

CHAPTER IV

THE MEMBERS

EVEN Emerson admitted that Brook Farm was a pleasant place, where lasting friendships were formed, and the "art of letter writing" was stimulated. But he held, moreover, that impulse without centripetal balance was the rule among the members, who suffered from the want of a head, and experienced an "intellectual sansculottism." The members could not well quarrel with these pleasantries, nor with his calling their cherished dream "an Age of Reason in a patty-pan." Such strictures are phrases after all, even in an Emerson. But he went further when he made the charge that those whose resolves were high, did not work the hardest, and that the stress fell on the few. This, however, is but one of the "necessary ways" of life which Emerson himself upheld.

Charles Lane, in an article contributed to the *Dial* (vol. iv.) and valuable as a contemporary opinion, was more searching. He found at Brook Farm an entire absence of assumption and pretence, but thought that taste, rather

than piety, was the aspect presented to the eye. "If the majority in numbers," he continues, "were considered, it is possible that a vote in favor of self-sacrifice for the common good would not be very strongly carried." There being no profession of hand-to-hand altruism,—the word was not then in the vernacular,—no charge of hypocrisy can be lodged. Lane also thought that riches would have been as fatal as poverty to the true progress of the Association, and herein he confirmed what had already been proclaimed. Endowments were early recognized as possible agents for weakening the purposes and activities of the experiment. If, as Mrs. Kirby says, Brook Farm was a protest against the *sauve qui peut* principle, then the stringencies and little economies were no bad discipline, and the display of a full purse would have been an offence against the ethics of the place. There was no mean poverty as there was no parade of individual wealth.

It would be an injustice to the good sense which underlay the external artificiality of this life, to say that the people who assured to the Association a lasting memory cherished any special faith in the immediate success of the undertaking. Twenty-five years had been set as a reasonable limit for the accomplishment of the high purposes announced. It is probable that Ripley and Dwight were the really sanguine

ones; for the influential members, as a body, must be fairly credited with a modicum of that ordinary human judgment which recognizes the adventitious quality of any new enterprise. These hoped for good fortune; but they were prepared for partial failure at least. When the community dissolved, the majority of its members met the crisis with a good-natured stoicism common to Americans. The hopes of the over-buoyant could not fall far, for the issues of success or failure had not rested on their shoulders; and those who had grumbled could easily find another opportunity. Brook Farm, like college life, was a slow-working inspiration to those of ordinary endowment who, in after years, prospered moderately through their contact with free and wholesome influences in the Association. One member of the later group, William H. Teel, writing twenty-five years after, made the acknowledgment that what little he possessed of "education, refinement, or culture and taste for matters above things material," he owed to this alma mater "by adoption." He probably voiced a gratitude felt by other inconspicuous members in their maturer years.

Had everybody who wished to join the Association been allowed to do so, the result had been strange indeed. Political exiles, tradesmen in a small way who had failed elsewhere, ministers without parishes but generally with

good-sized families, and needy widows, were among the applicants. Sometimes a whole family would present itself unannounced, and be sent away for want of room, if for no other reason. Inconsequent people, once admitted, were naturally the first to grumble at the Board of Direction over necessary retrenchments, though ready to sound the praises of the associative principle when affairs went to their liking.

One great step in genuine reform was taken noiselessly, and therefore with greater certitude, by both the antislavery and the transcendental movements. Men and women stood on a basis, not of asserted equality, but of actual achievement and assumed responsibility. Such publications as the *Liberty Bell* and the *Dial*, to name no others, show what a parity of sentiment and intellectual force there really was. This desirable condition had certainly never before shown itself publicly in American life. In the Brook Farm community, as in other phases of the radical tendencies of those days, there was a considerable number of women really capable of fellowshiping with men in a serious endeavor lying well outside of domestic relations. Even as late as 1844 there were but few married couples on the Farm. The maternal instinct, which is necessarily conservative, seemed to revolt against the project, while to masculine feelings it contained nothing inherently offensive.

Yet to blend domestic and associative sentiments was a part of the original plan. "Is it not quite certain," dubiously asks Lane in the *Dial* for January, 1844, "that the human heart cannot be set in two places, that man cannot worship at two altars?" Emerson was more rudimentary when he argued on behalf of mothers that "the hen on her own account much preferred the old way. A hen without her chickens was but half a hen." The Brook Farm experiment was mainly tested only by women of exceptional courage — perhaps as the "happy-helpless anarchists," which Emerson declared the Farmers as a whole to have been; and this will explain what Mrs. Kirby meant when she wrote that there was no large mother nature at Brook Farm; that, after the first period, the women who came were inferior to the men; and that the motive which influenced these new-comers was livelihood rather than social melioration. The earlier women threw away prerogative, and gained the then doubtful privilege of equality. The wonder is that those who first went to Brook Farm did not invite a larger share of censure from their own sex, but the phenomenal innocence of the life there and the absence of scandal, or of the least cause for it, had much to do with a tolerance which lasted until baseless attacks from a part of the New York press caused a temporary odium. This

shadow did not fall, however, on Brook Farm until its golden age was already gone and the iron age of Fourierism fully begun.

There was religion at Brook Farm, but it was by no means a religious community. Spiritual culture, except in the case of particular individuals, was pursued more as a diversion or a respite from more engrossing interests. Unitarianism might safely have included the majority of the earlier members — it certainly was traditional with most of them. W. H. Channing's visits never passed without services of deep interest and importance to a representative number of the Associates. What there was of religious life felt his stimulus. Although there was no dogmatism, and "controversial discussion was unknown," there is no recorded evidence of any open, bold opposition to the accepted forms of faith; there was, assuredly, no crudeness or blatancy in this matter.

It has been said that toward the close some definite interest was taken in Swedenborg's writings, but how much does not appear. A few — a very few — passed from one or another form of Protestantism to the Roman Catholic Church. There is no pretence that this transition ever threatened to assume the importance of a stampe Romeward; nor would it be safe to assert that discouragement at the failure of Brook Farm affected those who sought this sheltering

fastness. The external charms of the historic faith have their fascinations even for those who never embrace it — and it is probable that some effect was produced by the strong arguments of Brownson. Hecker, formerly of their own flock, had gone with Brownson, and Charles Newcomb mysteriously flirted with the romanticism of the Church. This sort of fervor was in the air, and a few naturally followed their desires and tastes. It would be unnecessary even to mention this change of religious base in Mrs. Ripley and her niece, Miss Stearns, and in one or two more, were it not that too much stress has been given to the simple fact. There may possibly have been a touch of mysticism in the Brook Farm life; but Mrs. Kirby, for one, has exaggerated the actual condition when she says that “rough, wooden crosses and pictures of the Madonna began to appear, and I suspected rosaries rattling under the aprons.” She is entirely in error when she says that Horace Sumner and Miss Dana became Catholics; the Miss Dana to whom she referred was not even in the Association. As for the Swedenborgian tendency there is this to say: Just as Catholicism represented the pendulum swung to its furthest point from rationalism, so did Swedenborgianism offer the extreme reaction from idealism, for in itself it is materialism — a holding out of merely creature comforts.

Death touched Brook Farm lightly,—a noteworthy fact, since there was a narrow escape from a fatal epidemic of smallpox, and no end of tampering with irregular theories of therapeutics. But the gravelly soil and the isolation from any centre of disease kept nearly every one in remarkably good health, and laid strong foundations for later years, when life became something more than a delightful experiment. The community did, however, suffer one loss in its six years of existence, in the death of Mary Ann Williams, who was buried with affectionate care in a portion of the Farm set apart for the Association's dead. One member of the later period, the Rev. John Allen, brought the body of his wife reverently to Brook Farm, where she was buried. These two graves were the only ones required during the whole period.

If death dealt gently with Brook Farmers, love made more havoc, though it is astonishing how little mismating there was. Intellectual equality and unusual opportunity for discovering real character would go far to explain the gratifying result. Fourteen marriages have been traced to friendships begun at Brook Farm, and the record of unhappy unions is small. There was one wedding at the Farm, that of John Orvis to John Dwight's sister, Marianne. At this simple ceremony W. H. Channing was the minister, and John Dwight made a speech of

exactly five words. It is to be hoped that the earnest Channing pronounced them man and wife, and not "couply consociated"—a phrase which he suffered to be used in the *Present!*

Starting with about fifteen persons, the numbers never increased to above one hundred and twenty. By the time that the change to the Phalanx had been effected, nearly all the first comers were gone. A safe estimate would be that about two hundred individuals were connected with Brook Farm from first to last. Such names as were of especial lustre stand apart, as they would have stood in any condition, from their associates. Others, of a second rank, but of considerable importance, rise in memory whenever the name of Brook Farm is mentioned. By reason of individual vivacity, eccentricity, or earnestness of character, each helped to make this spot rich in associations. Nor have these personalities been wholly forgotten in the issue of their later years. But for their lives and their endeavors, Brook Farm would be less memorable, and it is therefore proper not to omit them from this record, intended primarily for the more notable among the members and visitors.

If it were possible, it would be interesting to trace the subsequent career of certain relatively unimportant members. One would like to know more for instance of Grandpa Treadwell, who

was a merry soul, though a quiet one; or of Charles Hosmer, who had "the cranial development of a Webster." Christopher List, called "Chrysalis," who vied with Lizzie Curson in caring for visitors; Eaton, known as "Old Solidarity"; Colson, the shoemaker, with his wife; John and Mary Sawyer; Charles and Stella Salisbury, are some of the names which come and go without special relation to their consociates. The Misses Foord, of contrasting types of beauty, Dolly Hosmer, Mary Donnelly, pretty as her name half implies,—these and others of the women and girls, it is also difficult to trace beyond the fact that they once lived at the Farm. The undiscovered nicknames are tantalizing, for they are sometimes so full of unfulfilled promise. Who was Torquemada or Savonarola? Possibly Hecker and Parker. Who were Camilla and Sybilla, if not Cornelia Hall and Caroline Sturgis; and who, more than all, was Hawthorne's Dismal View, who soon abandoned the cheerful life as unsuited to his gloomy tastes?

Of several members, some of them humble in reputation and condition, but faithfully representative of the variegated membership, some brief notice deserves to be given.

Lewis K. Ryckman, a cordwainer, belonged to the "Shoemaking series" under the new order. His wife, short, sprightly, and nervous,

played the part of hostess and attended to the women visitors. Ryckman was a thorough believer in the associate life, with its boundless promise to reduce the waste and purposeless friction of individual households, but he was no advocate of the sequestration of property, — “dried labor,” as he called it; to him the impulse and ability to acquire was wholesome and proper, and he sought economy of social arrangement, not restriction of the individual. Ryckman went under the name of the Omnarch.

Ichabod Morton was a trustee from December, 1842, until April, 1843; his place on the Board was then taken by Minot Pratt. He was from Plymouth, and was the father of Mrs. Abby Morton Diaz. Emerson says of him that he was “a plain man and formerly engaged in the fisheries with success.” Because he felt that sentiment rather than good business judgment governed the practical affairs of the Farm, he abandoned his purpose of joining the Association.

One of Hecker’s successors at the honest task of baking was Peter M. Baldwin, known to all as the “General” — a tall, spare, osseous sort of man, built on the large Western plan, and thought to resemble Andrew Jackson. In spite of what has been written about an absence of tobacco smoke, it is certain that Baldwin

loved this solacement as well as he did an argument. This saint in a green baize jacket and slippers, awkward and homely to view, was an idealist such as even Brook Farm marvelled at. He did not write it out like Hawthorne, or dream it as at Patmos, like Channing, but he baked it, uncomplainingly, and with a patience of the Abraham Lincoln type. Suddenly he departed out again into a world not so regardful as Brook Farm of unsuccessful fidelity. He was the first to leave after the fire, and really started the exodus which soon began in earnest. His adventurousness did not die with his departure. A little later he went to find gold in California, and died on the Pacific coast.

Another sturdy character, Thomas Blake, was given the title of “Admiral” in honor of his name, and because of a figure, gait, and make-up, which included a nautical hat and rolling collar. He was fond of life, and never shirked his share of work. Ephraim Capen was the “Parson,” fond of reading in bed, and prone to fall asleep in the act. He was educated for the ministry, but lacked sufficient orthodoxy to preach dutifully the doctrine of eternal punishment. Frederick S. Cabot, the Corporation Clerk, was employed in the book-keeping department, and therefore deserving of his title of “Timekeeper.” It is recorded that he enjoyed “dancing and fun.”

Cabot was interested in the antislavery movement, and appears as an auditor of the accounts of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. His going to Brook Farm seems to have occasioned some criticism from his old friends; but in an unpublished letter to Miss Caroline Weston, dated December 1, 1844, from Brook Farm, he defends his conduct on the ground that while he loves the slave no less he loves humanity more, and adds: "I feel that Association is doing and will do more for Antislavery than anything else can."

Arriving on the same day with Blake, John Glover Drew, usually known as Glover, brought with him the wholesome atmosphere of business promptness and accuracy. Even his personal appearance bespoke commercial ways and a trig, well-groomed man. His advance was rapid to the position of Commercial Agent and member of the Industrial Council, and he showed himself a worthy shipper and forwarder of the Farm's products and merchandise. Yet this honest, determined comrade, so unlike many of his associates, shared their faith, and helped to improve their practice. Poetry was in his nature, but hidden under the smooth, careful raiment of a seeming prosperity. Associated with Drew in the general expressing, shipping, and purveying of the Farm was Buckley Hastings. As a private enterprise the work which they

zealously performed might have been made profitable.

Another instance of a continued interest in social and industrial problems, originating in a brief residence at Brook Farm, is J. Homer Doucet (pronounced Douçay), an eclectic physician who is still practising in Philadelphia. He was born at Three Rivers, in Connecticut, in 1822, and was at the Association from the spring of 1844 to the summer of 1846, coming early enough to experience some of the first charm, and staying long enough to know the sadness of decay. Several papers of his reminiscences appeared during 1895 in the *Conservator*, a journal devoted to the memory of Walt Whitman and the cause of ethical culture. These recollections, from their evident sincerity and openness, have considerable value, and preserve several anecdotes which otherwise might have perished. A cordial tribute is paid by him to the excellence of the school, and to the refining and wholesome influences of the farm life. "I never heard," he writes, "loud or boisterous language used; I never heard an oath; I never saw or heard of any one quarrelling; I never knew that any one was ever accused or suspected of having acted in an ungentlemanly or unladylike manner anywhere on the place." His opinion of the potency of the land was low, yet he says that "we planted

potatoes and raised very good crops." The strawberry bed, to which, according to him, the young ladies attended, stood near the Hive and did not make a good yield. Doucet lived in the Pilgrim House, but entered only two of its rooms, the ironing-room and his own, used during the day by the Sewing Group. The obvious nickname of "Homer the Sweet" was bestowed on him.

Hospitality at Brook Farm was generous, but on one occasion it had fatal results. An Irish baronet, Sir John Caldwell, fifth of that title and Treasurer-General of Canada, appeared one day, bringing with him as valet an Irishman named John Cheever. The baronet supped with the community on its greatest delicacy, pork and beans, and returned to the Tremont House, in Boston, where he died suddenly of apoplexy on the following day, October 22, 1842. Cheever had some little education, and the marks of a refinement beyond his station in life. He was commonly supposed to be the natural son of the baronet whom he served in so lowly a capacity. At all events, the forlornness of Cheever's position, and the romantic circumstances of his birth moved Mr. Ripley and others to shelter him, not as a member, but as a sort of irregular attaché. The eccentricities of his character added no little to the life of the community; his Irish wit and brogue

were wholesome leaven, and he was on the whole a beloved inmate, though his tongue was voluble and sometimes sharp. Dr. Codman gives some instances of his oddities of dress and speech. He addressed Miss Ripley as "your Perpendicular Majesty," and during the later period would refer to the earlier members of the Association as "extinct volcanoes of transcendental nonsense and humbuggery." After Cheever left Brook Farm he went to the North American Phalanx; it is supposed that he fell into intemperate habits, which finally led to his mysterious disappearance.

"Sam" Larned is hardly more than a name in the annals of Brook Farm, and it is not known whether he was an associate, a scholar, or a boarder. Although he could not have been more than eighteen when he was there, he was given to all manner of ultraisms, and some delightful anecdotes centre about him. Robert Carter gives a vivid sketch of him in an article on "The Newness," published in the *Century* for November, 1889. Larned steadfastly refused at that time to drink milk on the ground that his relation to the cow did not justify him in drawing on her reserves; and when it was pointed out to him that he ought, on the same principle, to abandon shoes, he is said to have made a serious attempt to discover some more moral type of footwear. He later

found radicalism somewhat wearisome, and became a Unitarian minister in Mobile, where he had married a slave-holding wife. He died in New York, of consumption, at the early age of twenty-eight.

Jean M. Pallisse was the Swiss engineer, an intelligent, placid man, fond of music to the point of playing dance tunes on his violin for the general festivities. He afterward went to New York, and filled a position of trust in a business house. Pallisse smoked tobacco, and was, therefore, a rare bird in this flock. Peter N. Kleinstrup, the Danish gardener, came early in the Fourier period with his wife and daughter. The greenhouse was built for him, but he did not, as has been stated, make his home in it. Amelia Russell said of him: "He was æsthetic in his ideas, and perhaps studied beauty a little more than profit." He died poor in California, where he went during the gold fever.

Among the women who gave loyally of their strength, a few besides Mrs. Sophia Ripley, Mrs. Mary (Bullard) Dwight, and Mrs. Orvis, who are best commemorated with their husbands, deserve a word because of their special charm or capability. Miss Amelia Russell, whose two papers in the *Atlantic Monthly* are conspicuous for good judgment and for accuracy, was known as "Mistress of the Revels,"

playing an important part in the Amusement Group, of which she was long the chief, because of her skill in arranging the various games and theatrical efforts. She also taught dancing, and achieved an honest fame as the clear stacher *par excellence* of the Association. One of the children, in recognition of her abilities as a laundress, called her "Miss Muslin." She had good manners, a petite and engaging personality, and was, as her writing shows, a woman of cultivation and tolerant mind. It is noteworthy that on her arrival she met with the same peculiar reception accorded, no one knows why, to others, who have mentioned the experience. No one spoke to her, although she had previously seen some of the members. "They kept about their occupations, utterly regardless of me." Lizzie Curson, who came from Newburyport, was not one of the celebrities, but she is of gracious memory for her untiring fidelity as chief for more than two years of the Dormitory Group. She was skilled in the art of housing for the night unexpected comers, and met the perplexities of her task with uniform serenity. She became the wife of John Andrews Hoxie, a carpenter at Brook Farm, and died a year or two ago. Mrs. Almira Barlow, who lived in a front room of the Hive with her three boys, had been a Miss Penniman, a famous beauty in Brookline, and of a lively and

attractive disposition. Later the Curtis brothers were her fast friends in Concord, where for a time they all found themselves. The impression, if a wrong one, is hard to escape, that Hawthorne may have had this lady's personal fascinations in mind when he drew certain characteristics of his Zenobia.

George Ripley
and Sophia
Willard Ripley

The ranks of reformers are seldom recruited by so unprejudiced and candid a mind as that of George Ripley. From the beginning to the close of his anxious but not unquiet life, his judgment controlled his passions, and he could discern the truth with clearness even when knowledge of the truth meant the loss of everything but courage and ideals.

Ripley's first serious disappointment had been his failure to build up the Unitarian parish in Boston, which had been gathered for him on his leaving the Harvard Divinity School. His friends had felt no doubt that his personality and unusual intellectual equipment would awaken the spiritual life of a large neighborhood. Alas, for the drawing qualities of sincerity and personal piety! They were no more potent in 1826 at the corner of Pearl and Purchase streets than they are to-day in correspondingly respectable quarters—after the newness was somewhat worn away.

For more than fourteen years Ripley's ministrations went faithfully on. He was often tried

by the limitations put upon his speech by the traditions of his profession, and by the failure of his parishioners to take any deep interest in what seemed to him some of the most vital concerns of human life; and finally, in October, 1840, he wrote from Northampton to his people, the manliest of letters, setting forth, with absolute open-mindedness, the incompatibilities which were separating him from them. The letter was accepted by the Purchase Street parish as a convincing argument. They, too, saw the futility of a longer attempt to engender a spiritual glow where there seemed to be neither tinder nor ignitable material; and the minister preached his farewell sermon on March 28, 1841, to a somewhat sorrowful but not afflicted people.

Although Ripley was a philosopher he was not visionary; he could not deceive himself any more than he could another man. Perhaps, next to his love for truth, his strongest characteristic was caution; but having patiently convinced himself of the righteousness of a course of conduct, he pursued it until he was equally certain that he had made a mistake. A full decade was consumed in discerning the impossibility of harmonizing Christian doctrine and Christian life under existing social conditions, and in forming the resolution to establish, if he could, better conditions.

So far as a man of Ripley's intellectual can-

dor can be influenced by other minds, it is probable that he was swayed by the talk and the writing of Dr. Hedge. The latter had been one of his revered instructors in the Divinity School, and had published in the *Christian Examiner* of March, 1833, an article on Coleridge, which recorded the great results flowing from the spread of Schelling's ideal philosophy. This naturally strengthened the set of Ripley's thought, already turned into this channel. It would be impossible, though interesting, to trace the growth of the Brook Farm scheme in his mind. One fact, however, is beyond dispute: Ripley sacrificed his personal feelings in pushing the enterprise. He wrote to Emerson: "Personally, my tastes and habits would lead me in another direction. I have a passion of being independent of the world, and of every man in it. This I could do easily on the estate which is now offered, which I could rent at a rate that, with my other resources, would place me in a very agreeable condition so far as my personal interests were involved—I should hope one day to drive my own cart to market and sell greens."

While Ripley's project clearly did not gain the sanction of several of his warmest personal friends, it was not seriously opposed by them. Ripley was, at this time, thirty-eight years of age, with a reputation for unusual mental balance, and it was quite impossible that he should

make so serious a move through mere enthusiasm for practising what he preached. Everybody who knew him felt assured that his eyes were wide open to the practical obstacles, and that he saw the resources with which to meet them. On that side his friends trusted him. What they doubtless feared was, perhaps, best expressed by Margaret Fuller, who wrote to William Henry Channing: "His mind, though that of a captain, is not that of a conqueror." Nobody would have admitted this more freely than Ripley himself. He had early realized that he possessed neither the taste nor the temperament for the rôle of a popular leader; while yet a student he had written to his mother: "I am not one of those who can write or speak from the inspiration of genius, but all that I do must be the result of my own personal, untiring efforts"; and he certainly felt that, in the long run, any mode of life which was at once right and feasible, although novel, would commend itself to general society whether backed by a "conqueror" or by a level-headed man who was more ready even to work than to "lead." If one were to mention a single quality which Ripley mostly lacked and which would have stood him in better stead even, at this time, than his knowledge of practical affairs, it would be worldly wisdom. Although this quality is not a common accompaniment of idealism, the two are

not by any means irreconcilable. The almost universal verdict has been that the Brook Farm experiment was untimely; and yet a "timelier" time certainly could not have been pitched upon, so far as the condition of public feeling was concerned. If there had been no Brook Farm, there would have been something else. The ferment in men's minds must somewhere and somehow have thrown something to the surface of society; and there is the keenest satisfaction to-day in the assurance that this hunger and thirst after social righteousness could not have found a nobler expression, even if it could have found a wiser one. At all events, George Ripley was irrevocably committed to associative cooperation — a social ideal which his wife, Sophia Ripley, accepted with even more outward enthusiasm than he himself. The unqualified support of so fine a spirit as Sophia Ripley might well strengthen conviction, and George Ripley had been buoyed up by it too long already not to know its full value.

The first weeks at Brook Farm were full for these leaders of the enterprise. The farm must be made ready for cultivation, and the domestic machinery set in motion; and the interminable detail of all this naturally fell very largely on the Ripleys. With their customary honesty they had set before themselves and before their friends the weary months — perhaps years —

during which the process of establishing their project should demand all their strength and return to them only the most meagre rewards. In his younger days Ripley had felt "pretty well satisfied that he should be happier in the city than he could ever be in the country"; but as his theory of the wholesomeness of combined manual and intellectual work developed, this preference for city life gave way. Glee-fully he donned the farmer's blouse, the wide straw hat, and the high boots in which he has been pictured at Brook Farm; and whether he cleaned stables, milked cows, carried vegetables to market, and estimated probable crops from improbable soil in the morning, or taught philosophy and mathematics and discussed religion with Parker (who called him the "Archon") in the afternoon, or led the brilliant conversations in the common parlor in the evening — he gave the same conscientious thought to all. The mere matter of correspondence must often have been looked upon as a weary necessity, and yet the answers to both sincere and insincere "inquirers" were un- failingly kind. This courtesy never forsook him, and his constant good temper and good cheer have been the occasion of almost universal comment among the members of a society in which both were far more common than is usual. He was one of the few men whom