

BROOK FARM

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NATIONAL STUDIES IN AMERICAN LETTERS

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BROOK FARM

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VISITORS

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BY

LINDSAY SWIFT



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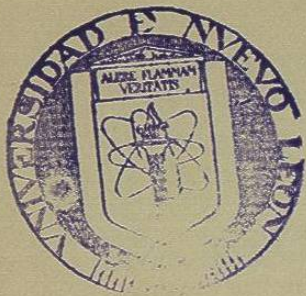
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PREFACE

It has often been said by those best qualified to know, and it may here properly be said again, that the veracious history of Brook Farm will never be written. Some of the most important records of its institutional life are hopelessly lost. Other material is lodged in the keeping of a former member, who has already made copious use of it. There are also before the world various recollections and memories of associates, scholars, and visitors once fully identified with this experiment. This literature of the subject is not inconsiderable, and much of it is entertaining and valuable; but it is often contradictory, often repetitious, and too often erroneous. No Brook Farmer of the first importance has chosen to write with fulness of his experience. The most which remains of the highest authority exists only in an occasional lecture, an agreeable paper of a personal nature, or some remembered conversation. Those to whom Brook Farm meant the most, have been the most silent, and its story was written — for only a few survive — deep in their hearts. This

reticence did not find its reasons in sentiment alone. What is true of a movement like the Antislavery agitation is true also of Brook Farm. Both looked to the realization of a moral ideal, and the subtle spirit which animated both was perishable and incommunicable. It is more than fifty years since the last dweller in that pleasant domain turned his reluctant steps away from its noble illusions, and toward the stress of realities; but from no one of this gracious company has ever come the admission that Brook Farm was a failure.

There may yet be a place for a book which shall endeavor, without too much minuteness, to coördinate and present what really is known concerning the most romantic incident of New England Transcendentalism. There was a distinct beginning, a fairly coherent progress, but a vague termination. The enterprise faded, flickered, died down, and expired. Like some ill-contrived play, the Brook Farm Phalanx lingered during one more act, after the essential dramatic elements were exhausted. It is still possible to give a nearly complete account, and, it is to be trusted, without causing undue disturbance to the sensitiveness of the survivors or their friends, who, guarding the privacies and the arcana of what seemed to many a home life, would shield it from intrusion and vulgar disclosure. There has been no wish to make these

pages a catch-basin for floating gossip or ill-natured anecdotes: these have been suffered to float, unstayed, out to the sea of oblivion. Manifest absurdities, the extravagance of youth, and the passing lights and shadows of the daily life may in fairness be considered as a relief to the seriousness of the story as a whole.

Inspired by a philosophical and speculative enthusiasm, Brook Farm began as an attempt to work modifications in social life. In this direct attempt it certainly ended in disaster. The visible fruits were intellectual, and of the men and women who contributed to the renown of Brook Farm as one of the true seedbeds of American letters it is the purpose of this book to speak, not critically or biographically, but rather from the personal side, and, in particular, as each person considered was affected by the associative life at Brook Farm. Some who came to a greater or less distinction were members, some scholars, and some were influential visitors.

It only remains to express my gratitude to Miss Mary Harris Rollins, who has rendered me the most loyal, friendly services and advice, and has herself renounced, to aid my own efforts, a long-cherished ambition to devote her ability and energy to a similar project.

I am indebted to all who have been approached with doubtless troublesome questions,