the State. Effingham replied, "When you know us better you will be surprised at discovering how little of anything remains a dozen years.... It is getting to be a predominant feeling in the American nature, I fear, to love change.... The whole country is in such a constant state of mutation, that I can only liken it to the game of children, in which, as one quits his corner another runs into it, and he that finds no corner to get into, is the laughing-stock of the others.... An American 'always,' in the way of usages, extends no further back than eighteen months. In short everything is condensed into the present moment..." Time after time Cooper noticed ruefully the change which had taken place in his country, the change from what he had admired in his earlier years, in the years before the "new" democracy. Ned Effingham, commenting on the Point Controversy (which Cooper accurately described in the novel), thought that such action on the part of the people was a poor reward for his generosity in letting them use the Point for thirty years. John, his cousin, answered, "I have told you, Ned, that you were not to expect the America on your return, that you left behind you on your departure for Europe. I
insist that no country has so much altered for the worse in so short a time." John himself had checked and found that none of the old, permanent families of Templeton had been active in this affair of the Point, but that all the clamor was made by the so-called birds of passage. "These people fancy everything reduced to the legal six months required to vote; and that rotation in persons is as necessary to republicanism as rotation in office.... We are a nation of changes...this necessity has infected the entire national character, and men get to be impatient of any sameness, even though it be useful. Everything goes to confirm this feeling, instead of opposing it. The constant recurrences of the elections accustom men to changes in their public functionaries; the great increase in the population brings new faces; and the sudden accumulations of property place new men in conspicuous stations." Ned, seeing hope for the future, recognized this to be true, but said that we can only hope "that time will bring its changes also, and that one of them will be a greater constancy in persons, things, and the affections." John, not so optimistic, replied, "Time will bring its changes, Ned, but all of them that are connected with individual rights, as opposed to popular caprice or popular interest, are likely to be in the wrong direction." A final word on this propensity for moving came from a bit of conversation being carried on between the two old worthies, Captain Trucks, of the salt-water, and the "Commodore," the old fisherman who had spent his years cruising on Otsego Lake. The Commodore, in the course of the conversation, suggested that Yankees were the worst neighbors that a man could have because they never remained in any one place long enough to love
anything but themselves. Captain Trucks asked,

"Do you mean that the people come and go like the tides?"

"Exactly so, sir; just as it used to be with the herrings in the Otsego, before the Susquehanna was dammed, and is still, with the swallows."

"Well, well my good friend, take consolation. You'll meet all the faces you ever saw here, one day, in heaven."

"Never! Not a man of them will stay there, if there be such a thing as moving. Depend on it, sir," added the Commodore, in the simplicity of his heart, "heaven is no place for a Yankee, if he can get further west, by hook or by crook. They are all too uneasy for any steady occupation."  


The extensive reform movements in the United States at this time presented an interesting problem to practically all the literary men. Here, at least, one would think that a critic of the contemporary scene would find a movement with which he could sympathize. But Cooper, like many of the other literary figures, did not join or become popular with the professional reformers. He was for reform, but not for the reforms or methods advocated by many reform groups. Cooper called for reform in such things as the general leveling trend of democracy, but he wanted the change to be brought about by individuals who would stand up for their rights by law. He wanted individuals to become vociferous social critics. Thus he did not fall in with the general rush of reformers because he demanded individualistic freedom in a society which was headed in the opposite direction. Most of the suggested reforms led to intolerance toward individualism and would impose a standard morale on the entire nation. Behind both liquor and slavery reform, for example, was just
the sort of intolerance and tyranny which Cooper wished to see rooted out of American life. By 1849 in the preface to The Pilot he was against the current flogging reform movement, saying that there were thousands of American who would be benefitted by a little judicious flogging. Finally, he turned to a faith in religion as the great means of reform. Peace Societies, Temperance and Moral Reform Societies, he said, mistakenly tried to get the results which Christianity promised, without the accompanying faith in Christianity.

In all these areas—banking, the press, politics, demagoguery, literature, money-worship, impermanence, and reform—Cooper criticized the society in which he lived. But all of these specific evils were in some way related to the leveling, equalitarian, and majority rule principles which were, as Cooper felt, being carried to excess and applied in too many areas of life. The concept of equality in a democracy, he wrote, must be divided into "equality of condition" and "equality of rights"; and only the latter equality was ever intended in a democracy. "Equality of condition is incompatible with civilization.... Equality of rights is a peculiar feature of democracies." It was when these two were confused that individual prerogative was in danger. "The celebrated proposition contained in the declaration of independence is not to be understood literally. All men are not 'created equal,' in a physical, or even a moral sense, unless we limit the signification to one of political rights...equality of condition is nowhere mentioned.... Desirable in practice, it can hardly be, since the result would be to force all down to the level of the lowest."
This feeling about intellectual and social equalitarianism in the United States was illustrated in Cooper's social satires in these years. In *The Moniks* it was noted that in Leaplow, all the tails, which were the seats of wisdom, were cut off to equal lengths, and then, when the King of Leaphigh (a country quite similar to England) was to be met, false tails were donned. In *Home As Found*, Mrs. Jarvis was an out and out equalitarian republican, and on the morning before she was to give a party, her conversation with Mr. Jarvis, who had some slightly different notions concerning equalitarianism, was quite amusing. Mr. Jarvis was perfectly aware that Mr. Effingham, in education, habits, associations, and manners, was of a class entirely distinct from his own, while his wife "expressed her surprise that anyone in New York should presume to be better than themselves." The conversation continued along these lines until Mrs. Jarvis asked, "Why talk of these sorts of differences in a country in which the law establishes none?" Mr. Jarvis replied that these social differences did exist, as a fact, just as any natural differences existed without being legally ordered. But Mrs. Jarvis was not convinced and rose to leave saying, "All this strikes me as being very spiritless, and as particularly anti-republican." In return, Mr. Jarvis left this as a parting word to his wife, "If you wish the world to believe you the equal of any one, no matter whom, do not be always talking about it, lest they see you distrust the fact yourself. A positive thing will surely be seen...but beware betraying a consciousness of your own inferiority, by letting every one see you are jealous of your station."120

One result of the false ideas of leveling was to give to the members of society an exaggerated idea of their own importance and rights. In 1837 an event occurred which was to bring to a head all Cooper's misgivings about the twisted social ideals of his people. This was the famous Point Controversy in which Cooper experienced the contempt of the citizens of his neighborhood for the rights of property. The controversy afforded an adequate and contemporary pretext for his critical writing of the next several years. Cooper's Point, a strip of the Cooper estate jutting out into Otsego Lake, had been popular through the years as a picnic spot for the townspeople who went there with the tacit assent of the owner. Finally the assumption grew that the Point was public property, a small shelter was erected on the spot, and, in 1837, other "improvements" were made, including the cutting down of some trees. Cooper, at this juncture, made protest, informally at first, but later, as threats and ill-feeling grew, by means of a formal no-trespassing notice in the local newspaper. This was of course received indignantly by the people, who held a meeting and drafted a resolution expressing their contempt for the order. For a time the argument raged, but merely locally, and Cooper's temper was aroused. In the situation he saw graphically pictured all the faults of the contemporary interpretation of democracy—the tyranny of majority opinion, the false theories of equality under all conditions, the demagoguery of the press, and the general crudeness and lack of taste accompanying these. This whole controversy was made the subject of an episode in *Home As Found.*
Aristabulus Bragg, the agent for the Templeton estate in *Home As Found*, typified the upstart society Cooper saw about him. Aristabulus was quick-witted, prompt, enterprising (but cautious in things wherein he had an interest), and ready to turn not only his hand but his principles to anything that promised him advantage. "With him, literally, 'Nothing is too high to be aspired to, nothing too low to be done.' He will run for governor, or for town clerk, just as opportunities occur...."

At a very "fashionable" party given by a Mrs. Houston in New York, Aristabulus was invited to meet some of the dignitaries "and he accepted the offer with joy, Aristabulus uniting cordially in the proposition, as he fancied he had a right, under the Constitution of the United States of America, to be introduced to every human being with whom he came in contact." Cooper added to his criticism of the overweening pretensions of the new democrats by describing, in the novel, Mrs. Hawker, the one American in New York who deserved the title of lady. She was "a lady in every sense of the word; by position, education, manners, association, mind, fortune, and birth." But the *nouveaux riches*, "people who first appeared on this island five or six years since, and who, having accumulated what to them are relatively large fortunes, have launched out into vulgar and uninstructed finery, would look with surprise at hearing Mrs. Hawker mentioned as one having any claim to social distinction."121

121 *Home As Found*, pp. 10, 77, 51.

As to the democratic belief in the rule of the majority, Cooper felt that this belief must be restricted and be wisely kept within bounds.
He showed why, in a democracy, one must keep alert to see that the majority principle was not distorted. Groups and majorities on which democracies were based could become, when their powers were flagrantly used, as dictatorial and as careless of individual freedom as the most ruthless of dictators. The axiom that the "majority must rule" was to be received with many limitations. In the case of law and individual human liberty, for example, the majority was impotent.

It is a besetting vice of democracies to substitute publick opinion for law. This is the usual form in which masses of men exhibit their tyranny.... No tyranny of one, nor any tyranny of the few, is worse than this. All attempts in the publick, therefore, to do that which the publick has no right to do, should be frowned upon as the precise form in which tyranny is the most apt to be displayed in a democracy.

Again Aristabulus Bragg represented the democratic person who uncritically accepted the tyrannical rule of the majority in all phases of life. As Bragg was describing the changes that had been made on the house at Templeton during the owner's absence, he suggested that Roman or Greek architecture would have been more republican than the Gothic that was employed; at least, he said, that seemed to be the opinion of the majority. Upon this, Eve Effingham remarked that she did not see what concern a majority, as he termed them, could have with a house that didn't belong to them. This disregard for a majority left Bragg somewhat aghast, and he replied, "I do not mean that the public has a legal right to control the tastes of the citizen, but in a republican government, you undoubtedly understand, Miss Eve, it will rule in all things."

This attack on the abject compliance with public opinion in matters other than political and legislative, Cooper sustained throughout the book.
One of the chief complaints Cooper had about equalitarianism and the rule of a majority was the lack of excellence and the mediocrity to which they contributed.

The tendency of democracies is, in all things, to mediocrity, since the tastes, knowledge, and principles of the majority form the tribunal of appeal. This circumstance, while it certainly serves to elevate the average qualities of a nation, renders the introduction of high standards difficult. Thus do we find in literature, the arts, architecture and in all acquired knowledge, a tendency in America to gravitate toward the common center in this as in all other things; lending a value and estimation to mediocrity that are not elsewhere given....the mass of no community is qualified to decide the most correctly on anything, which, in its nature, is above its reach.122

122 The American Democrat, pp. 36, 64-65, 13.

This popularly accepted mediocrity, boorishness and provincialism was especially reflected in the realms of art and manners. In his series of Gleanings in Europe (1836-37), for example, Cooper praised the Germans for their love of art, and added, "Blocks are not colder, or can have less real reverence for letters, arts, or indeed cultivation of any kind, than the great bulk of American people." In the original preface to The Deerslayer (1841), a novel containing little of the sharp critical quality of most of his writing at that time, Cooper made some sarcastic remarks about the ability of the reading public to read imaginatively. If anyone had the same name or same color of hair as one of the characters in the novel, he explained to the literal minded, it was merely coincidental; however, a novelist knew that in a republican country only a minority would understand that a novel was a work of fiction and was to be read as such.
The taste and manners of the time, Cooper thought, were abominable. "The Americans are the grossest feeders of any civilization known. As a nation, their food is heavy, coarse, ill prepared and indigestible.... The predominance of grease in the American kitchen, coupled with the habits of hasty eating and of constant expectoration, are the causes of the diseases of the stomach so common in America." Bragg, in Home As Found, also represented America in manners. At Mr. Effingham's table, which was served in the quiet but thorough manner that distinguishes a French dinner, "there were a delay and a finish...that suited neither Aristabulus' go-ahead-ism, nor his organ of acquisitiveness," and he proceeded to help himself right and left as the opportunity offered "until not only was the plate completely covered, but it was actually covered in double and triple layers; mustard, cold butter, salt, and even pepper garnishing its edges." But just at the moment when his ingenuity was about to be rewarded and he was "about to commence the process of mastication, or of deglutition rather, for he troubled himself very little with the first operation," the report of a champagne cork diverted Bragg's attention, and by the time he had finished a glass of this beverage, his plate had been snatched away in an unguarded moment and he had to begin anew with the second course, which was then being served. The "defects in American deportment are...numerous and palpable," Cooper wrote. "Among the first may be ranked insubordination in children, and a general want of respect for age.... The Americans are reproached, also, with the want of a proper deference for social station; the lower classes manifesting their indifference by an unnecessary insolence.... There is no doubt that in general, America has retrograded in manners within the
last thirty years. Boys, and even men, wear their hats in the houses of all classes, and before persons of all ages and conditions. This is not independence, but vulgarity..."

American party manners in general were satirized by Cooper in his description of Mrs. Houston's ball. Mrs. Houston was termed a fashionable lady in New York, and it was here that Grace Van Courtland, Eve Effingham's American cousin, wanted to show off American society at its best. But there was an excessive amount of noise, confusion, calling out, swearing, and rude clamor among the coachmen before Mrs. Houston's house, and Cooper's chief target of comment at the party seemed to be a Miss Ring, a New York belle, who engaged groups of five or six young men at a time in conversation. Her attempts to be excessively precise in what she considered to be the rules of fashionable manners made her, in Cooper's description, seem provincially ridiculous in comparison to the natural poise of Eve Effingham. The conversation at one point had gotten around to Miss Ring's remarking that there was "something excessively indelicate in a young lady's moving about a room without having a gentleman's arm to move on!" when Miss Effingham, the acme of perfection and sophistication, walked naturally and quietly across the room to sit beside a friend. "I would not for the world," gasped Miss Ring to an escort whose arm she had fortunately just seized, "do so a brazen thing as Miss Effingham has just achieved; would you believe it, she positively went from this spot to her seat, quite alone!"\(^{123}\)

\(^{123}\)The American Democrat, p. 156; Home As Found, pp. 18, 144, 69.
This vulgarism and provincialism in social and intellectual fields was for Cooper the most repugnant result of democratic leveling. In *Home As Found*, Cooper stated this explicitly in a conversation between John Effingham and Mrs. Bloomfield, the latter a "thinking" American. She asked,

"What then do you deem our greatest error—our weakest point?"

"Provincialisms, with their train of narrow prejudices, and a disposition to set up mediocrity as perfection, under the double influence of an ignorance that unavoidably arises from a lack of models, and of the irresistible tendency to mediocrity, in a nation where the common mind so imperiously rules."

"But does not the common mind rule everywhere? Is not public opinion always stronger than the law?"

"In a certain sense, both these positions may be true. But in a nation like this, without a capital, one that is all provinces, in which intelligence and tastes are scattered, this common mind wants the usual directions, and derives its impulses from the force of numbers, rather than from the force of knowledge. Hence the fact, that the public opinion never or seldom rises to absolute truth. I grant you that, as a mediocrity, it is well; much better than common even; but it is still a mediocrity."

And in the introduction, Cooper suggested that the "governing social evil of America is provincialism; a misfortune that is perhaps inseparable from her situation.... Her people...possess no standard for opinion, manners, social maxims, or even language. Every man, as a matter of course, refers to his own particular experience, and praises or condemns agreeably to notions contracted in the circle of his own habits, however narrow, provincial, or erroneous they may happen to be."^{124} This gets

^{124} *Home As Found*, pp. 375, iv.
close to the heart of a paradox that many of the writers and thinkers of this period faced. For a man to be individual and to rely upon himself was good philosophical idealism, but it would work only when man had properly prepared himself and his capabilities for this responsibility. In 1838 I feel certain that many writers, including Cooper and Emerson and others, could not say truthfully to themselves that the great majority of the American people had as yet arrived at that state of development. Even Whitman looked forward to the time when man, through his acquired ability to communicate with his Inner Light, would participate in the Utopian existence under democracy, but the present possibility of such a condition was considered hopeless by the more practical-minded-than-we-believe "idealists." In the future of democracy Cooper and the others had faith, but when newly liberated common man depended upon his present narrow and erroneous ideas and experiences as guides, he became merely "provincial" in the worst sense of the term. The essential greatness of the American nation and its future as a democracy Cooper at all times maintained; indeed, if his praise of America is withheld in this study in favor of his censure, it is because of the purpose of the paper and not because Cooper himself omitted all favorable comment. But Cooper's chief purpose was criticism, and criticism of a kind that he knew would not gain him popularity; and it is this element of the literary mind that he so well illustrates for our purpose.

What belief Cooper did have in democracy stemmed from his faith that in an ideal democracy, individualism would have the best opportunity
to survive. This individualism, which Cooper held to in common with most of the other writers of the day, was a higher individualism than that popularly advocated. It was essentially a belief in the nobility of each man. "It was an individualism which permitted man the right to think and act as a separate and distinct organism in accordance with the Higher Law without regard to the dictates of the majority. In Cooper's case the idea perhaps never took the form of a philosophical expression—Cooper acting and thinking primarily in social terms—but the basic belief was there which made him fight against the oppression of strict majority conformity. "We see neighborhoods, in which oppressive intolerance is manifested by the greater number, for the time being, to the habits of the less. This is a sore grievance, more especially, when, as is quite frequently the case, the minority happen to be in possession of usages that mark the highest stage of civilization. It ought never to be forgotten, therefore, that every citizen is entitled to indulge without comment, or persecution, in all his customs and practices that are lawful and moral."

Out of this belief in individualism came Cooper's argument for the existence in a democracy of an "aristocracy" based on merit and worth. All people were not the same: social station was dependent on birth, education, personal qualities, tastes, habits, and on property, and must inevitably vary from person to person. "They who have reasoned ignorantly, or who have aimed at effecting their personal ends by flattering the popular feeling, have boldly affirmed that 'one man is as good as another'; a maxim that is true in neither nature, revealed morals, nor political theory." The person in a high social station, therefore, had a right to have his individualism and way of life respected, even in a
democracy. But such a person—the gentleman—had a responsibility in return for the recognition of his position. "The class to which he belongs is the natural repository of the manners, tastes, tone, and, to a certain extent, of the principles of a country. They who imagine this portion of the community useless, drones who consume without producing, have not studied society...If the laborer is indispensable to civilization, so also is the gentleman. While the one produces, the other directs his skill to those arts which raise the polished man above the barbarian." And the desire of the multitude to "equalize" persons of superior social status would eventually vulgarize and weaken a democracy if the desire were allowed to operate through majorities. Thus, the stigma attached to the word "aristocrat" was unreasonable if one believed, as did Cooper, in an "aristocracy of worth" within a democracy.

Some men fancy that a democrat can only be one who seeks the level, social, mental and moral, of the majority, a rule that would at once exclude all men of refinement, education and taste from the class.... Manners, education and refinement, are positive things, and they bring with them tastes which are productive of high enjoyments; and it is as unjust to deny their possessors their indulgence, as it would be to insist on the less fortunate's passing the time they would rather devote to athletic amusements, in listening to operas for which they have no relish, sung in a language they do not understand.... He is the purest democrat who best maintains his rights, and no rights can be dearer to a man of cultivation, than exemptions from unreasonable invasions on his time, by the coarse-minded and ignorant.125

125 *The American Democrat*, pp. 69, 71, 84, 88-91.

Cooper's whole attitude toward the manifestations of society, especially during this five-year period from 1837-1842, was based on the
fact that he saw as a fundamental problem of democracy his own right to be different and on his own terms. Because the right of a gentleman to be different from the multitude had been denied by majority opinion and the press, he felt it his duty to protest and try to guide democracy into its proper expression. Democracy, in its true form, was to Cooper the only possible guarantee of individualism, and the only way to attain this true form was to counteract the propaganda of the demagogues by energetic writing and more writing directed to the "sound heart" of the people. In time, he felt, if enough of the intelligent and aware people did this, the falseness of the equalitarian dogma would be seen through and room would be made in the democracy for an aristocracy of worth.

"In America," wrote Cooper, "the gross mistake has been made of supposing, that, because the mass rules in a political sense, it has a right to be listened to and obeyed in all other matters—a practical deduction that can only lead, under the most favorable exercise of power, to a very humble mediocrity. It is to be hoped that time, and a greater concentration of taste, liberality, and knowledge than can well distinguish a young and scattered population will repair this evil...."

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Cooper, truly interested in the preservation of individual rights in his country's experimental democracy, felt it necessary in his social writings to make a statement criticizing the infringement of these rights wherever he saw such infringement in evidence. It was, I feel, a prompting similar to that which inspired many of the writers of the
American Renaissance to produce masterpieces. A statement such as the following, from the chapter "On Individuality" in The American Democrat, might conceivably have been one of the ideas informing "The American Scholar," "Self-Reliance," or even Moby Dick or The Scarlet Letter: "All greatness of character is dependent on individuality. The man who has no other existence than that which he partakes in common with all around him, will never have any other than an existence of mediocrity."127

127 The American Democrat, p. 174.
Chapter V

The Sublimated Reaction: Emerson

One would say we could well afford to slight all other ages if only we could value this one. The great will seize with eagerness this novel crisis when the old and the new stand face to face, and reflection is for a time possible, and faith in the eternal stands in close neighborhood to exhausting analysis of the economic.

*Emerson's Journal*, October 31, 1839.

Emerson, I feel, was keenly aware of that tension within himself produced by the conflict of the Real and the Ideal. Especially in these years of triumph for Jacksonian democracy did he see his ideal concept of democracy besmirched and dragged in the mud. There is a frustration for any man who sees a cause, with which he identifies himself, founder­ing on its initial trial because of inept management. What to do? Certainly he cannot abandon the cause; he couldn't even though he would. He must help. He must nurse, he must coax, he must encourage. If necessary, he must be sharp and cruelly critical— for underneath all, the heart of the cause is sound and good. Thus did Emerson react when he felt that the democratic cause in America was undergoing a crisis. And the tensions resulting from this collision of the ideal with contemporary reality in the years from 1837 to 1842 provided Emerson with important themes for his art.

The fact that Emerson was in accord with the spirit of the times, was the "philosopher of democracy" in his emphasis on the "infinitude of
the private man," and was a forward looking liberal identified with the Movement party as opposed to the Establishment has been often and adequately pointed out.\(^1\) The fact that he was against many of the

\(^1\)See Emerson's own statement in such essays as "The Conservative"; see also studies as widely separated as John Dewey's "Emerson—the Philosopher of Democracy," Int. Journ. of Ethics, XIII (July, 1903), 405-413, and John Stafford's The Literary Criticism of "Young America" (Berkeley, Calif., 1952).

social and economic manifestations of equalitarianism or Jacksonian democracy has been less elaborately presented. His latter attitude was something more than the "transcendental protest against materialism"; it was also the protest against the new and ill-timed rise of bourgeois standards of conduct, against the wild and half formed schemes and ideals being projected by a populace unschooled, as yet, in the true insights, or in the decorum appropriate to such insights. It was very largely a protest against the increasing antipathy of the multitudes toward the select few—Emerson's natural aristocracy—who were capable of seeing life whole and of pointing the way toward a future, but not a near future, perfection. This skirmish between belief on the one hand and disapproval on the other seems to have been particularly effective in stimulating in a man of Emerson's genius, the production of lasting literature.

Emerson emerged from a background of what might justly be called an "aristocratic" American family. Although there was poverty, this poverty did nothing to lower the position of the Emerson ministerial family in the New England aristocracy. Inculcated early in Emerson
were the high counsels and Spartan traits of his Aunt Mary, the classic standards of Harvard where he idolized Edward Everett, and the grave precepts of his sire from whom, he said, "I inherit...a formality in manners & speech." Although Emerson broke with the philosophical opinion of his forbears, some of their feeling and temperament was ever present as he made decisions and worked out his attitudes.

During the years of national crisis, beginning with the Panic of 1837, Emerson was in the process of working out these attitudes. Having just recently broken with the organized ministerial profession, he was, in these years, formulating and crystallizing his thinking, all the while in close contact with contemporary events. In his journals, in his lecture series during 1836 to 1841, and in his letters he was evolving the tenets of his works. Whether his reactions toward contemporary society at this time grew out of his philosophy, or whether the philosophy grew out of the reaction can probably never be quite settled, but that the reaction itself was important in goading Emerson into writing at all is my contention here.

To illustrate the tensions involved in Emerson's thinking during these years of social and economic crisis, we have only to look at some of his observations about society in the light of the progressive and liberal views we know him to have held. He found from experience that the "common" man did not always seem the paragon of noble "infinitude" as, in another mood, he had held. He found that he himself hated journeying, for the stagecoach conversation was invariably a waste
of breath. He wrote on a trip to New Hampshire in 1836 that the dignity of the White Mountains made one "more sensible of the meanness & Mud of the population at the taverns untempered by so much as a spark of the true fire." "The fritter & degradation of man which we see every where in the stage coach and bar room" severely tried his faith.²


As to the artistic sensibility of the people, it was simply lacking, snowed under by other interests. The age produced a railroad, a State Street, a Bunker Hill Monument, but no art—because it did not want art. "What interest has Greenough to make a good statue? Who cares whether it is good? a few prosperous gentlemen and ladies..."

But there was no lack of pretension. "O no, all we be is placarded in square miles of newspapers, and the characteristic of the American in Europe is pretension. But is it fair to ask these Reformers, Democrats, New Churches and Transcendentalists, Where is your Poetry, your Science, your Art? Why slumbers the Creative Hand?" To Alcott in 1836 he wrote commending his power of reflection and expression in a time and country where there was such a dearth of both. The age, he wrote during the 1836 boom, will be characterized as an age of Trade. "The fever of speculation in Maine and the prairies is matched by the ardor and restlessness of politicians—reckless experiment." The speculator imagined rivers (where there were really barren sands) to float his "blackberry bush" logs to market. The politician imagined that currency, trade, and
production could be altered by law.  

In general, Emerson recognized the "Dulness of the Age," the wickedness of the majority, the flatness and foolishness of society. If one directed his attention to the "arrangements of Society, at the parties, the education, the manners, the laws...it looks as if man were endeavoring to traverse every purpose of God." In the face of the money force, Emerson began lecturing in order to do what he could for the circulation of thoughts and to give such food as he could to the starving youth. To Carlyle in 1837 he wrote, "In this country we need whatever is generous and beautiful in character more than ever because of the general mediocrity of thought produced by the arts of gain." And as a result of so much revulsion, he turned back, in certain moods, to an admiration of the dignity of the older times when the prevailing religion taught privation, self-denial, and sorrow as man's lot. In this view, Andover, Yale, and Princeton became valuable as altars of the old fire. And with the passing of old Dr. Ripley, Emerson saw the passing of a mighty epoch which planted and liberated America; even in the new theories of abolition, non-resistance, and temperance, Emerson saw but a continuation of Puritanism.  

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4 Journals, IV, 85, 134 (entries Sept., Oct. 1836); The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston, 1883), I, 132-133 (written Sept. 1837); Letters from Emerson to a Friend [Samuel G. Ward], ed. Charles Eliot Norton
This last note suggests what seems to me the most important thing about Emerson's attitude: below the surface of contemporary boorishness he saw a valuable impulse at work which suggested the oneness in variety wherein the small excess in favor of optimism lay. But the pull was strong in both directions, the tension was great. In 1836 he wrote in his journal, "I dislike the gruff, Jacobin manners of our village politicians... But by this screen of porcupine quills, of bad manners and hatred, is the sacred gem of individual genius concealed and guarded in secular darkness. After centuries, will it be born a god." The ultimate answer seemed to be clear; what was valuable would triumph.

Emerson's problem lay in determining how to face the present abused age. He looked at the ferment around him in 1838—"The rights of women, the antislavery—, temperance—, peace—, health—, and money—movements; female speakers, mobs and martyrs, the paradoxes, the antagonisms of old and new, the anomalous church, the daring mysticism and the plain prose, the uneasy relation of domestics, the struggling towards better household arrangements,—all indicate life at the heart, not yet justly organized at the surface." He made clear that when he praised the democratic element, he did not mean "that ill thing, vain and loud, which writes lying newspapers, spouts at caucuses, and sells its lies for gold; but that spirit of love for the general good whose name this assumes. There is nothing of the true democratic element in what is called Democracy..." Yes, the good was there and would ultimately come
out; however, as Emerson jotted in his journal in July, 1837, "We all undoubtedly expect that time will bring amelioration, but while the grass grows the noble steed starves, we die of the numb palsy." 5


One of the most obvious manifestations of Jacksonian democracy, the faith in numbers or majorities, was of course an anathema to an individualist like Emerson—except as the people themselves acted as individuals and not merely as majorities. But to place faith in and pander to numbers as such was unthinkable. "The multitude is the worst argument"; "Ten people are a great deal better than a hundred"; "Whilst we plead for the Ideal we do not pretend that we have the majority." Like others, especially like Cooper, Emerson found the chief weakness of majority rule to lie in the ease with which minds could be swayed by demagogues. "The poor old public stand...perfectly & universally convertible the moment the right word comes." Only a person with a robust temper could avoid disgust at the way in which a young fellow "with talents for intrigue" came into Concord at the November elections in 1836 and besotted all the "ignorant and simple farmers and laborers" until they rejected their honorable townsman, Samuel Hoar, and selected a stranger. As a result of many such incidents, Emerson concluded, "This town is governed in Wesson's bar-room; and the country in bar-rooms."

In Portland, Maine, in 1842 Emerson noted that Judge Freeble, a very
sensible person, held that republican institutions never had large or prudent aims, only low personal ones, and that behind the fact that government officers were taken every year from a lower and lower class, was the evil of Universal Suffrage. But even on these points, Emerson was not certain he continued to feel the tug of his ideal philosophy; "The mob are always interesting," he wrote in 1839. He listened to the blacksmith, the farmer, and the truckman in the barroom because when they spoke they had something to say. The men and women at work in the streets of North Boston in 1841 were more interesting than the clean-shaven, silk-robed procession of Washington and Tremont streets. And even though it seemed "as if it were intolerable that Broad Street Paddies and barroom politicians, the sots and loafers and all manner of ragged and unclean and foul-mouthed persons without a dollar in their pockets should control the property of the country," the situation was only fair, when the property was held selfishly as it was and employed so cunningly against the poor by the moneyed interests; "You cheat and they strike; you sleep and eat at their expense; they vote and sometimes throw stones, at yours.""
politics and reform movements; his final attitude toward the movements seemed to be always, "I agree in sentiment with your purposes, but I disagree with your methods." But this answer, then, always placed Emerson in the seemingly unsupportable position of criticizing what he must, in the final analysis, believe in.

As far as Emerson's political position is concerned, there is little need to chronicle again all his various, and at times contradictory, statements on the subject. Although his sympathies were, in the long run, with the party which promised the greatest aid to the position of the individual, common man—the Democratic Party—he was sure the time was not yet ripe for the radical steps which it was advocating. The fact that the Whigs were not so well "organized and drilled" and were not so capable, through the press, of inflicting their ideas on others was for Emerson, in 1841, a point in their favor. The Democratic Globe especially came in for criticism in 1837 and 1838 with "its lie for each new emergency to hood-wink its honest millions." That it was said to have three hundred thousand readers meant nothing to Emerson; "Three million such people as can read the Globe with interest are as yet in too crude a state of nonage to deserve any regard." His dislike of Jackson and of the "unmixed malignity, the withering selfishness, the impudent vulgarity" of a Jackson Caucus has been duly pointed out. Although in 1843 Emerson said that the Democratic Party had the best cause, he could not
accept the men who were supposed to represent these liberalities. The spirit of American radicalism seemed to him only aimless and destructive, pulling down with the wild wish to have physical freedom, but for no nobler end. On the other hand, the conservatives, composed of the "most modest, able and cultivated part of the population," were timid and merely defensive of property. Just after the Whigs had come into office in 1841, Emerson wrote: "The Whig assumes sickness, and his social frame is a hospital, his total legislation is for present distress,—a universe in slippers and flannels, with bib and pap-spoon, swallowing pills and herb tea. Whig preaching, Whig poetry, Whig philosophy, Whig marriages. No rough, truth-telling Miltons, Rosseaus." All in all, however, I suppose the Democratic Party received the worst of the attack. A thorough-going Democratic sympathy was precluded for Emerson partially by his attitude toward property as stated in his essay on "Politics." There he introduced his discussion of parties by emphasizing the basic inequalities which existed in regard to the rights in property, saying that the accumulation of property depended primarily on the skill and virtue of a person. Also, property would always have its say in the government, would write its own laws, and rightfully so. "Society always consists in greatest part of young and foolish persons.... With such an ignorant and deceitful majority, States would soon run to ruin" were it not for the inevitable law of property.8

In October, 1840, Emerson wrote to Carlyle in England, "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waist coat pocket. I am gently mad myself...." Perhaps there is no better known facet of Emerson's relation to public affairs than his reaction to the countless reform movements of this period of social crisis. And there

is no better place in which to see the Emersonian response to social stimulus that I have been suggesting. Reform was not alien to Emerson's philosophy; it was quite central to the desired modification of society, and Emerson himself experimented with different varieties. But again, in the last analysis, we find Emerson writing and lecturing—in some of his most famous prose—to explain why he could not cast his lot completely with the Reformers. And again his basic criticism stemmed not from his own disbelief but from the partiality and the dependence on numbers which appeared in the contemporary carrying-out of the idea. The precariousness of the position is obvious; the wonderful letter to George Ripley in December, 1840, explaining why he, Emerson, could not join the Brook Farm venture shows all the elements of the mental strain which Emerson had experienced in making his hard decision. But he was firm,
and the failure of his own rather pathetic attempts to set up reforms in his household—by having the cook eat at the family table or by having Alcott and wife share his home in communal living—only increased his resolution. "I have not yet conquered my own house; it irks and repents me. Shall I raise the siege of this hen coop, and march baffled away to a pretended siege of Babylon?" Emerson's journal entry in 1839 upon being asked to join actively in the Temperance Movement reflected his feeling concisely: "A part of the protest we are called to make is to the popular mode of virtuous endeavor.... Though I own I sympathize with your desire and abhor your adversaries, yet I shall persist in wearing this robe, all loose and unbecoming as it is, of inaction, this wise passiveness until my hour comes when I can see how to act with truth as well as to refuse." 10

Directly out of this personal conflict on the reform question came three vital lecture-essays—"Man the Reformer" (delivered in January, 1841, before the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association in Boston), "Lecture on the Times" (December, 1841, at the Masonic Temple in Boston), and "New England Reformers" (March, 1841, at Amory Hall in Boston). These three essays illustrate something of Emerson's reason for writing at this particular time, and something of his method. All three were on current topics of top priority interest, and all three began on a conciliatory practical tone. Reform was rampant—but for good reason: because of the extravagance of abuses. Commerce was "so
vitiated by dereliction and abuses" that if an honest man went into business he had to forget his ethics and take on him "the harness of routine and obsequiousness," had to shut his eyes and accomplish a compromise of private opinion and lofty integrity. And certainly he, Emerson, preferred the reform or movement party over the conservative or stationary class; moves to reform war, slavery, intemperance, usages of trade, tariff, banks, education systems, laws of property, executive power, Indian treatment (he listed them all) were all a part of a moral sentiment which was new, creative, alive, divine.

But—and the change of tone is obvious in each essay—those who were conducting these reforms had turned out to be not whole men. "They are partial; they are not equal to the work they pretend." These men got lost and expended all their energy on some accidental evil. "Society gains nothing whilst a man, not himself renovated, attempts to renovate things around him...hypocrisy and vanity are often the disgusting result." Advocates of individual reform magnified and exaggerated, repelling discreet persons by their unfairness. The mystic richness of the impulse was made disgusting by some "poor Perfectionist or 'comer out'." And if this exaggerated partiality was one fault of the movement, the other defect was its reliance on association or numbers. The reformers, said Emerson, believed that by numbers changes could be made that a person could not make on himself individually. They used vulgar means, not relying on love but on men, multitudes, circumstances, money, party. A person was strongest when he was alone, and "the hour in which he mortages himself to two or ten or twenty, he dwarfs himself below the stature of one."
Then, towards the end of each essay, in the third parts, Emerson summed up on the level of the ideal. "The impulse is good, and the theory; the practice is less beautiful.... The Reformers have their high origin in an ideal justice, but they do not retain the purity of an idea.... We say then that the reforming movement is sacred in origin; in its management and details, timid and profane." True, he said, man was born to be a Reformer, but the basis of reform must be elevated to the whole and the positive. Mankind must not be approached as classes—this group or that group to be worked with by social agencies; each individual stood in a strict connection with a higher fact never yet manifested, and the only true reform was the reform of the individual to this realization. A man was not to be raised by improving his circumstances, as the Reformers believed; "obedience to his genius is the only liberating influence."

The final note in each essay was a positive one. The basis of all reforms must be the conviction that there is an infinite worthiness in man. We can never "construct that heavenly society you prate of out of foolish, sick, selfish men and women, such as we know them to be." We must have faith in the ultimate divine possibilities of each human being and work through the power of love. "Love would put a new face on this weary old world." Only through an acceptance of love and its universal practice could social or civil reform be brought about. "I do not believe in two classes of men, but in man in two moods, in Philip drunk and Philip sober.... Men are in all ways better than they seem.... Nothing shall ever warp me from the belief that every man is a lover of
truth. There is no pure lie, no pure malignity in nature."

Emerson also made out his case for an aristocracy of the intellect as it applied to the reform problem. The Reformers divided themselves naturally into the actors and the thinkers; and it was the actors for whom he had the harshest criticism at that time. The thinkers were apt to be thought too intellectualized, but "Their unbelief arises out of a greater Belief; their inaction out of a scorn of inadequate action. By the side of these men, the hot agitators have a certain cheap and ridiculous air.... Of the two, I own I like the speculators best."

It is important, though, that Emerson knew that this speculator class must not become merely negative, critical, and stationary. In a draft of a letter about 1840, he said, "Certainly virtue has its own arithmetic as well as vice, and the pure must not eat the bread of the impure, but must live by the sweat of their own face & in all points make their philosophy affirmative. Otherwise it tends so fast downward to mere railing and a greater falseness than that which it reprobates."

The first impulse of the mind receiving the heavenly light was to see and lament the death which surrounded it. It saw only tombs, ghosts, and a sort of dead-alive population stretched to the horizons; how could it testify to truth and life? But in the individual heart was life—innovative, creative, and prodigal of beauty—and in obeying this lay the only method of reform. "If thou wouldst have the sense of poverty, squalid poverty, bestir thyself in endless proclamation of war against the sins of society, thyself appearing to be the only exception.
Toward the muddled literary scene of these years, with its cheap books and magazines, pirating and copyright difficulties, Emerson was relatively noncommittal. He at times praised the cheapness and the resulting widespread distribution of literature, but he also criticized the quality of much of the writing and editorial work in newspapers and magazines. The literary criticism of the time he scorned. In 1838, he wrote in his journal, "When I read the North American Review, or the London Quarterly, I seem to hear the snore of the Muses, not their waking voice." Early in this period (1836) he wrote to his brother William explaining the title "Modern History" which he had given to a lecture course. His definition of what Modern History included was, he realized, quite dogmatic, but with so much lecturing, and some writing, he had become bronzed—"To such lengths of madness trot we when we have not the fear of criticism before our eyes: and the literary man in this country has no critic." Concerning the proposed Dial (1840), Emerson thought that an introductory essay was not needed; "With the old drowsy Public which the magazines address, I think we have nothing to do;—as little with the journals & critics of the day.... This Journal has a public of its own." Later, on taking over the Dial from Margaret
Fuller, he remarked that he didn't want to be the whole magazine, but neither did he want to put it into the hands of the Reform men or the scholars. The former, he said, trampled on letters and poetry; the latter were dead and dry. But some conservative bias was evidenced even here: "I do not like the Plain Speaker so well as the Edinburgh Review. The spirit of the last may be conventional and artificial, but that of the first is coarse, sour, indigent; dwells in a cellar-kitchen and goes to make suicides." 12


Perhaps the closest Emerson came to the book trade industry in these years was in his attempts to get Carlyle some return for his books published in this country. The copyright situation, as has been discussed, guaranteed Carlyle no profits on his books which were pirated here, and Emerson, who had met and become friendly with Carlyle on his trip to Europe, tried to do what he could to help his poverty-ridden friend. By 1837, Emerson pleaded with the publisher of Carlyle's books in this country not to print the forthcoming *History of The French Revolution* until some time had been given for people to import British copies. He wrote to Carlyle, "I am ashamed that you should educate our young men, and that we should pirate your books. One day we will have a better law...." But the difference in exchange, the high duties, and the freight charges prohibited the sale of British imports, and Emerson next tried to get a bookseller on contract to print the *History* and sell at a 20 per cent commission. This worked fairly well, with Emerson doing the
financing and depending upon the sale to reimburse himself. The price, at $2.50 for two volumes, was very low, Emerson explained, "in terror of the Philistines, and to secure its accessibility to the economical Public." Emerson also arranged to sell 500 copies imported from England at $3.75. Apologizing for the small profit per book to Carlyle, Emerson wrote, "The book is rather too dear for our market of cheap manufactures, and therefore we are obliged to give the booksellers a good percentage to get it off at all: for we stand in daily danger of a cheap edition from some rival neighbor." But the times were bad, and books were slow. By 1841, Emerson reported that he had been driven off the market in the matter of Heroes and Hero Worship by New York pirates, especially Appleton, who announced he would print everything of Carlyle's that was printed in London. He also reported that the New York newspapers printed the book in chapters and circulated it at six cents on all the corners. He advised Carlyle to have any future books copied off by a scrivener before publication and sent to him, "and I will keep all Appletons and Corsairs whatsoever out of the lists." 13


Thus, over a period of time, Emerson did help Carlyle to some profits, but his contact with the contemporary American literary practices only served to heighten his belief that the average man in America was not yet cultured or refined enough to be given the control over literary or other matters. It was a difficult conclusion to accept for a person who believed in the possibilities of individual man and American
democracy as thoroughly as did Emerson. He wanted to believe in the new America; even though what he saw repulsed him, he kept trying. The tension produced by Emerson's underlying admiration for English and European literary atmosphere was illustrated in a letter (1841) to Margaret Fuller in which he wrote that if he had the money, he would travel down the Ohio and up the Mississippi trying to cast out the passion for Europe by the passion for America, trying to transfer his reverence for London, and for Cambridge—an extension of London—across the Allegheny Ridge. But the culture and talent exhibited by the English scholars was attractive; the English literary life had been a most agreeable and complete circle of means and ends. Later on in the letter, though, he again recited the need for an American emphasis, and finally ended the indecisive letter on the wistful note, "And yet—and yet—towards evening & on rainy days I wish to go to Berlin & to Dresden, before I quite amputate that nonsense I called Europe."  

11 Letters, II, 394-396 (written April 1841).

The somewhat fastidious abstaining from contemporary movements and the inability to place himself in complete sympathy with the "common man" of the period—qualities which we have seen so far in Emerson—were the result of many things: a patrician background, personal temperament, a disbelief in anything partial, and a faith in the ideal. In addition, Emerson's financial position during the depression beginning in 1837 did not serve to quicken his sympathy with the new democracy. Instead, the
slump seemed to him to be in some manner a just retribution for many of the excesses symptomatic of the time—speculation, materialism, irresponsible assumption of position, dishonesty, faith in numbers. His comments, for example, during the months of panic in 1837 are indicative of his attitude. "Cold April; hard times...." he said at the very beginning. "Loud cracks in the social edifice. Sixty thousand laborers, says rumor, to be presently thrown out of work..." But, instead of following this with sympathetic commentary on the workers' plight, Emerson continued, "and these make a formidable mob to break open banks and rob the rich, and brave the domestic government." He didn't quite understand why a reputable merchant who had safe wealth was not satisfied and was soon caught up in the speculative fever, only to lose a lifetime's profit. By early May, Emerson noted the runs on banks, the Park mobs, and the general panic without too much concern. His juxtaposition of comments in his journal is very interesting: "Harder times. Two days since, the suspension of specie payments by the New York and Boston banks. William and his wife and child have spent a little time with us. F. H. Hedge was here the day before yesterday. We walked in the wood and sat there to discuss why I was I." The true medicine for these hard times, Emerson said, was sleep; the proper objects of attention in these disastrous times—the bumble-bee and the pine-warbler; the way to recover peace and avoid the suffering of this screwing panic—gardening.

Not only could hard times be ignored by averting the glance, but they had an actual positive value. By the middle of May he wrote to Margaret Fuller, "These black times discover by very contrast a light in the mind we have not yet looked for. I, at least, have seen pleasant
gleams." And the journals are full of similar sentiments. When some obstruction came, like a depreciation of property, the creative in him was energized and he counter-created. "I see a good in such emphatic and universal calamity as the times bring. That they dissatisfy me with society.... The present generation is bankrupt of principles and hope, as of property.... Behold the boasted world has come to nothing.... Pride, and Thrift, and Expediency, who jeered and chirped and were so well pleased with themselves, and made merry with the dream, as they termed it, of Philosophy and Love,—behold they are all flat, and here is the Soul erect and unconquered still." The times seemed to have a salutary rather than an evil effect. "The black times have a great scientific value." No philosopher would have wanted to miss such a critical epoch when central tones were so vivid and "the roots of orchards and the cellars of palaces and the corner stones of cities are dragged into melancholy sunshine." To his brother William, deeply involved in commercial transactions in New York, Emerson offered advice from Concord. "But do not I beseech you let care carve one wrinkle in the sublime brow. Other men have had losses & lived to laugh at them, and every loss is somehow a gain." A crisis, he said, always taught political economy, and a "gloomy catastrophe of a bankruptcy, of a revolution, of a war... is only an emphatic exposition of the natural results of given courses of action...." 15

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Thus did Emerson chortle during the first few months of the most severe panic this nation had ever experienced. That he could take this attitude was the result of two things: he had been filled with disgust at what was going on around him, and he himself was under little economic strain. He could look at the conditions very objectively and see the working out of his philosophy of compensation, and the whole crisis could be used as a controlled laboratory experiment upon which the observer was prompted to write synthesized reports in the form of philosophical lectures and essays. Emerson's own money, partially inherited from his first wife, was largely in solid Boston bank stocks, stocks which were protected from the early impact of the panic by wise banking associations which pooled and protected funds. In early 1838 Emerson could write to Carlyle that besides his house (which was evaluated at $3500) he had $22,000 whose income in ordinary years was six per cent. Lidian, his wife, had in addition a small inheritance. During the hard winter of 1837-38, Emerson cleared $568 lecturing, the audiences averaging 500 per lecture; these engagements continued with more or less success during the period of depression. (In the middle of the year of panic, The American Scholar had sold 500 copies in one month.) Only toward the end of the slump when things became very black after a temporary false gain did Emerson begin to feel the pinch. After receiving $300 from a lecture tour in New York and Providence in 1840 and crowing to himself on the way home, he found on his arrival that the Atlantic Bank had declared no dividend where he was wont to draw $237 semi-annually. In the fall of 1841 the City Bank failed to resume
payments as expected, so, wrote Emerson, "This winter I must hang out my bush again & try to sell good wine of Castaly at the Masonic Temple."16

During most of the financial crisis, then, Emerson was personally fairly well off. Certainly this fact could not help but have had some effect on his forming attitudes. The important thing is that it did not contradict, but only reinforced, the ideas which had grown out of his life pattern up to the time of the depression. He himself protested in 1838 and again in 1840 that his "accidental freedom by means of a permanent income" was not essential to his habits, his tastes, and his direction of thought, these being so strong that, rich or poor, he would have continued to spend the best part of his time as he then did.17 This may be true (he contradicted himself later), but his "accidental" position did nothing to deter his philosophical development, as we have seen. And the fact that a financial crisis did occur concurrently with his developing thought helped to give his thought direction and provided an incentive for his putting it into words.

The result of these various reactions to contemporary trends was that Emerson gradually evolved a view of society and of the relation
of the individual to society that was to color all his thinking. In explaining his position, he published essay after essay either fitting this view to his philosophy or fitting his philosophy to the attained view. Briefly, Emerson had come to recognize the inadequacy of the greater number of the population to measure up to the high standards which he felt a successful democracy required. He did not despair; the possibilities were still present in every individual and eventually could be uncovered. But for the present, unless the democratic experiment were to founder, those few who had reached the necessary understanding were the ones to take the helm, and their position in this world must be recognized. In other words, although holding out hope for every private person, Emerson felt that at present there was a natural aristocracy of intellect and manners which must take over the leadership and guidance of the social organization. This was, of course, contradictory to the democratic bias of the time, the celebration of the common man. The paradox of the position no one felt more strongly than Emerson himself, and much of his writing is best understood in the light of this paradox.

As early as 1824 Emerson was considering what place an aristocracy had in a society. "Aristocracy," he said, "is a good sign. Aristocracy has been the hue and cry in every community where there has been anything good, any society worth associating with, since men met in cities. It must be everywhere. 'Twere the greatest calamity to have it abolished. It went nearest to its death in the French Revolution, of all time." But even at that time Emerson wanted to make clear that his
aristocracy was one based on worth, having nothing to do with titles, birth, decorations, clothing, traditional classes, etc. But there were distinctions of breeding, manners, taste, learning, ability, leadership—all the qualities which Emerson would require in his "gentleman"—and these divided people into natural groups. It is true, there were times and moods in which Emerson felt the value of the sturdy traits of the common and rough multitudes, and he could never sneer at the masses. Once in 1840 he said he liked the aristocracy of manners which was a merit, a chivalry, and indicated a sense of beauty, but "Yonder simple countryman...strikes down all your glittering and serried points with a wave of his hand, and overawes you...he is dignified by a higher thought, viz., by a humanity which slights all this, and overstands it, as a sane man an insane." This note of the dignity of every human being is central in Emerson and pervades the whole of his philosophy, as has been often pointed out. But his accompanying belief, and at short range seemingly contradictory belief, in the importance of the leadership of the few over the many, has too often been de-emphasized. An understanding of this view, I feel, makes Emerson eminently more real, practical, human, and comprehensible. This is the view of the Emerson who in 1839, after experiencing the excesses of ten years of Jacksonian democracy and depression, entered in his journal under the title "Aristocracy and Idealism" the following remarks:

1. Society in our bright hours seems not to claim equality, but ought to be treated like children to whom we administer camomile and magnesia on our own judgment, without consultation. What we can do is law enough for them.... But when our light beams less steadily and flickers in the socket, the pupil seems suddenly riper and more froward
and even assumes the mien of a patron whom we must court.

2. Do you say that all the good retreat from men and do not work strongly and lovingly with them? Very well; it is fit and necessary that they should treat men as ghosts and phantoms here for our behoof, here to teach us dramatically...until the uprise of the soul within them. Then instantly we shall...treat them as ourselves. Now they are not ourselves: why should we say they are?

The italics are mine; the italicized phrase shows Emerson's retention of his basic optimism while prescribing for present actualities. It is also significant that the pronoun referring to the "good," changes midway in the last part from "they" to "we."\footnote{Journals, II, 311, V, 378, 276-277 (entries 1824, April 1840, Oct. 1839).}

The most explicit statement of this whole aristocratic facet of Emerson's thinking comes in two essays, "Manners," written from lectures given in the winters of 1836-37 and 1841-42, and "Aristocracy," first presented as a lecture in England in 1848.\footnote{Works, III, 119-155 ("Manners"); Works, X, 29-66 ("Aristocracy").} These statements had come almost directly from Emerson's inner struggle to correlate his philosophical bias with his experiences in a new democracy and with his personal temperament which tended to put a premium on decorum. The result was that his natural admiration of the "gentleman" was enhanced. The true gentleman, he said, was made up of virtue, wit, beauty, truth, wealth and power and was servile to nothing or no one. That he usually had a condition of ease and fortune was because it "is a natural result of personal force and love, that [he] should possess and dispense the goods
of the world." The good manners of a gentleman were an important attribute because they eliminated the superfluous and renewed the graceful so that life was facilitated and became a less troublesome game with fewer misunderstandings between the players. We of America, Emerson had said in an 1838 lecture on "Prudence," blame what is best in English manners from our "democratic wantonness"; but he himself had an affinity for the mild, exact decorum which hated all starts, screams, faintings, sneezings, laughter and all violence of any kind. There were, however, no rules for the gentleman class; good sense and character made their own rules. The demands were only for composure, self-content, and stateliness. Gentlemen made no noise, ladies were serene. A criterion for good breeding, Emerson believed, was an intellectual quality which delighted in measure. "The person who screams, or uses the superlative degree, or converses with heat, puts whole drawing rooms to flight." But on the other hand, a quality necessary to the gentleman, but often lacking, was a certain heartiness and sympathy—not a low neighborly sympathy, but a grand human sympathy. At the end of the essay on "Aristocracy" Emerson did admit that the word "gentleman" possibly did not convey accurately his idea of the cultured, self-reliant man; the word had too long connoted only the outside of "cultivated" men.

In both essays the perfectly natural and inevitable quality of the Emersonian aristocracy was stressed. In any society, a leading class would arise as certainly as cream in a bowl of milk. If only two men were left, one would be the leader. In New York and Boston, there was a scale of society into which each person fitted which was as
rigid as any caste in India or Egypt. "Porcelain remains porcelain, earthen earthen" and any attempt to artificially equalize such a society was doomed to fail. The French Revolution tried to end tyranny, inequality, and poverty by abolishing kingship and aristocracy, but the tyranny, inequality, and poverty were still there. We likewise had put our faith in democracy, carrying it to the extreme of universal suffrage and the will of the majorities in order to obtain equalitarianism. But the equalitarian "will one day know that this is...a distinction in the nature of things: that neither the caucus, nor the newspaper, nor the Congress, nor the mob, nor the guillotine, nor fire, nor all together, can avail to outlaw, cut out, burn or destroy the offence of superiority in persons."

This aristocracy was, of course, not based on inherited titles or systems. "We must have kings, and we must have nobles. Nature provides such in every society,—only let us have the real instead of the titular."\(^{20}\) The inequalities that Emerson emphasized existed not in costume, but in the power of expression and action, and there was nothing injurious about an upper class—as long as it was dependent on merit. In fact, the recognized existence of such a class could inspire "a pure reverence for character, a new respect for the sacredness of the individual man [which] is that antidote which must correct in our country the disgraceful deference to public opinion."

\(^{20}\) Works, I, 368-369 ("The Young American").
Toward the end of Emerson's life in 1863, he was called upon to deliver an address to the literary societies of Dartmouth College. He chose to talk about a subject which had been dear to him from the very earliest times—the concept of the Scholar:

I offer perpetual congratulation to the scholar; he has drawn the white lot in life. The very disadvantages of his condition point at superiorities. He is too good for the world; he is in advance of his race; his function is prophetic. He belongs to a superior society, and is born one or two centuries too early for the rough and sensual population into which he is thrown. But the Heaven that sent him hither knew that well enough, and sent him as a leader to lead. Are men perplexed with the evil times? The inviolate soul is in perpetual communication with the source of events. He has earlier information, a private dispatch which relieves him of the terror which presses on the rest of the community.21


It seems to me that this is a summary of the attitude that Emerson had worked out through years of trying to apply his philosophy to contemporary fact and trying to formulate a practical philosophy out of experience. The position of the poet-scholar as separated from the rest of society, as a member of the aristocracy of worth, guiding, leading, shocking the individual members of society into an awareness of their own possibilities represents an important thread in Emersonian thinking and writing. And it was in the tensions of the years of social change, turmoil, and panic that the idea had its roots. Henry Nash Smith, in a suggestive essay called "Emerson's Problem of Vocation,"
points out that once Emerson was out of the family tradition of the church, he had to create an occupation consistent with his philosophy—one which would not be subject to the accusation of inaction, weakness, or cowardice; and out of this early struggle came his imaginary conception of the "scholar out of the church," called variously by Emerson the Man of Genius, the Seer, the Contemplative Man, the Student, the Transcendentalist, and the Scholar. "The Scholar is the hero of Emerson's unwritten Prelude, and belongs with all the Werthers and the Childe Harolds and the Teufelsdöckhs of the period." The mental search was a difficult one, "But like so many other artists before him, he discovered that the very tensions which drained his strength provided him with important themes for his art."  

I submit, however, that Einerson's problem was not merely one of vocation, but the larger and more universal one of how to reconcile the tenets of an Ideal philosophy with a disappointing and inadequate contemporary Reality; and that his Scholar was not only a fiction, as Smith suggests, but an example of the segment of society through which the Ideal could be implemented, that segment of society to which Emerson, by temperament and sad experience during his formulative years, was naturally drawn.

The picture of the scholar which emerges from this period in Emerson's writings identifies the scholar as one of the natural aristocracy. The whole emphasis seemed to be that since the scholar did stand apart from society, he was to be granted perfect freedom from majority
pressures to carry out his duties of study, contemplation, and direction. He was not to be subjected to the same culture and social demands as the crowd; "I think the scholar, the artist must go alone and ask a somewhat dainty culture." Since he was the minister of the world-soul, he could hold all things answerable to it, and he did not have to exhibit complaisance to any school of contemporary thought. Only solitude conferred the elevation necessary to the noble, manlike, just thought which was demanded of the scholar, and society's "foolish routine, an indefinite multiplication of balls, concerts, rides, theatres" was not for him.

But the true scholar in contemporary society would probably not be accepted. Since he worked with invisible tools to invisible ends, the carpenter, the mason, and the merchant would take him for an idler, defenceless and brainsick. Emerson told the boys of the Dartmouth College Literary Society in 1838 that they would be taunted and jeered at as scholars, and hear maxims about how the first duty is to get land and money, place and name—low prudence. "What is this Truth you seek? what is this Beauty?" would be asked of them. But their first duty was not that of others; it was "to show the besotted world how passing fair is wisdom." Perhaps the world would accuse the scholar of idealism, but if he tended thither, it was not because he loved the warm sun and magnetic persons any less than they, but because he saw the falsity of the world about him and neared the real world of Ideas within him. "Let ideas obtain and establish their sway again in society, let life again be fair and poetic, and we shall gladly be objective,
-203-

lovers, citizens and philanthropists." The interesting emphasis on "again" suggests a reminiscent quality in Emerson's thought.  

23 Journals, IV, 482 (entry June 1838); Works, I, 153-187 ("Literary Ethics"); Journals IV, 6, V, 405 (entries Jan. 1836, May 1840).

Perhaps, though, the true scholar had no need of advice on how to meet the taunts of demanding society. In his journal for 1838 Emerson remarked that if the scholar were truly the observer, the dispassionate reporter, he had perfect immunity; sure of his point, he was fast rooted and invulnerable to the revilers who had no stability. The roaring multitude was made of such timidities, uncertainties and no-opinions that it was not worth dispersing. The scholar should tell society he had anticipated the consequences, "that up there in his silent study, by his dim lamp, he foreheard this Babel of outcries... and knew well that when their routine and their dreams were disturbed, like bats and owls and nocturnal beasts they would howl and shriek and fly at the torch bearer." But, as a scholar, he had also seen that under their disguises there were the features of man hidden, and he was befriending them by thus dragging them to the light of day. "The taunts and cries of hatred and anger...are so familiar long ago in my reading that they sound to me ridiculously old and stale. The same thing has happened so many times over...that, if people were not very ignorant of literary history, they would be struck with the exact coincidence." And although the scholar saw that the people were shocked, he should tell them that he had a great deal more to say that would shock them out of all patience, and he would have his say. "Everyday
I am struck with new particulars of the antagonism between your habits of thought and action, and the divine law of your being, and as fast as these become clear to me you may depend on my proclaiming them."

That Emerson again shifts in mid-passage from the objective third person to the subjective first person is evidence of the intensity of his feeling.24

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Two well-known essays of Emerson's, composed in this period, are especially illuminated by and illuminating to this concept of the scholar-aristocrat. "The Transcendentalist" (1842) used a term other than that of scholar, but was essentially a plea for the recognition of a special class. It was a sign of the times, Emerson said here, that many intelligent persons withdrew from the common labors and competition of the market and the caucus and shunned society out of temperament and principle. Because of their passion for what was great, they were repelled by the vulgarity and frivolity in people. The old idealists of the last generation had been forced out of active society by the present. But "Society also has its duties in reference to this class, and must behold them with what charity it can...and in society, besides farmers, sailors and weavers, there must be a few persons of purer fire kept specially as gauges and meters of character...rare and gifted men, to compare the points of our spiritual compass, and verify our bearings from superior chronometers."25

25 Works, I, 329-359 ("The Transcendentalist").
"The American Scholar" (1837), long famous as a milestone toward literary nationalism, was, in its primary emphasis, not so much a plea for American literature as it was an exhortation from one scholar to a group of other scholars of the same class (Phi Beta Kappas) to reassert their position of leadership in a country which otherwise was soon certain to bog down in the slough of mediocrity. "Our" and "we" were the terms of address. The genial opening remarks were to a friendly, cozy group gathered as a "sign of the survival of the love of letters among a people too busy to give to letters anymore." The farmer, the planter, the tradesman, the mechanic were all subject to short-sightedness, routine, dollars, machines, and forms: it was only the scholar who was Man Thinking. As such, the scholar should be exempt from all restrictions, customs, and authority; he should not "sacrifice any opinion to the popular judgments and modes of action." But with such a noble and heroic mind, and the ability to convert and raise all experience into thought, it was up to the scholar to let beauty and grandeur shine from his life so that others could see and emulate. His duty was "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances." In other words, Emerson seemed to be suggesting the old aristocratic idea of "noblesse oblige." To do this, however, the scholar must set himself apart—and be allowed to set himself apart. He must pass on the verdicts of Reason to the passing men and events of his day, and thus must never defer to the popular cry or let anyone convince him that a pop gun isn't a pop gun. As to the commonplace, the familiar, and the low, these were texts to learn from. One must know
the meaning of "the meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street" to obtain insight. But the contemporary "go aheadism" was premature, for all men were not as yet awakened from their dream of money and power. This task of awakening the unsearched might of man was given to the class of scholars, and perhaps sometime this country could be a nation of individuals; but at the present, Emerson implied, all that could be hoped for was a free aristocracy of the intellect.  

26 Works, I, 79-117 ("The American Scholar").

This has been a partial reading of Emerson. I do not mean to suggest that this aristocratic bias constitutes the final evaluation of the bulk of his writing. Indeed, a whole reading, I suppose, must ultimately place Emerson on the liberal side of the balance. But the crucial concept to be obtained from such a study as this is that Emerson was not only a liberal in accord with the boundless aspirations of the times (Transcendentalism, the Dial, reforms, etc), but at the same time was a conservative aghast at the contemporary vulgarity. And this dichotomy in his nature served him well as an impulse for putting thoughts into memorable words. It wasn't, after all, out of the pure liberal reform movement that the great writing of the century came, but out of the tensions created by the friendly critics of its excesses. Emerson was of course thrilled as in 1841 he noted, with De Toqueville, that the population was moving toward the Rocky Mountains
at the rate of seventeen miles per year with the "solemnity of a providential event...daily driven onward by the hand of God," and as he remarked in 1838 that the arrival of the "Sirius" and the "Great Western" had brought England a thousand or fifteen hundred miles nearer. But he was also aware that, in this country, with but a little reading, writing, and ciphering, we were turned out to set ourselves up as leaders of opinion and writers without check. "It is very easy to reach the degree of culture which prevails around us; very hard to pass it." 27

27 Journals, V, 531, IV, 430, VI, 105 (entries April 1841, April 1838, Oct. 1841).

Emerson consciously struggled to adapt the Real to the Ideal in these years of crisis, and he worked the problem out as best he could, as a practical man, in his writing; but he never lost the deep abiding faith:

I know the difficulties in the way of the man of honor. The man of honor is a man of taste and humanity. By tendency, like all magnanimous men, he is a democrat. But the revolution comes, and does he join the standard of Chartist and outlaw? No, for these have been dragged in their ignorance by furious chiefs to the Red Revolution.... Let him accept the position of armed neutrality, abhorring the crimes of the Chartist, abhorring the selfishness of the rich, and say, "The time will come when these poor enfants perdus of revolution will have instructed their party, if only by their fate, and wiser councils will prevail; the music and dance of liberty will come up to bright and holy ground and will take me in also. Then I shall not have forfeited my right to speak and act for mankind." 28

28 Works, X, 63 ("Aristocracy").
Chapter VI

The Sublimated Reaction: Hawthorne

Were I to adopt a pet idea...it would be, that the great want which mankind labors under at this present period is sleep. The world should recline its vast head on the first convenient pillow and take an age long nap. It has gone distracted through a morbid activity, and, while preternaturally wide awake, is nevertheless tormented by visions that seem real to it now, but would assume their true aspect and character were all things once set right by an interval of sound repose.... Stimulants, the only mode of treatment hitherto attempted, cannot quell the disease; they do but heighten the delirium.

Let not the above paragraph ever be quoted against the author; for, though tinctured with its modicum of truth, it is the result and expression of what he knew, while he was writing, to be but a distorted survey of the state and prospects of mankind.

("The Old Manse," 1846)

It would be endless to describe the herd of real or self-styled reformers, that peopled this place of refuge. They were the representatives of an unquiet period, when mankind is seeking to cast off the whole tissue of ancient custom, like a tattered garment. Many of them had got possession of some crystal fragment of truth, the brightness of which so dazzled them that they could see nothing else in the wide universe. Here were men whose faith had embodied itself in the form of a potato; and others whose long beards had a deep spiritual significance. Here was the abolitionist, brandishing his one idea like an iron flail. In a word, there were a thousand shapes of good and evil, faith and infidelity, wisdom and nonsense—a most incongruous throng.

Yet, withal, the heart of the staunchest conservative, unless he abjured his fellowship with man, could hardly have helped throbbing in sympathy with the spirit that pervaded these innumerable theorists. It was good for the man of
unquickened heart to listen even to their folly....
still the wiser spirit would recognize the struggle of the
race after a better and purer life than had yet been
realized on earth.

("The Hall of Fantasy," 1843)

How little I have told! and of that little, how almost
nothing is even tinctured with any quality that makes it
exclusively my own!... So far as I am a man of really
individual attributes I veil my face; nor am I, nor have
I ever been, one of those extremely hospitable people who
serve up their own hearts, delicately fried, with brain
sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public.

("The Old Manse")

Hawthorne always presents a difficult problem to one who tries
to deal with him decisively. He weighed one, then the other side of
fundamental problems, and it becomes easy to document almost any view
of him that is desired—liberal or conservative, associationist or
isolate, Transcendentalist or Puritan, romantic or realist, democrat
or aristocrat. Some have attributed this unpredictability to the fact
that Hawthorne was a calm, detached observer of the human scene. I
feel that he was, on the contrary, torn between two opposing attitudes
toward life, the one originating from his own naturally idealistic
aristocratic, withdrawing, aloof temperament, and the other stemming
from what he recognized, in theory at least, as the saving and
practical social ethic,—the mixing and participating in the real,
the existant democratic society.

Hawthorne was very much aware of the contemporary America in
which he found himself. But he discovered that this America, with
its precipitant social changes, presented him with a complex problem
in loyalties, a problem for which he may never have found a solution. Basically it was the same question faced by many sensitive thinkers who were idealistic enough to want to see the "best" prevail: Could the superior man—gentleman, artist, scholar, idealist, what you will—continue to exist and exert his needed influence in a country where the equalitarian, bourgeois, materialistic standards of "democracy" were in the ascendent? Thus Hawthorne's paradoxes and contradictions derived not from a scientific objective analysis, but from a deep emotional involvement in two seemingly irreconcilable views of life.

During the years of this study, Hawthorne, like Emerson with whom he differed in so many ways, ran headlong into the popular culture and society of the day, and out of this collision, I feel, rose the tensions which prompted Hawthorne to write what he did when he did. Unlike Emerson, however, Hawthorne did not seem to have come up with an answer; there could be for him no decision to rest temporarily in a faith in an "aristocratic minority," as there had been with Emerson, waiting for the infinitude of the private man to make itself known universally. For Hawthorne recognized no infinitude, but only a universally shared guilt. So his problem was even deeper in as much as in one sense he was even more conservative than Emerson. True conservatism has as one of its basic tenets original sin in some form; true liberalism relies upon perfectability in some form.¹ Emerson, writing out his tensions, was able to fall back upon a deep-seated liberal belief in amelioration under which current problems could be viewed as temporary.

Hawthorne, of course, could not do this. Thus, when Hawthorne hesitantly turned his back on fanatic reformers and radicals, or even on the unworthy actions of the common populace, it was an irrevocable action. Moral reformation was the only true reformation, he pointed out in "Earth's Holocaust," but he repeated in tale after tale that our common humanity lies in our common sin, the remnants of which can never be eliminated completely.

Given Hawthorne's postulated beliefs—and leaving out his own temperament and his attitude toward contemporary society—the democratic, social ethic would seem to be the obvious answer. Only in a humanitarian, equalitarian democratic society, where human imperfections would be revealed, recognized, and assuaged in a brotherly spirit of love, could mankind reach its highest attainable felicity. But Hawthorne's own temperament and his own reaction to his social environment cannot be left out; his own idealistic inclination, shared with many another of similar background, was to criticize and separate himself from the bumbling and crass human ferment of the day. In the conflict of these two opposite tendencies and in Hawthorne's own sense of guilt for feeling as he knew he shouldn't feel, lay the genesis of and impulse behind much of Hawthorne's writing.

Throughout his life Hawthorne made valiant attempts to live according to the social ethic, to "open an intercourse with the world," and throughout his life he never succeeded completely. But at no time

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2 Lawrence S. Hall in Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944) makes out a case for Hawthorne's abandonment, in his later life, of his idealistic position, and his almost unconditional endorsement of the materialistic ways and utilitarian spirit of the democratic society.
of the time, beginning with his period of literary fame and his consul­ship in England. This, however, leads Hall into some unconscionable interpretations of Hawthorne's later writings, such as identifying Holgrave as Hawthorne's spokesman in The House of Seven Gables (Hall, p. 166).

were his attempts more obvious and earnest than during the years between 1836 and 1842. At the beginning of the period, he had consciously decided to end his own twelve years of comparative isolation, and we find him editing The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge (1836), publishing his first edition of tales (1837), visiting his friend Horatio Bridge in Augusta, Maine (1837), becoming engaged to Sophia Peabody (1838), visiting North Adams in western Massachusetts (1838), filling a position in the Boston Custom House (1839-1840), joining the Brook Farm Community (1841), and being married (1842).

Practically all of these ventures brought him somehow into contact with contemporary society, and his reactions, as recorded in his letters, journals, and tales written during these years, make an engrossing story of an artist at variance with a culture which, however, he could not, and did not want to, reject. It is a story which, given a wider application, constitutes a valuable critical tool for the reading of many of Hawthorne's important fictional works.

It was a fateful coincidence that brought Hawthorne into an "intercourse with the world" at the precise moment that it did. The Hathorne family had deep roots in the aristocratic, patrician, conservative Puritan backgrounds of early America. His ancestors numbered among them a speaker of the House of Delegates, a major in the Salem militia, sea captains, judges and churchmen. Hawthorne himself had the then aristocratic advantage of going to Bowdoin College where he was the
the classmate of future poet-laureates and presidents. Even at that
time he had decided to be a writer, a then somewhat precarious and
uncongenial occupation. Graduating in 1825 at the very beginning of
the democratic unrest and returning to Salem to live with a family of
women inclined to be somewhat withdrawn, it is not so "unaccountable"
that the next years of his life should have been dedicated to the de­
velopment of the writer's art away from the hubbub of social activity.
And it was not such a dreary isolation as has often been pictured.
But by 1836, when Hawthorne was ready to try to meet the world on its
own terms, all the tendencies we have identified with the raw democracy
were the most rampant. In the economic sphere, there was one vast
whirl of speculation which was to lead to the panic of 1837. Social
equalitarianism was the by-word; rowdyism, political opportunism, dis­
honesty, and materialism were in the air, and money was the key to
everything. Perhaps, though, fate was kind to Hawthorne in this in­
stance. Such an atmosphere was destined to provide the conflict and
tension which played so large a part in giving Hawthorne themes for his
most successful writings. The 1843 and 1844 allegories satirizing the
contemporary scene, for example, represent a development toward The
House of Seven Gables and The Blithedale Romance. 3

3Neal F. Doubleday, "Hawthorne's Satirical Allegory," College
English, III (Jan., 1942), 325-337.

As in the case of Emerson, Hawthorne's democratic tendencies
have oft been chronicled: he admired Jackson, he wrote a biography of
Pierce, he took a interest in the commonest and most sinful of men,
he abhorred a privileged and titled aristocracy, he preached a philosophy of love and brotherhood and of the saving grace of that "magnetic chain of humanity." But the antithesis of this, the pull of Hawthorne's own nature toward a belief in the aristocratic, isolated nature of the artist-scholar-idealist—a belief heightened at times by his own reaction to his environment—has been too much neglected in studying out the Hawthorne enigma. In this period of social and economic crisis, this latter side was brought out.

For example, in his notebooks kept during his summer jaunts of 1837 and 1838, Hawthorne made continual comment on houses—how some of them had the advantage of isolation, and how others, of magnificent architecture, were little respected by the encroaching leveling society. In Augusta his friend Bridge's house, where he lived as a bachelor, was "very pleasantly situated half a mile distant from where the town begins to be thickly settled, and on a swell of land, with the road running at a distance of fifty yards, and a grassy tract and gravel walk between." Hawthorne's life there was so independent and untroubled by the forms and restrictions of society that he felt that he would soon have become strongly attached to it. Penobscott Bay, near Augusta, was dotted with several islands, each containing one house. "The owner of such an island must have a peculiar sense of property and lordship; he must feel more like his own master and own man than other people can." The next summer, while walking through the mountains in the vicinity of North Adams, Massachusetts, Hawthorne remarked upon a pretty little house with "much quietness in its environments, on the other side of the river, with a flat-bottomed boat for communication. It was a pleasant idea,
that the world was kept off by the river." And in his sketch "The Old

Randall Stewart, ed., The American Notebooks by Nathaniel
Hawthorne; Based upon the Original Manuscripts (New Haven, 1932),
pp. 4, 24, 60.

"Manse" he was delighted that the long drive, overgrown with grass, dis­
tinguished the old house from "those ordinary abodes which stand so im­minent upon the road that every passer-by can thrust his head, as it were, into the domestic circle." Its atmosphere of "near retirement and accessible seclusion" kept Hawthorne's sense of privacy from being disturbed.

Some structures were imposing and impressive. Near Augusta, Maine, Hawthorne saw the elegant, new granite mansion built by Robert Gardiner, with towers and lofty, imposing portals and located in a fine place, amid fertile fields, large trees, "afar retired from the public road." But the house conveyed a sad impression, for it was unsuited to the true nature of the family, the place, and the time. The evil of the current speculation had reduced the owner to such straits that he could not finish the house. The common people called it Gardiner's Folly, and the workmen on a nearby dam had built their shacks near the aban­doned mansion. "Gardiner's Folly," wrote Hawthorne, "offers hints of copious reflection in reference to indulgence of aristocratic pomp among democratic institutions.... A thought comes into my head: —which sort of house excites the most contemptuous feelings in the beholder—such a mansion as Mr. Gardiner's, all circumstances considered, or the broad­built and turf­buttressed hovels of these wild Irish, scattered about as
if they had sprung up like mushrooms in the dells and gorges, and along the banks of the river. Mushrooms, by the by, spring up where the roots of an old tree are hidden under the ground." Another house, built by General Knox, Secretary of War in Washington's Cabinet, was designed in the grand style. Knox himself had settled an early protest of the squatters on his thirty square miles of land, and was held in great love and admiration by them. But he died, and his aristocratic wife, Lady Knox, lived on in isolated but decayed grandeur among the encroaching rows of neat, smart, white cottages, within a stone's throw, occupied by mechanics. Towns have now grown up on the estate where there were meant to be forests and parks. General Knox's house, said Hawthorne, "may be taken as an illustration of what must be the result of American schemes of aristocracy."  

5 American Notebooks, pp. 8-10, 22, 23.

Other comments in the architectural metaphor are found in the tales written in the years 1837-1842. Around the original old Province House, in the tales called "Legends of the Province House," there were well laid out grass plots shadowed by trees. These were later occupied by a brick range of stores, and "the old aristocratic edifice hides its time-worn visage behind an upstart modern building." The other buildings on the street, in the Province House days, "stood insulated and independent, not, as now, merging their separate existences into connected ranges, with a front of tiresome identity,—but each possessing features of its own, as if the owner's individual taste had shaped it,—and the whole presenting a picturesque irregularity, the absence
of which is hardly compensated by any beauties of our modern architecture." The practical Mr. Brown, in one of the tales, wanted to build a respectable brick block with dry goods stores, tailors' shops, and banking rooms on the lower floor, and lawyers' offices in the second story, on the same foundation where Peter Goldthwaite was building his exciting but impractical castles in the air. Of course old Peter didn't find the treasure supposedly hidden in the ancient house, but in spite of his eccentricity, he and his housekeeper, Tabby, found a delight in the enthusiasm of the vain search, and turned out as satisfactorily in the end as the business-like Mr. Brown. Again, the new Adam and Eve, in the story of that name, found in the heart of a modern city a squareness and ugliness and deformity meeting their uncorrupted eyes on every side.6

6 "Howe's Masquerade" (1838), "Edward Randolph's Portrait" (1838), "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" (1838), "The New Adam and Eve" (1843).

These comments seem to show first that Hawthorne, in his architectural language, indicated an undercurrent of admiration for the advantages which the aristocracy of older times and countries furnished for the development and protection of outstanding individuals of sensitivity and genius. But this admiration was counterbalanced by his realization that such a system often contributed to falseness of expression; the system did not provide for the inevitable changes in the natures of the people, or the changes in the thinking of subsequent periods. Some years later in the preface to The House of Seven Gables,
Hawthorne wrote that he hoped his readers would see "the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity"—making them seem something that they weren't. Thus much of Hawthorne's thinking, even into his last years, revolved around the problem of maintaining the advantages of aristocracy in a democratic country, a problem symbolized for him by the contrasting architectural styles. He never gave up democracy; this form of social organization afforded the best chance for each person to express his own natural integrity, a cardinal principle which Hawthorne insisted upon. In an ideal democracy, he felt, there would be room for true distinction, but not for the artificial distinctions of wealth, inheritance, title, or family alone. The Knox mansion did have "grandeur in the architecture," but after the General died, neither the Lady nor her family deserved it, and it went to ruin. The Gardiner house was a "splendid structure," but was the result only of artificial wealth, and was thus overrun by Irish shanties. Old Peter Goldthwaite was presented picturesquely and sympathetically, but he was crazy and pursuing an empty dream. The new leveling democracy had eliminated the faults of aristocracy, but only the ideal democracy would incorporate its advantages for individual taste and expression. With the current form of democratic society, as represented in the architecture of the day, Hawthorne was still at odds.

Other comments show Hawthorne's discontent with his times. While editing, and practically writing, The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge during 1836, he wrote an article for the April issue listing a series of the April Fools of contemporary society.
Among the April Fools were "he who has reduced himself from affluence to poverty, whether by riotous living or desperate speculations.... He who has climbed, or suffered himself to be lifted, to a station for which he is unfit.... The farmer, who has left a good homestead in New England, to migrate to the Mississippi Valley, or any where else, on this side of Heaven....the Yankees who have enlisted for Texas; the merchant who has speculated on a French war." The conservative's criticism of lack of stability in society is here evident. Elsewhere, Hawthorne indicated that the liberal watchword of Jacksonian democracy—"go ahead"—was but another symbol of the roughshod way in which society was running over delicate sensitivities and the sense of the past. Old Esther Dudley's loyalty to the fading grandeur of the Province House was a thing of pathos as Hawthorne rendered it, even though she was accused of being the "very moral of old fashioned prejudice." She was a representative "of an age gone by, with its manners, opinions, faith and feelings, all fallen into oblivion or scorn—of what had once been a reality, but was now merely a vision of faded magnificence." When, after many years, she found it to be the Republican Governor Hancock who was returning rather then the Royal Governor, she sank down saying, "I have been faithful until death." The new Governor then spoke of the new, supplanting faith—"We represent a new race of men—living no longer in the past, scarcely in the present—but projecting our lives forward into the future....it is our faith and principle to press onward, onward!... We will follow her
reverently to the tomb of her ancestors; and then, my fellow citizens, onward—onward! We are no longer children of the Past!" The story is fully appreciated only when one sees the sad irony mixed with Hawthorne's grudging approval of the new spirit.

In "The Old Manse" Hawthorne stated that the one thing this world needed above all else in the present period was sleep to cure it of its morbid activity. This attitude, he admitted, might have been exaggerated as the result of the close contact with the "hobgoblins of flesh and blood" that were being attracted by Emerson to Concord. But elsewhere he repeated his first judgment: the new Adam and Eve found a ghostly silence in the modern city; "trade is at a standstill, and not even an echo of the national watchword, 'Go ahead!' disturbs the quiet of the new customers." And again, in the portrait of the old apple dealer, the throngs of the train station rushed by the "altogether decent and respectable," but pitiful, figure—throngs which "are full of the momentum which they have caught from their mode of conveyance. It seems as if the whole world, both morally and physically, were detached from its old stand­fasts and set in rapid motion." Hawthorne found it difficult to put into words two opposing feelings at the same time, and admitted to the difficulty of describing so negative a creature as the apple-dealer, for whom he still felt a certain amount of sympathy.®


There are many other points at which Hawthorne recorded his re-action to society in general during these years; some of these will merely
be mentioned to complete this first part of the picture. The contemporary
love for money was satirized when Mr. Bullfrog forgave the horrible de-
fects of his false bride after she promised him five thousand dollars.
In the useless yellow metal in the bank vaults the new Adam and Eve dis-
covered "the main spring, the life, the very essence of the system that
had wrought itself into the vitals of mankind, and choked their original
nature in its deadly grip."

The cynical artist, Copley, remarked when
Drowne turned down money for his wooden image, "What sort of a fellow
is this! A Yankee, and throw away the chance of making his fortune! He
has gone mad..."

On the subject of business ethics, Hawthorne found
that at the modern Vanity Fair, one could purchase anything with a very
valuable scrip called Conscience. "Indeed, few rich commodities were to
be obtained without paying a heavy sum in this particular stock, and a
man's business was seldom very lucrative unless he knew precisely when
and how to throw his hoard of conscience into the market."

The manners
and politeness and virtues, too, of the older days were gone. The
venerable old figure of the Oldest Inhabitant, attending the Man of
Fancy's select party, was the first one there, with "old-fashioned
punctuality." When other "fanciful" characters arrived—an incorruptible
Patriot, a Scholar without pedantry, a Priest without worldly ambition,
a Beautiful Woman without pride or coquetry, a Married Pair who did not
quarrel, a Reformer untrammeled by his theory, and a Poet without
jealousy—the Oldest Inhabitant observed that in his younger days such
persons might be seen on every street corner. In the confusion and
haste of the departure from the party when no one was bothering with
leave-taking, the Oldest Inhabitant "true to the rule of those long-past
days in which his courtesy had been studied, paused...to express his vast satisfaction at the entertainment." In another story, Copley, the celebrated painter and resident of Boston, came to visit Drowne, the wood carver, "for he had recognized so much of moderate ability in the carver as to induce him, in the dearth of professional sympathy, to cultivate his acquaintance" (my italics). In the Hall of Fantasy, besides the variety of reformers, could be found the business men, speculators, of the exchange who mistook the Hall for solid brick and dealt in cities to be built in pathless forests, streets to be laid out under the sea, and river courses to be diverted by dams to run cotton mills. The natural conservative reaction against modern inventions, the stove for example, which "are fast blotting the picturesque, the poetic, and the beautiful out of human life" was developed in "Fire Worship." "These barren and tedious eccentricities are all that the air-tight stove can bestow in exchange for the invaluable moral influences which we have lost by our desertion of the open fireplace." In general, Hawthorne found himself sometimes in the position of the departing Sister Year who, in saying farewell, advised her New Sister "to expect no gratitude nor good-will from this peevish, unreasonable, inconsiderate, ill-intending, and worse-behaving world." I say he

9 "Mrs. Bullfrog" (1837), "The New Adam and Eve" (1843), "Drowne's Wooden Image" (1844), "The Celestial Railroad" (1843), "A Select Party" (1844), "The Hall of Fantasy" (1843), "Fire Worship" (1843), "The Sister Years" (1839). Whether the symbols of the "Fire Worship" sketch can be extended to refer to Puritan and modern theologies or not is the subject of a recent dispute: Millicent Bell, "Hawthorne's 'Fire Worship': Interpretation and Source," AL, XXIV (March, 1952), 31-39, and Roy R. Male, Jr., "Criticism of Bell's 'Hawthorne's "Fire Worship": Interpretation and Source,'" AL, XXV (March, 1953), 85-87.
"sometimes" found himself thus, because at practically every point where I have illustrated Hawthorne's reactionary tendency I could go on to give examples of how he refuted or explained it away. I repeat, this is but a partial picture, designed to provide a depth of understanding which can be achieved only by bringing the reactionary, conservative, isolate tendency into balance with the associational.

In the laboring and lower classes of this period, Hawthorne found much that was congenial to his penchant for the real and the common. He continually took notes on individuals from these classes that he met in his wanderings, hoping some day to use them in a novel, making something beautiful out of commonplace reality. He himself tried the life of labor during these years in the Boston Custom House and at Brook Farm. But the results of both trials proved disastrous to a temperament such as Hawthorne's. Of the first he wrote, in letter after letter to Sophia, in the following tone: "My heart thirsts and languishes to be [in Concord] away from the hot sun, and the coal-dust, and the steaming docks, and the thick pated, stubborn, contentious men, with whom I brawl from morning to night...."

Of the Brook Farm labor he wrote after less than two months, "It is my opinion that a man's soul may be buried and perish under a dung-heap, or in a furrow of the field, just as well as under a pile of money." One month later he wrote to Sophia, "Oh, labor is the curse of the world, and nobody can meddle with
it without becoming proportionably brutified!" He had joined the community in April. By September he was certain he would not spend the winter there. The time would be wasted, he said, as far as literary endeavors were concerned. "The intrusion of an outward necessity into labors of the imagination and intellect is, to me, very painful."  

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As to Hawthorne's attitude toward the other members of the lower classes, there is often evident a certain tone of condescension or even revulsion. On an Ontario steamboat he recognized the strict lines drawn between the upper classes and the multitude, the latter "constituting as veritable a Mob, as could be found in any country.... Here, therefore, was something analogous to that picturesque state of society, in other countries and earlier times, when each upper class excluded every lower one from its privileges, and when each individual was content with his allotted position, because there was no possibility of bettering it."  

12 In the March, 1836, issue of The Amer. Mag. of Useful and Ent. Knowledge. See Turner, Hawthorne as Editor, pp. 98-63.

name of the new equalitarianism sometimes went against Hawthorne's natural grain. At a commencement celebration which Hawthorne attended at Williams College near North Adams he noted the "Country graduates—rough, brown-featured, schoolmaster looking, half-bumpkin, half-scholar figures, in black ill-cut broadcloth; —their manners quite spoilt by what little of
the gentleman there was in them." The undergraduates were of the same rough-hewn, unpolished bumpkin variety, grown-up farmer boys with nothing of the literary man about them but the green spectacles and black broad-cloth. They were laughing, acting sheepishly, and with a vanity at being students. At Shelburne Falls, near North Adams, there was an academy which was attended by older, farmer-bred students; "In nine cases out of ten, they are incapable of any effectual cultivation...." But in general these were not as repulsive as some of the other upstart varieties encountered. An underwitted old man met in North Adams insisted on shaking hands and argued his right to do so as being "a friend of mankind." Many of the villagers "had their mouths half-opened in a grin, which more than anything else, I think, indicates a low stage of refinement." Self-explanatory is one item of observation: "A fellow with a pink guard-chain, two breast pins in his shirt—a masonic pin of gold, with compass and square, and the other a concern of colored glass set in filigree brass—and the shirt a dirty one." And bringing an exhibition of animals to North Adams was a group of Caravan people, "a rough, ignorant set of men, apparently incapable of taking any particular enjoyment from the life of variety and adventure which they lead.... blustering for hot meat, and calling for something to drink, without anything of the wild dignity of men familiar with the nobility of nature." These men, and the country boors who came to the exhibition, were contrasted with the dignity of their natural environment. "The great lion lay with his fore paws extended, and a calm, majestic, but awful countenance.... Coming out of the caravan, there were the mountains, in the
quiet sunset; and many men drunk, swearing and fighting. Shanties with liquor for sale.\textsuperscript{13}


One of the best measures of Hawthorne's ambiguity is in his reaction to the reforms and liberal movements of the day. As one critic has put it, "there is no better indication of a man's judgment of society than his estimate of the practical extent to which it requires and is susceptible of reformation."\textsuperscript{14} Hawthorne's comments on reform and reformers, on new theories of salvation and theorists, runs throughout both his own life and work; they contradict the theories of critics like Munger, Canby, Bromfield, Brownell, and Arvin that he took no interest in such matters. In his tales, in his later novels, in his Brook Farm experience, and in his associations at Concord lie the abundant record of his attitudes toward these movements. Recent biographies and special studies have made this a subject for so much research that here we need merely to summarize a few of the conclusions, and illustrate with a few of the remarks from the period immediately following 1836.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14}Hall, \textit{Hawthorne: Critic of Society}, p. 8.

Hawthorne was in the same tension-producing situation as were many others: he could not accept society in its present state, nor could he countenance the reformer's zeal. All change was in the realm of Providence alone, and there was a universality of ineradicable sin among men; in view of these facts, man's little reform activities became an impertinence. Besides, each reformer, attaching too much importance to his own eccentricity, was "brandishing his one idea like an iron flail," becoming "trammled with his own theory," and losing sight of reality. Looking through the gorgeous varicolored windows of the Hall of Fantasy, "it did seem practical, at that very instant, to realize some plan for the perfection of mankind"; but the reformers mistook the colored lights for the white sunshine of truth. When the Grand Marshall summoned all those whose pervading principle was Love, all the genuine benefactors of mankind assembled, but they inevitably began to gather into sects, surrounding themselves with a hedge of thorns; "When a good man has long devoted himself to a particular kind of beneficence—to one species of reform—he is apt to become narrowed into the limits of the path wherein he treads, and to fancy that there is no other good to be done on earth but that selfsame good to which he has put his hand, and in the very mode that best suits his own conceptions." And at Vanity Fair there were wonderful reform societies to which a person had merely somehow to connect himself and throw his quota of virtue into the common stock, and the president and directors would take care of the proper application of the aggregate amount.16

16"The Hall of Fantasy" (1843), "The Procession of Life" (1843), "The Celestial Railroad" (1843).
Through an ironic trick of Fate, Hawthorne himself was widely read as a temperance writer. His "A Kill From the Town Pump" was taken up by the reformers and widely reprinted as a temperance tract, the readers evidently missing his ironic allusion to "Milk and Water! The TOWN PUMP and the Cow!" as the glorious partnership destined to tear down distilleries and cider presses, uproot vineyards, ruin the tea and coffee trade, and monopolize the whole thirst quenching business. They also either did not read or did not print Hawthorne's admonition at the end against the over-zealous pugnacity of the temperance men. "Is it decent, think you, to get tipsy with zeal for temperance, and take up the honorable cause of the Town Pump in the style of a toper fighting for his brandy bottle?" The Town Pump was fearful of the hazard of a broken nose! Hawthorne's own personal habits belied the attribution to him of tea-totaling tendencies, and his tales are filled with warm and pleasant allusions to drinking. The old raconteur of the Province House tales, Mr. Tiffany, usually refreshed his memories with Mr. Thomas Waite's good liquor. "The generous liquid that he had imbibed, while it warmed his age chilled blood, likewise took off the chill from his heart and mind, and gave him an energy to think and feel, which we could hardly have expected to find beneath the snows of fourscore winters." The "I" of the Province House tales, presumably Hawthorne, sipped a glass of port sangree before one story, and a glass of whiskey punch, "steaming hot, with a slice of lemon at the bottom, a dark red stratum of port wine upon the surface, and a sprinkling of nutmeg strewn over all," before another. At the beginning of the third tale, the host "uncorked a bottle
of Madeira, of such exquisite perfume and admirable flavor that he surely must have discovered it in an ancient bin, down deep beneath the deepest cellar...." Hawthorne's own image, which in another story he fancifully called "Monsieur du Miroir," was so often reflected back from lakes, fountains, pools, and puddles that Hawthorne believed him to excel any temperance man whatever in his fondness for water; "But, as a friend," said Hawthorne, "I could wish that he would not so often expose himself in liquor." With these views in mind, it is evident that in Hawthorne's

17"A Rill From the Town Pump" (1835), "Old Esther Dudley" (1835), "Howe's Masquerade" (1838), "Edward Randolph's Portrait" (1838), "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" (1838), "Monsieur du Miroir" (1837). Other allusions, both earlier and later, are cited in Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society, pp. 11-13.

1836 contributions to The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge there was much humorous irony. In one item he recorded that the Hudson Bay Company had imported sixty kegs of "High Wine" per year to sell to the Indians, the agent saying that the streams would run with liquor if the savages wanted it. "Thus all the sparkling rills," commented Hawthorne, "where the sons of the wilderness once quaffed the pure element, are now made to overflow with poison." In Iceland the forced abstinence due to poverty had contributed to simple virtues in that country, but now with prices down, about one thousand barrels of liquor were imported annually, providing about two bottles per inhabitant. And in London and Scotland, Hawthorne recorded, there were gigantic stills said to produce ten gallons per minute and eighty gallons every three and one-half minutes, respectively—"which is indeed an amazing quantity to be added to the sin and misery of the world, in so short a time."
Reformers, radicals, liberal theologists, and liberal theorists in general, who were so closely identified with the new spirit of change abroad in the America of this age, gave Hawthorne pause. The uselessness, the exaggerations, the impracticability, the unrealistic quality, and the easy utopianism of the various theories appalled his conservative nature. His skepticism growing out of his Brook Farm experiences has often been related. He found there that instead of coming into a closer brotherhood with mankind, he was separated even more. Later, in his fictional treatment of the Brook Farm community, he intimated, in the picture of Hollingsworth, that philanthropic optimism was more likely to be characteristic of unenlightened, half-educated men than of persons with a greater knowledge of life. The Blithedale Socialist Community was made up of eccentrics and failures who could not even manage their own lives. Such Apostles of Newness and Reform erred by relying upon external patterns for reform, by exaggerating the capabilities of man to speed up the pace of Providence, by working out theories not based on the realities of human nature and wants, and by denying any value in old institutions and traditions.19 "No sagacious man will long retain

19 Abel, "Hawthorne's Skepticism About Social Reform...," pp. 190-192. His sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people, without periodically returning into the settled system of things....
It was now time for me, therefore, to go and hold a little talk with the conservatives...all those respectable old blockheads, who still, in this intangibility and mistiness of affairs, kept a deathgrip on one or two ideas which had not come into vogue since yesterday morning.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{20}\)The Blithedale Romance, p. 480.

Brook Farm, though the most famous, was not the only incident eliciting comment by Hawthorne on the new theories. While editing The American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge, he published the "facts" about a convent at Pisa where a huge cast iron kettle, fifty feet high and one hundred and forty feet in circumference, was used to feed six thousand paupers daily. "We should apprehend, however, that such an ocean of soup would be apt to prove rather watery, and that a poor man must either drown himself in it, or depart unsatisfied." He stated his point that charity, or philanthropy in general, must have a personal feeling, for if it took in too many objects, it would become meagre and unsubstantial, like a soup for six thousand paupers." Later, after moving to Concord, Hawthorne encountered the Transcendentalists, and the "hobgoblins of flesh and blood" which Emerson, "that everlasting rejector of all that is and seeker for he knows not what," attracted were obnoxious to him. In his notebooks he recorded that Ellery Channing came to visit at the Manse, and, although he liked Channing well enough, "these originals in a small way, after one has seen a few of them, become more dull and commonplace than even those who keep the ordinary pathway of life. They have a rule and routine, which they follow with as little variety as other people do their rule and routine; and when
once we have fathomed their mystery, nothing can be more wearisome."
And in "The Old Manse" the extreme of his reaction is very vividly set
down: "This triteness of novelty is enough to make any man of common
sense blaspheme at all ideas of less than a century's standing, and pray
that the world may be petrified and rendered immovable in precisely the
worst moral and physical state that it ever yet arrived at, rather than
be benefitted by such schemes of such philosophers."21

21 Turner, Hawthorne as Editor, p. 259; Stewart, American
Notebooks, p. 168; "The Old Manse" (1846).

The contemporary religious trends toward liberal Unitarianism
also incited reaction from that part of Hawthorne that was conservative.
Once, in an editorial comment upon Bunyan's "The Life and Death of Mr.
Badman" and its powerful simplicity and pathos, he remarked, "We doubt
whether the present generation has not lost more than it has gained, by
the philosophy which teaches it to laugh, rather than tremble, at such
tales as these." Another time, while looking through Dr. Ripley's
library stored in one of the outbuildings around the Manse, he found,
in addition to some of the old volumes passed down from the days of the
Puritan divines, a large collection of "volumes of the Christian Examiner
and Liberal Preacher, modern sermons, the controversial works of
Unitarian ministers, and all such trash; but which, I suppose, express
fairly enough, when compared with the elder portion of the library, the
difference between the cold, lifeless, vaguely liberal clergymen of our
own day, and the narrow but earnest cushion-thumper of puritanical times.
On the whole, I prefer the last mentioned variety of the black-coated tribe. After having passed through the alembic of publication, these notes were tempered somewhat; in "The Old Manse" Hawthorne admitted that both sets of theological books were frigid. But still the older books seemed to have contained warmth at one time; the "frigidity of the modern productions, on the other hand, was characteristic and inherent, and evidently had little to do with the writer's qualities of mind and heart."22

22 Turner, Hawthorne as Editor, p. 221; Stewart, American Notebooks, p. 158.

The epitome, however, of Hawthorne's criticism of the liberal religious trends was in his well-known "The Celestial Railroad" where again Bunyan's work was used as the basis for an ironic contrast with modern theory. Here Mr. Smooth-it-away conducted the narrator to the Celestial City on a railroad, symbol of contemporary "go-aheadism" and mechanization. The Slough of Despond had been filled by tracts, essays, and sermons of modern clergymen and various philosophers; at the wicket gate the so-called "Evangelist" delivered square pieces of pasteboard for tickets, so much more convenient than the antique roll of parchment; on the train were a cheerful group of magistrates, politicians, men of wealth, and fashionable ladies, with religion pushed into the background as a topic of conversation; the dispute between the old Evangelist and Prince Beelzebub had been "pacifically arranged on the principle of mutual compromise" by the "worthy and enlightened directors of the railroad"; the liberality and lack of prejudice of the age was shown by
the hiring of Apollyon, Christian's old enemy in Pilgrim's Progress, as chief engineer; the modern day burdens, which contained a large selection of material things, did not have to be carried on the modern pilgrims' backs because they were put into the baggage car where, best of all, they did not have to be dropped off as in the original story, for they could be taken in safety right to the Celestial City; the train rushed right over the Valley of the Shadow of Death on a causeway, for which "the boldness of its original conception and the ingenuity of those who executed it" were praised; the Giant Transcendentalist, a German by birth, had taken the place of the Pope and Pagan as the only hazard, and he sometimes seized passengers and fattened them for his table on meals of smoke, mist, moonshine, raw potatoes and sawdust; and the railroad brought much business for the ancient city of Vanity Fair, which was still flourishing and where "the reverend clergy are nowhere held in higher respect." But at the end, the narrator found that the Lord of the Celestial City had steadfastly refused to grant an act of incorporation for the railroad, and no passenger could ever hope to enter His dominions by that route. The only way was still the way of Christian and of the two pilgrims, Mr. Stick-to-the-right and Mr. Foot-it-to-heaven, that the train had so jeeringly passed on the way.

Other groups and types came under Hawthorne's scrutiny. The Shakers, who "had overcome their natural sympathy with human frailties and affections," were criticized in the pathetic wedding where Martha Pierson had to renounce earthly affection forever as part of the marriage ceremony. At the Christmas banquet given yearly for miserable
people was a former clergyman, "apparently of the genuine dynasty of those old Puritan divines whose faith in their calling, and stern exercise of it, had placed them among the mighty of the earth." But the clergyman had yielded to the speculative tendency of the age, gone astray from the ancient faith, and, instinctively still requiring something steadfast, found only misty and deceptive vapors piled on vapors. Also present was a theorist, miserable because his scheme for doing away with all moral and physical wretchedness in the world was scorned as impractical by the mankind it was intended to help.

But as "The Celestial Railroad" was the apex of Hawthorne's comments on religion, so was "Earth's Holocaust" the chief document in his criticism of reform movements. Here, to the great bonfire on the western plains, came all the reformers intent on improving the status of man by doing away with all the harmful parts of his environment. At first came those who threw into the fire some trash which was truly worth getting rid of—including artificial distinctions of nobility. This, said a grave observer, was good riddance, "if no worse nonsense comes in its place." Then were brought all the hogsheads and barrels of liquor in the world—which Hawthorne seemed to describe rather appreciatively: "treasures of famous bon vivants—liquors that had been tossed on the ocean, and mellowed in the sun, and hoarded long in the recesses of the earth—the pale, the gold, the ruddy juice of whatever vineyards were most delicate—the entire vintage of Tokay..." Next the zeal of the reformers induced them to burn all the tea and coffee in the world, then the tobacco—and the absurdity grew. Women were going to burn their clothes, and assume men's clothes, duties and
responsibilities. When the munitions of war were thrown in, an optimistic philanthropist felt that the millennium had come, while others, less gullible, prophesied that man's nature would somehow devise other means of war and bloodshed. Capital punishment reformers burned all machines of death, including the gallows, which one observer protested was a "Heaven-ordained instrument," since the idea of Death could not easily be dispensed with. Then came those who would throw in marriage certificates; others threw in bales of money and tons of coin, whereupon the bankers and speculators grew pale, and a pickpocket fell down in a dead faint. Ledgers, records of debts, title deeds of property, and even all the books containing the wisdom of the ages were thrown on the blaze. And finally came the emblems of all the religions, and the Bible itself was thrown in in the frenzy of reform. In fact, everything in the world had been at last consumed, when a grinning dark-complexioned personage appeared to give comfort to the hangman, a thief, a murderer, and a toper who had gathered to bewail their fate. The human heart itself, he said, had not been thrown into the conflagration to be purified, and until that was accomplished, all the evils would again return to earth, originating where they had originated in the beginning:

23"The Shaker Bridal" (1838), "The Christmas Banquet" (1844), "Earth's Holocaust" (1844).

Thus far we have seen how Hawthorne, attempting during these years to live according to his reasonable belief in a social ethic, was
continually running into a frustration produced by his own natural temperament and his high idealism. Trying to believe and act on the principle that all that associates saves and all that isolates damns, Hawthorne found himself often at odds with, and thus in a sense isolated from, his own society. We have seen him revolted by the upstart equalitarianism and the rowdy go-aheadism of the nation in general. Toward the lower classes, with whom, in theory he should have been joined in a "magnetic chain of humanity," we have seen that he often felt only a repugnance. With the trend toward reform we have seen him in detailed and violent conflict. Although these were the main areas of his maladjustment, a few of his other comments and attitudes toward the political, literary, and financial phenomena of these years of crisis are helpful in completing this side of the picture.

Politically, Hawthorne achieved perhaps a closer identification with his society than in any other field. At least on the surface he was a good Democrat, wrote a biography for Democratic candidate Franklin Pierce, served in three political appointment positions, could admire Andrew Jackson as an individual, and was at various times identified as a Loco-foco and a Young American. But even here, upon a close study of his motives, we find that he was probably acceding, as a practical man, to the demands of expediency rather than surrendering to and accepting earnestly the popular enthusiasms of the day.24 Most of his political

24 This point is well made in the section entitled "Politics" in Austin Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne: Representative Selections, with Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes (New York, cop. 1934), pp. xlvii- lv. For the opposite point of view see Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society, passim.
activity and comments occurred later than the period under consideration here, but even at this time his true reaction was becoming evident. In 1837 he recorded a visit to his relative, Eben Hathorne, to inquire about the proper spelling of the family name. "Eben passed from matters of birth, pedigree, and ancestral pride, to give vent to the most arrant democracy and locofocoism that I have happened to hear; saying that nobody ought to possess wealth longer than his own life, and that then it should return to the people &c." As a magazine editor in 1836 he stayed clear of political entanglements. Writing a biographical sketch of Calhoun, for example, he was detailed until he came to the conflict existing between Jackson and Calhoun: "But our narrative has now brought us to forbidden ground, where the embers of faction are still smouldering, and may scorch our feet, if we venture further." Other comments show only his contempt for and aversion to the rowdy and dishonest politics of the day. During his Boston Custom House experience in 1839 and 1840, he wrote to Sophia, "I do detest all offices—all, at least, that are held on a political tenure. And I want nothing to do with politicians—they are not men; they cease to be men, in becoming politicians. Their hearts wither away, and die out of their bodies. Their consciences are turned to India-rubber—or to some such substance as black as that, and which will stretch as much. One thing, if no more, I have gained by my Custom-House experience—to know a politician." One of the subjects of Dr. Heideggar's experiment exhibited a certain dizziness upon drinking of the water from the Fountain of Youth, and his mind seemed to run on political topics, "but whether relating to the past, present, or future, could not easily be determined,
since the same ideas and phrases have been in vogue these fifty years." The retiring Sister Year is tired to death of and wants to hear no more "of Whig or Tory, with their interminable brawls about Banks and the Sub-Treasury, Abolition, Texas, the Florida War, and a million of other topics...." The Salem political scene, she says, is but a miniature of the game of national politics, and makes one smile in its Lilliputian scope. In the city of Vanity Fair, a member of Congress occasionally lined his pockets by selling out his constituents, "and I was assured that public officers have often sold their country at very moderate prices." One of the bad spirits who had served Dr. Faustus came into the Intelligence Office to secure a position; the only offer he had was from the editor of a political newspaper who was looking for someone to scribble party paragraphs. He was hired, "with some misgivings as to his sufficiency of venom." Another job seeker, a mysterious man in Red who had aided Bonaparte in his ascent to imperial power, was interviewed by an aspiring politician, but rejected "as lacking familiarity with the cunning tactics of the present day." At the Christmas banquet was a gentleman "in a predicament hitherto unprecedented, but of which the present epoch probably affords numerous examples." He had always followed one party consistently, "but, in the confusion of these latter days, had got bewildered and knew not whereabouts his party was." The spoils system was criticized when disappointed office-seekers were given a side table among the miserable at the Christmas banquet, and when the hack politician, deprived of bread by loss of office, threw
his teeth (symbolically false) into the earth's holocaust. In short, any attempt of Hawthorne to establish a connection with society through politics was doomed to meet the obstacle of his aversion.

The literary scene, what with its piracy, dishonesty, low pay, cheap periodical popularization, and somewhat blatant nationalism, was in hardly the most propitious condition for Hawthorne's emergence in 1836. Looking at the authors around him, he sometimes found much to criticize. For example, among the inhabitants of the Hall of Fantasy were most of the contemporary writers. Cooper was in the realm of fantasy preparing a libel speech; Longfellow was present, with a "glance thrown upward to the lofty dome, as who should say, EXCELSIOR"; Halleck was there, but only by way of amusement rather than by nature; Sargent and Tuckerman were searching for contributors to their magazines; Willis looked so much like a man of the world that he hardly seemed to belong in the hall; Mrs. Sedgwick was there, although perhaps not authentically; Griswold was busy with a notebook noting down poets and poetesses for his anthologies, including "some whom nobody but himself had ever suspected of ever visiting the hall." Of course the Hall of Fantasy was not always a bad place for a writer to be, but as Hawthorne left the group he remarked, "Thank heaven...we have done with this tacky, wayward,
shy, proud, unreasonable set of laurel gatherers. I love them in their works, but have little desire to meet them elsewhere." Ellery Channing provided Hawthorne with some pleasurable moments at the Manse; his talk was made up of "evanescent spray" and "lumps of golden thought," but if he could have given it currency by drawing it out and stamping it with the proper mint mark, he could have had profit and fame. With the ideas of the Transcendentalist group of writers we have already seen Hawthorne in conflict; but he admired Emerson and Thoreau as artists: "being happy, I felt as if there were no question to be put, and therefore admired Emerson as a poet of deep beauty and austere tenderness, but sought nothing from him as a philosopher." In his notebook he remarked that Thoreau had a deep and true taste for poetry, although more exclusive than desirable; in this he was like all other Transcendentalists, as far as Hawthorne was concerned. Other critical comments are to be found where Hawthorne recorded the amount of blaze produced by the books which were thrown into earth's holocaust; "It was not invariably the writer most frequent in the public mouth that made the most splendid appearance in the bonfire." A volume of Channing's poetry exhibited a great deal of excellent inflammability, though "certain portions hissed and sputtered in a disagreeable fashion." Some respectable books merely melted, which proved them to be ice. As for his own part, Hawthorne described himself as occupying "an unfortunate position between the Transcendentalist...and the great body of pen-and-ink men who address the intellect and sympathies of the multitude." He was too remote, shadowy and unsubstantial for the latter class, yet too popular to
satisfy the spiritual and metaphysical requirements of the former, he concluded. Only occasionally could a breath of Nature, tenderness, or humor of real life be found among his allegories and fantastic imagery.  

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26 "The Hall of Fantasy" (1843); "The Old Manse" (1846); Stewart, American Notebooks, p. 167; "Earth's Holocaust" (1844); "Rappacini's Daughter" (1844). "The Hall of Fantasy" must be read as it appeared in The Pioneer, I (Feb. 1843), 49-55 in order to get the literary allusions, most of which were omitted in the collected Mosses From an Old Manse. See Harold D. Miller, "Hawthorne Surveys His Contemporaries," AL, XII (May, 1940), 228-235.

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The literary nationalists of the time—John Neal, William Tudor, W. H. Gardiner, J. G. Whittier, Rufus Choate—were urging American writers to produce a fiction based upon American historical background. To a certain extent Hawthorne complied, but in using historical material he was apt to criticize as well as glorify. His backgrounds were used for general, not specifically national, moral themes. There was much talk of "the great American writer" embodying the indigenous American theme, but Hawthorne found him, with his high, white forehead and deep-set, warm eyes—the Master Genius of American literature—only at the select party of the Man of Fancy. As he was introduced, some of the guests were skeptical: "Pshaw! There can never be an American genius." "Pish! We have already as good poets as any in the world. For my part I desire to see no better." Neither of these contemporary views could Hawthorne completely accept. And in the modern Vanity Fair, Hawthorne was critical of another prevailing trend—lecturing—which he felt was doing a disservice to literature. "Thus literature is etherealized by assuming for its medium the human voice.... These ingenious methods
constitute a sort of machinery, by which thought and study are done to every person's hand without his putting himself to the slightest inconvenience in the matter." 27

27 Neal F. Doubleday, "Hawthorne and Literary Nationalism," AL, XII (Jan. 1941), 447-453; "A Select Party" (1844); "The Celestial Railroad" (1843).

Both the political and literary areas are involved when we come to a consideration of Hawthorne's attitude toward the economic phenomena of these years. His own earnings during the few years after the time he "opened his intercourse with the world" were derived from magazine and gift book contributions, a short editorship, the publication of a volume of tales, and a political position in the Boston Custom House. None of these paid very handsomely. He complained to his friend Bridge in 1836 that he could not make over $300 per year by writing fiction for magazines and annuals. Actually for the nine pieces used in The Token for that year he received $108, less than one dollar per page. It was in that year that through Goodrich, publisher of The Token, Hawthorne took over the editorship of the American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge for six months; this brought him a mere $250. This job took him to Boston where, when an advance didn't come through, he was down to thirty-four cents at the end of the first month. Through the good offices of Bridge, who unknown to Hawthorne advanced $250, his Twice Told Tales was published in March of 1837. This was, coincidentally, just at the beginning of the panic, and although six or seven
hundred copies were sold, and there was praise from Longfellow, Benjamin, and the London Athenaeum, the public reception was cold and slow. But strangely enough, in spite of all this travail, Hawthorne had almost nothing to say about the panic. Visiting Bridge in Augusta, during the summer of 1837 at the height of the financial disasters, he wrote only, "Nothing of much interest takes place. We live very comfortably in our bachelor establishment, on a cold shoulder of mutton, with ham, and smoked beef, and boiled eggs; as to drinkables, we had both claret and brown sherry on the table today." Actually, for Hawthorne, living at home or visiting well-to-do friends, there was little reason to be upset at the turn of financial events. He was aware of the greedy speculation of the time which brought on the disaster (one of the guests at the Christmas banquet was there because he had lost his vast fortunes in the crash), but Hawthorne himself was not personally involved. Not until he began to think in terms of marriage did his financial position weigh upon him. Then, in 1839 he was appointed as measurer of salt and coal in the Boston Custom House at a $1500 annual salary. After two years he was well enough off to invest $1000 in the Brook Farm community at West Roxbury. But with marriage and moving to the Old Manse, money matters became more pressing, and Hawthorne's conflict with a society in which money and property were the only recognizable assets became more open. Contributing now to O'Sullivan's Democratic Review, he found that the hard times were holding up even the small recompense he was getting for his work. To his friend Bridge he wrote in 1843 that he was often short of cash. "My difficulties
of this sort sometimes make me sigh for the regular monthly payments at the custom-house. The system of slack payments in this country is most abominable, and ought, of itself, to bring upon us the destruction foretold by Father Miller. It is impossible for any individual to be just and honest and true to his engagements when it is a settled principle of the community to be always behindhand.... On my part I am compelled to disappoint those who put faith in my engagements, and so it goes around. The devil take such a system!" A short while later he wrote to Bridge that he found it singular that he should be in need of some office, "for nobody's scribblings seem to be more acceptable to the public than mine; and yet I shall find it a tough scratch to gain a respectable support by my pen." 28 Hawthorne was discovering,

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28 Stewart, American Notebooks, p. 5; "The Christmas Banquet" (1844); Horatio Bridge, Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1893), pp. 89, 94.

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after some years of comparative obliviousness, that under the existing conditions of society men must either sacrifice spiritual values to make a living, or neglect the business of making a living and starve. This was just one more factor in the estrangement of Hawthorne from the democratic society to which, to the best of his theoretical belief, a man must give himself in order to obtain a measure of salvation from the guilt of the sin of pride and isolation.

Against all the negative reaction to the tenor of American society, its assertive lower orders, its reformers and theorists, its
politics, literature, and economics, Hawthorne created what was meant to be a positive ideal. I say "meant to be," because in the end, as we shall see, it was not positive at all, since it contradicted all the tenets of his theory about the relation of the individual to society. This was the ideal of the gentleman-scholar or gentleman-artist. As in Emerson's case, or Cooper's, or the elder Dana's, or Poe's, Hawthorne, by temperament and instinct and ideals, felt that there must be a place of respect reserved for the outstanding, superior man of genius, intellect, and manners. As he looked about him, he found that in the contemporaneous leveling tendencies, this ideal was not being fulfilled. From this viewpoint, he was in conflict with his society. But unlike the others, both he and Emerson found this simple conflict made more complex because both believed implicitly either in the possibility or at least the efficacy of an ideal democratic society. Emerson described his scholar-ideal, and found some satisfaction in placing him positively against all the rest of society, at least until that society had begun to come up to his standards. He was to study and teach and guide from his necessarily isolated position. But this necessary isolation of the gifted individual was not so readily accepted by Hawthorne. Again and again the contrasting theme occurred—"All that isolates damns; all that associates saves"—and he would return to a criticism of the isolated genius. And this criticism included himself, for with both Emerson and Hawthorne, the threshing out of the problem of an individual's relation to society stemmed from their own personal predicaments in an era of change. Hawthorne tended in much of his
writing to criticize himself for dealing too exclusively with somber thoughts which helped to isolate him from the public.

But before citing his refutation of the isolated genius, let us see what sort of positive ideal of the aristocrat of ability Hawthorne summoned up. There was, for example, in Augusta, Maine, the Frenchman, Monsieur Shaeffer, whom Hawthorne admired as an intelligent, well-informed man. But he was not given the respect due him by American society; he spoke with joy of going back to his own country away from the dull Yankees who misunderstood and despised him, in many cases because of his appearance only. Hawthorne's friend Bridge, himself, "combines more high and admirable qualities, of that sort which make up a gentleman, than any other that I have met with. Polished, yet natural, frank, open, straight forward, yet with a delicate feeling for the sensitiveness of his companions." In addition Bridge was warm hearted, well acquainted with the world, and had a nice and rigid code of honor and principle. Thus he stood in contrast to the Irish workers and the boorish countrymen whom we have seen Hawthorne criticizing. They looked up to Bridge as an umpire in disputes, an adviser, a protector, and a patron friend. Again, Captain Percival, Captain of the Boston Navy Yard, still retained much of the roughness of the sailing profession; "Nevertheless, he knows how to behave and talk like a gentleman.... Percival seems to be the very pattern of old integrity...." The gentlemanly distinctions Hawthorne made were nice. In a hotel, he noticed a vendor of patent medicines. "He seems to be an honest man enough, with an intelligent face, and sensible in his talk—
but not a gentleman, wearing a somewhat shabby brown-coat and mixed pantaloons, being ill-shaven, and apparently not well acquainted with the custom of a fashionable hotel." One of the passengers on the Boston cars for Worcester, the next summer, "was a young man who had been in Pennsylvania keeping a school—a genteel enough young man, but not a gentleman." At North Adams he encountered a person, once a lawyer, with a missing arm and a mangled foot. However, he attracted Hawthorne because of the sense of acuteness of his talk, the elevation of his expression, the courtesy of his manner, the acuteness and trained judgment bespeaking a once strong and cultivated mind, and, in general, the qualities of the gentleman and man of intellect that he showed even in his deep degradation.29

29Stewart, American Notebooks, pp. 3, 11, 7-8, 26, 29, 32, 36-37.

In addition, the tales present Hawthorne's conception of the ideal gifted person. Before the period under consideration, even as early as Fanshawe (1828), the character type was in evidence. "There was a nobleness on his high forehead," wrote Hawthorne of the hero Fanshawe, "which time would have deepened into majesty.... The expression on his countenance...was proud and high, perhaps triumphant, like one who was a ruler in a world of his own, and independent of the beings around him." And later there were such depictions as Clifford in The House of Seven Gables (1851) and Dimmesdale in The Scarlet Letter (1850), delicate, sensitive, intellectual scholar-idealists into whom, by the way, it is likely that Hawthorne put a good deal of himself.
Some of the tales of our period go far toward the development of this portrait. One of the trumpet blasts for the new Procession of Life was for all those whom the gifts of intellect have united in a noble brotherhood. These came from all classes, to be sure, but all "possess the kingly gifts to lead armies or to sway a people—Nature's generals, her lawgivers, her kings, and with them also the deep philosophers...."

In the Intelligence Office, the brokerage business in hearts was good, most of them being matched up and traded quite easily. But in rare cases "a heart was occasionally brought hither of such exquisite material, so delicately attenpered, and so curiously wrought, that no other heart could be found to match it...it is sad that hearts which have their well-spring in the infinite, and contain inexhaustible sympathies, should ever be doomed to pour themselves into shallow vessels, and thus lavish their high affections on the ground." 30

30Stewart, American Notebooks, xlv-xlix; "The Procession of Life" (1843); "The Intelligence Office" (1844).

During these years the two outstanding portraiture of the exceptional individual were perhaps to be found in "The Birthmark" and "The Artist of the Beautiful." In the former, the almost magically gifted Aylmer had no gross or wicked intentions whatsoever; he had employed his extraordinary powers of thought for the purpose of taking out the one imperfection which kept Georgiana, his wife, from being perfect. Like Ahab in Moby Dick, he symbolically wanted to rid the world of evil, a purpose in itself high and noble. He was sincere when he declared to his wife that he would never employ his power to work
"inharmo2ous effects upon our lives." If compared to the ideal at which he aimed, his most splendid successes in the past were invariably failures. His love for his wife was an "honorable love—so pure and lofty that it would accept nothing less than perfection"; and just before her death, Georgiana commended her husband: "My poor Aylmer... you have aimed loftily, you have done nobly. Do not repent that with so high and pure a feeling, you have rejected the best the earth could offer." Aylmer's past records were "the exemplification of the shortcomings of the composite man, the spirit burdened with clay and working in matter, and of the despair that assails the higher nature at finding itself so miserably thwarted by the earthly part. Perhaps every man of genius in whatever sphere might recognize the image of his own experience in Aylmer's journal." In the other tale, "The Artist of the Beautiful," we get a most sympathetic picture of the genius isolated from his uncomprehending society. Owen Warland, the sensitive and ingenious artist, was continually misunderstood and frustrated by old Peter Hovenden, who represented utilitarian coarseness; by the blacksmith Robert Danforth, who represented the hard, brute force which darkened and confused the spiritual element in Owen; and even by Annie, who at first seemed to understand his effort to infuse spirit into machinery by making a beautiful butterfly, but who then ruined all his work thus far by a playful touch upon a delicate part, and later married Danforth, who was a worker in iron, not gold, and who "spends his labor upon a reality." Owen Warland, the artist, at the end of this story of frustration, came to the realization of the isolated faith he must hold in himself to exist in a hostile and vulgar society. "The
townspeople had one comprehensive explanation of all these singularities. Owen Warland had gone mad! How universally efficacious—how satisfactory, too, and soothing to the injured sensibility of narrowness and dullness—is this easy method of accounting for whatever lies beyond the world's most ordinary scope!" Madness had always, from St. Paul's days to the present, been applied as an explanation of "men who spoke or acted too wisely or too well." But in spite of this, and in spite of the fact that the baby son of Robert and Annie Danforth crushed the completed and successful artistic butterfly, Owen Warland could remain placid because he had risen "high enough to achieve the beautiful." At first every little setback had almost destroyed his soul, but he had learned that "it is requisite for the ideal artist to possess a force of character that seems hardly compatible with its own delicacy; he must keep his faith in himself while the incredulous world assails him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against mankind and be his own sole disciple, both as respects his genius and the objects to which it is directed."

Here, in this story, Hawthorne has gone all the way in his reaction against society in favor of the exceptional genius. In a sense, this tale is very Emersonian in that it arrives at a somewhat stable conclusion. And in this sense it is almost unique for Hawthorne, and quite untypical. For although I have left out most of the evidence for it in the preceding account, Hawthorne includes a refutation, growing out of his social ethic, for almost every instance in which his antipathy toward earthly society seems to be prominent. For example, "Yet, had Aylmer reached a profounder wisdom, he need not thus have flung away the
happiness.... The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time...to find the perfect future in the present." Likewise did all who forsook society and isolated themselves through pride of intellect, self-introspection, or through any reason whatsoever, bring destruction to themselves.

Dimmesdale was saved only when he shared his guilt publicly, in spite of the force for good he was otherwise; Clifford was but an ineffectual idealist who had to make way for progress; Fanshawe failed because of physical collapse. Peter Goldthwaite could have come to his senses and been cheerful and prosperous had he participated in social pleasures and an intercourse of business. "It is one great advantage of a gregarious mode of life that each person rectifies his mind by other minds, and squares his conduct to that of his neighbors, so as seldom to be lost in eccentricity." The artist of the Prophetic Pictures had so engrossed himself in his art that his heart was cold, he had no sympathies, and he was insulated from the mass of human kind—with almost tragic results. "It is not good for man to cherish a solitary ambition. Unless there be those around him by whose example he may regulate himself, his thoughts, desires, and hopes will become extravagant, and be the semblance, perhaps the reality, of a madman." Roderick Elliston, who "had held himself so scornfully above the common lot of men," was now paying for this egotism by carrying a snake around inside him, the snake being the symbol of the monstrous egotism to which everything in his life was referred. Only the humility of love could remove it.

Gervayse Hastings, the perennial attendant at the Christmas banquets for
the miserable, was the chief of sufferers. Although he was wealthy, was possessed of a good family and reputation, had a taste of rare purity and cultivation, and a scholar's instinct for collecting a splendid library, to the public he was a cold abstraction, a man of no warm affections; he was unscathed by grief, and needed no companionship in his old age. He lacked the "deep, warm secret" which gives substance to the world of shadows, and was thus the most miserable of all. Drowne, the wood carver, who "had a singular depth of intelligence," was, before and after his interlude of love, only a mechanical carver, as lifeless and uninspired as his own family of wooden images. Lady Eleanore, who had "noble and splendid traits of character" and combined "an almost queenly stateliness with the grace and beauty of a maiden in her teens," brought on death and tragedy and self-destruction through her mantle, that symbol of pride and isolation and scorn belonging to one "whose spirit held itself too high to participate in the enjoyment of other human souls." 31

31 "The Birthmark" (1843), "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" (1838), "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837), "Egotism; or, The Bosom Serpent" (1843), "The Christmas Banquet" (1844), "Drowne's Wooden Image" (1844), "Lady Eleanore's Mantle" (1838).

And so it goes in tale after tale—the obvious and widely recognized moral theme of Hawthorne. Here is an oft and baldly repeated refutation of the isolated genius and of all the anti-social and anti-democratic tendencies of Hawthorne that have been pointed out in this study. Even though he admired and defended the right and necessity of individualism for the gifted, aristocratic and ideal genius of Art or
intellect, and deplored the encroachments of a crass society, he still
could never encourage a positive isolation from that society, because
in separation, even from a world of venal bureaucrats, loutish farmers,
reforming zealots, and greedy speculators, lay the unpardonable sin.
Probably Hawthorne's final belief rested in the associational ideals of
democracy, wherein one's own integrity could be freely expressed. But
the personal tensions derived from the complicated maladjustment between
an idealist and an imperfect democratic society—in which he still re­tained faith—provided effective impulses toward the production of
literature. Yes, Hawthorne retained his faith in a democratic society
—a faith, that stemmed from the possibilities of association afforded
by democracy, however, rather than from the Emersonian faith in the
possibilities of individualism. But this faith was never quite complete
enough to eliminate an inherent and underlying aristocratic bias that
was part of Hawthorne's character. To know and understand Hawthorne's
fiction—why he wrote what he did when he did—it is necessary to
realize his partial rejection as well as his acceptance of the demo­cratic social ethic.
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-255-


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