

Colby



Colby Quarterly

Volume 16
Issue 4 *December*

Article 6

December 1980

F.B. Sanborn and the Lost New England World of Transcendentalism

D. R. Wilmes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/cq>

Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, Volume 16, no.4, December 1980, p.237-247

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Quarterly by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

*F. B. Sanborn
and the Lost New England World
of Transcendentalism*

by D. R. WILMES

WHEN Franklin Benjamin Sanborn died in 1917, the Boston papers announced the passing of the "Sage of Concord."¹ It had, after all, been thirty-five years since the last one died. Sanborn would have enjoyed every ounce of this journalistic momentousness; as a veteran image-maker, he would surely have smiled at his own last success. Yet, there was in his death an irony that he would hardly have appreciated: an implicit, perhaps unconscious recognition by his eulogists that he had not been what he had hoped to be remembered as—a Transcendentalist. As the Reverend Loren B. Macdonald remarked, "He was a man I admired very much, and a man of considerable genius, especially in regard to his memory of the old school of writers, including Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, with whom he was intimately acquainted."² A man of "considerable genius" in the matter of "memory," Sanborn had lived to complete the circle of an argument begun by Emerson in 1836, in the first sentences of *Nature*: "Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes."

With the death of F. B. Sanborn, the world of Transcendentalism became truly, vitally lost. He was the last Sage, the final public witness to the New England renaissance led by "the old school of writers." But the metaphor of completion suggested by Sanborn's life is but a part of his meaning for the historian of Transcendentalism and New England culture. For the process by which the forces of Transcendental energy and creativity were redirected and dispersed during the second half of the nineteenth century is in fact archetypally figured in Sanborn's life and mind. This process took two major forms, one expansive and the other contractive; the meaning of Transcendentalism became both too general and too specific for its identity to survive. Thus, affected by the national concerns of American liberalism, Sanborn participated in the cultural generalization and dispersal of Emersonian thought into the larger and far more amorphous context of American optimism. Rejecting the idealist specifics of Emerson's philosophy, Sanborn uncritically accepted its

1. Articles reprinted in *The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 40 (III Quarter 1965), Part 3.
2. *The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 40 (III Quarter 1965), Part 2.

optimistic tone as a rationale for specific social action. On the other hand, Sanborn participated in a regionalist contraction of Transcendentalism into the confines of Concord itself. In an ironic development of the Transcendentalist microcosmic vision, Sanborn retrospectively saw a world in the New England locale of Transcendentalism. But this world was too concrete, too non-symbolic, and too entrapped in time and history not to be finally lost to Sanborn. It had been condensed into an emotion-laden simplicity: the historical presence of a New England town where he himself had once been young. Like the great Transcendentalists before him, Sanborn was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. But his life, begun in the Transcendentalist mode, had carried him far from the complex of thought and passion he had strived to embody in his later years.

II

SANBORN was born in the small New Hampshire town of Hampton Falls in 1831. He prepared for Harvard at Phillips Exeter Academy, entering the college with sophomore standing in 1852. Upon graduation, he taught school in Concord, while actively participating in the Abolitionist movement. Travelling extensively, he worked for committees raising money for John Brown. Following the Harper's Ferry raid, Sanborn narrowly escaped being arrested as a witness.³ After 1863, he worked as a journalist and as an official in many organizations, most of which were engaged in liberal reform efforts. These included the Massachusetts Board of State Charities, the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, the Clark Institution for Deaf-Mutes, and the American Social Science Association. With the exception of 1868-1872, when he left to serve as an editor of the *Springfield Republican*, Sanborn maintained his connection with Concord. After 1882, when he published his first book on a Transcendental subject, Sanborn increasingly devoted his energies to the editorial and historical work for which he is remembered today.⁴ Beginning in 1879, he was associated with the Concord School of Philosophy, serving as secretary and treasurer.⁵

The efforts of these last thirty years of his life assured Sanborn's reputation as an editor and historian. As an editor, he preserved material that has since been lost and provided some of the texts necessary to the modern analysis of Transcendentalism. Less fortunately, he took unacceptable freedoms with the documents in his trust.⁶ As an historian, his

3. See Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 423-25.

4. F. B. Sanborn, *Henry David Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882).

5. For further biographical information, see Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Some Memorabilia of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn," *The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 16 (III Quarter 1959), 23-30.

6. Evaluations of Sanborn as an editor include Francis H. Allen, *Thoreau's Editors: History and Reminiscence* (The Thoreau Society, Booklet Number 7, 1950), pp. 12-16, 23-27; Walter Harding, "Franklin B. Sanborn and Thoreau's Letters," *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, III (1951), 288-93;

work has the authenticity of personal experience; again less fortunately, it often has the formlessness of casual recollection. In addition, the complicating and intruding force of Sanborn's ego and self-interest affected both roles, and confronts anyone who now attempts to evaluate his accomplishments.⁷

In outline, then, Sanborn's mature life falls into three phases. In his early manhood, Sanborn came to Concord and was personally acquainted with the major Transcendentalists. Between approximately 1860 and 1880, his concerns were social and political, essentially pointing him away from Concord and the Transcendentalists. After Emerson's death in 1882, Sanborn's focus returned to Concord, and he began to see himself as a conservator and representative of the Concord tradition. In the later two stages, and perhaps as early as the mid-fifties, following his association with John Brown, Sanborn's characteristic public stance was that of the organization-man. In the social sphere, and perhaps finally in his perception of the Concord philosophy as well, Sanborn was a cog in machines that sought to affect the policies of his society or to direct that society's historical perceptions. He was an individual, but not a radical individualist.

III

IT WILL be seen that there are problems in evaluating Sanborn's relationship to the Transcendentalists by the example of vocation, that central Transcendental problem. If Sanborn was in his youth a Transcendentalist, he was so only through sympathy with aspects of the philosophy, not with the way of life of Emerson or Thoreau. Although his personal involvement with the movement may qualify him as a Transcendentalist, his career is marked by contrary tendencies. He was, perhaps quintessentially, a member of the second generation in a movement that had fragmented when its first generation was still comparatively young. Sanborn was Transcendental only in the light of after-glow. As a youth, he had some experience of the movement's waning energy. In later life, he self-consciously embodied the Transcendental idea, the idea, at its most reductive, of being "of Concord." Sanborn was, as we have seen, surprisingly successful in this limited endeavor. But the self-made image is problematic. Is it a measure of relative truth or illusion? How, in this uncertain light, should we regard Sanborn? How authentic was his early Transcendentalism, given his acquaintance with the Transcendentalists?

When Sanborn first saw Concord in 1851, the great age of Transcen-

and J. Lyndon Shanley, *The Making of Walden with the Text of the First Version* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 2-3.

7. For example, Allen, who worked with Sanborn on the 1906 "Walden" edition, was "irritated by Sanborn's attitude of ownership of all that pertained to Thoreau. . . ." *Thoreau's Editors*, p. 26.

dentalism was already over. But if an age was over, it was just barely so, and young Sanborn, writing his "Class Book Sketch" in 1855, could declare: "I am a Theist in religion, a Transcendentalist in philosophy, an Abolitionist in politics. In a word, I am an ultra reformer on almost all points."⁸ At Sanborn's Harvard, the adjunct revolutionary philosophy for the political extremist was the Transcendental philosophy, and the center of the world was not Cambridge or Europe, but Concord. As for the generation before, one's essential education was extra-curricular: "I was more indebted to Concord than to Cambridge for my literary inspiration and training."⁹ Moreover, Sanborn could share his elders' appreciation of themselves as an embattled minority, a few who had seen a new kind of truth. Sanborn, in his *Recollections*, remembered that his first talk with Emerson might "have given him the impression that my set at Cambridge were of his church and school, as indeed was the fact, though we were few in numbers and weak in power" (*R*, II, 436). The "good crop of mystics at Harvard College" that Emerson had hoped for "were in fact fewer than they had been . . . at Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands . . . where there were never more than six at a time" (*R*, II, 315). Patterns were repeated in Sanborn's experience, but the times had changed. In January, 1857, Sanborn met John Brown (*R*, I, 75). It might be said that the rest of Sanborn's life was then determined by a pattern that carried him far from Concord, in spirit if not in body.

The contemporary evidence concerning Sanborn's thought during the fifties is slight when compared to the bulk of his later recollections.¹⁰ However, Sanborn's early writings, interpreted in conjunction with his later work, do enable us to draw a picture of the young Transcendentalist, if such he was. The important elements in this picture are Sanborn's own rural New England background, his personally close relationship with Emerson, and the historical forces of Abolitionist violence preceding the Civil War. Within the crux of these personal and national circumstances, the essential tendencies of Sanborn's thought were formed.

Sanborn's New Hampshire boyhood seems to have had a great impact on his character and his reaction to Concord. He was a young man from the provinces, the product of an ancestral homestead in an isolated town (*R*, I, 13). Knowledge of current political and intellectual trends came through the fragmented and ephemeral pages of newspapers and magazines: "So early [1845] did I begin to read Emerson's writings, at least in

8. Cameron, "Some Memorabilia of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn," p. 24.

9. F. B. Sanborn, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 2 vols. (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1909), II, 313. Hereafter cited in the text as *R*.

10. The important sources are: (1) "Manuscript Diary of Franklin B. Sanborn," edited with annotations and interpolated extracts from the *Recollections* and Sanborn's letters by Kenneth Walter Cameron, *Transcendental Climate*, 3 vols. (Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1963), I, 205-43. This is the journal of 1854-1855, hereafter cited in the text as *J*. (2) Autobiographical statements in Cameron, "Some Memorabilia of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn," pp. 23-30. (3) John Michael Moran, Jr., *Collected Poems of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn of Transcendental Concord, The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 40 (III Quarter 1965), 1-150, hereafter cited in the text as *Poems*. Moran reprints an early essay, "Poetry," from *The Harvard Magazine*, I (January 1855), 49-54 (*Poems*, 115-119).

extracts . . . that I can hardly remember when I did not know them, in part and superficially. A natural affinity for that school of thought which he most clearly represented, and something akin to his intuitions in my own way of viewing personal and social aspects, really brought me into relations with him before I ever saw him, or ever heard that thrilling voice. . . ." Transcendentalism was a few books by Emerson or Carlyle. In its immediacy, it was *The Dial*, the *Western Literary Messenger*, and the *Christian World* (R, II, 261).

One may easily imagine the effect of figures such as Emerson emerging into acquaintance and friendship: the enchantment of the *idea* of association with the famous Transcendentalists. Sanborn's journal, begun in November, 1854, and continued until September, 1855, principally consists of recorded conversations with the Transcendentalists. It serves, in the context of Sanborn's career, as a preparation for his Boswellian task, not as the foundation for any creative work.¹¹ However, Sanborn's own thoughts and emotions occasionally burst through the record, in references to the tragic death of his first wife, and notably in this exclamation at the wonder of being in Concord and knowing Emerson: "Should I have believed three years ago, when I was in doubt and trouble at Exeter, that in so short a time I should be living *here* of all places in the world, and that this greatest and finest of all Americans would be making me an evening call? That I should be teaching his children, visiting his home, and drawing new lessons of life from his serene and simple dignity?" (J, 223).

The reactions of Emerson and Thoreau to young Sanborn are in keeping with his exclamation. For example, in March, 1856, Emerson wrote to his brother William that Sanborn was "quite too important a person to old as well as to young Concord, than that you should have missed him. . . ."¹² Following Sanborn's near arrest in the John Brown affair, Emerson told John Murray Forbes that "Sanborn seems quite clear headed, & to be also well advised."¹³ Another letter to William Emerson, in 1860, shows Sanborn in close and friendly relation to the Emerson family.¹⁴ Thoreau also seems to have treated Sanborn with respect. Thoreau's *Journal* records observations on natural phenomena that Sanborn had shared with Thoreau,¹⁵ and the *Correspondence* includes several letters to Sanborn, notably a long description of Minnesota, written during Thoreau's last trip in 1861.¹⁶ Indeed, the length and

11. For example, a description of Thoreau's appearance (J, 225; May 18, 1855) is the source for Sanborn's comments in "Thoreau and Emerson," *Forum*, XXIII (1897), 218-27.

12. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Ralph L. Rusk, 6 vols. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1939), V, 14.

13. *Ibid.*, V, 210.

14. *Ibid.*, V, 211.

15. *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen, 14 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906), VIII, 46, and X, 108.

16. *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Walter Harding and Carl Bode (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 618-22.

detail of this letter suggests that Thoreau may have had intimations of Sanborn's later role as an historian and biographer.

Sanborn, then, found a home in Concord. When he left to edit the *Springfield Republican* in 1868, his departure led Emerson to write that he "plainly means to return here to live at a future day."¹⁷ Four years later, Sanborn was back in Concord. But the original attraction was not simply that; Sanborn may have been guided by a repelling as well as an attracting force, for his life in Cambridge seems to have been uncomfortable. When E. H. Abbot, secretary of the class of 1855, recorded Sanborn's death in 1917, he followed the *Recollections* in suggesting that Sanborn was "always genial and ready to make friends . . . a typical country boy, hungry for books and information of all sorts." Yet, describing Sanborn's Harvard years, Abbot writes that he "never inclined to confidences" and "had very few intimate friends among us." Abbot's remarks, which go on to mention the "curious ecstasy of detestation" felt by some classmates and by "not a few of the best and kindest and most excellent citizens of Boston" in later years, confirm Sanborn's statement that his party at Harvard were "few in numbers and weak in power," while suggesting the social and emotional implications of that remark.¹⁸ The normative communities of Cambridge and Boston, the "best . . . citizens," rejected Sanborn. But his personally abrasive manner was balanced by a strongly social vision. Thus Sanborn believed himself to be a Transcendentalist, went to Concord, and found himself accepted by a *community*. The resulting association of Concord with the communal rural happiness of his youth had a great deal of weight in Sanborn's final assessment of the Concord experience.

Clearly, Sanborn's attraction to the Concord milieu and the Transcendental personalities had a deeply personal resonance. But the local, even pastoral dimensions of Concord were confronted and confounded by the national, violent force of the slavery issue. Sanborn's interests were directed away from the publicly reserved stance of Emerson and Thoreau and toward the activism of John Brown and the social awareness of Theodore Parker. The slavery crisis had turned Sanborn into an organizational activist. Brown became the representative hero of Sanborn's faith, a man with "mythical" possibilities (*R*, I, 82).¹⁹

In every important sense, Sanborn's faith was no longer Transcendental. By the outbreak of the Civil War, Sanborn understood all he would

17. Emerson, *Letters*, VI, 20.

18. Abbot's statement is reprinted in *The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 40 (III Quarter 1965), Part 2, preface. Cf. Sanborn's *Recollections*, I, 32: "I was never very shy or unsocial, made friends easily, and was tolerated or praised by my elders. . . ."

19. Sanborn's activities in the Abolitionist committees are summarized in F. B. Sanborn, ed., *The Life and Letters of John Brown, Liberator of Kansas, and Martyr of Virginia* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1885), p. 347. For analyses of Emerson's and Thoreau's positions, see Gilman M. Ostrander, "Emerson, Thoreau, and John Brown," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXIX (1953), 713-26, and Marjory M. Moody, "The Evolution of Emerson as an Abolitionist," *American Literature*, XVII (1945), 1-21.

ever immediately know of Transcendentalism. It was only later, in an attempt to reenter the Transcendental world he had left, that Sanborn began to redefine that world in his own image. His efforts extended to the assertion that John Brown had “spiritually” belonged to the “Concord circle of writers” (*R*, I, xi). Abolitionism had destroyed the possibility, for Sanborn, of living within the Emersonian or Thoreauvian world. It is doubtful, however, that Sanborn explicitly recognized the nature of what he sensed was gone. For when one examines the particulars of his understanding of the Transcendental philosophy and vocation, it becomes clear that his sense of the philosophical implications of the movement was vague.

Sanborn's relations with Thoreau may illustrate the nature of his understanding of pure Transcendentalism most clearly. In January, 1855, before he had met Thoreau but a year and a half after his acquaintance with Emerson had begun, Sanborn addressed his first letter to Thoreau. It concerns a review of *A Week* and *Walden* in *The Harvard Magazine*, which Sanborn briefly edited: “For my part, I thank you for the new light it [*Walden*] shows me the aspects of Nature in, and for the marvelous beauty of your descriptions. At the same time, if any one should ask me what I think of your philosophy, I should be apt to answer that it is not worth a straw.”²⁰ It should be noted, however, that Sanborn was never particularly adept at handling philosophical questions. In later life, while writing a memoir of Alcott, Sanborn called upon William Torrey Harris to explicate Alcott's philosophy in an appendage to the book.²¹ Lacking the services of a philosopher, Sanborn tended to avoid in his biographies any explicit attention to the systems of thought of his subjects. The journal of 1854–1855 does not indicate that Sanborn was much more concerned with the details of the Transcendentalists' thoughts when he was first exposed to Transcendentalism. The journal does not record the content of his discussions. It does list subjects, but usually in the most general possible terms. For example, Emerson “talked of Pascal, and philosophy, and other things—” (*J*, 223). The probable direct result of Emerson's remarks on Pascal, Sanborn's part in the Harvard Exhibition of May 1, 1855, enables us to assess his abilities as a critic of philosophy. This essay, entitled “The ‘Thoughts’ of Pascal” (*J*, 223–24), does not suggest that Sanborn had examined the thought of his subject very deeply, although he may have profited from Emerson's remarks on Pascal the man. Indeed, the latter subject monopolizes the essay. A short paragraph of paraphrase and quotations “taken at random from this book [*Pensées*]” comprises Sanborn's only attempt to discuss the philosophical aspects of his subject.

20. Thoreau, *Correspondence*, p. 367.

21. Sanborn, *A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy*, 2 vols. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), II, 544–664.

Pascal is shown to be "the enemy of philosophy and the bigoted supporter of ancient faith." But, he is admirable because he was a poet, with "wondrous skill in the use of words," and because he was courageous.

In short, it is unclear what Sanborn meant by his early statement rejecting Thoreau's philosophy. It is likely that he meant nothing very definite. In later life, of course, Sanborn came to understand Thoreau better. In 1869, commenting upon Edmund S. Hotham, then living at Walden Pond in supposed imitation of Thoreau, Sanborn noted that "Thoreau did not expect to convert his fellow men to that hermit's life which he chose for himself." Sanborn had acknowledged the immense difference between Thoreau and himself with regard to social action. He had even exaggerated that difference by speaking of Thoreau's "hermit's life." More seriously, Sanborn's remark suggests that he had begun to give some thought to the problem of Thoreau's vocation. But Sanborn's real interests in 1869 were elsewhere: "Setting aside, for the present, all higher reasons for turning hermit, suppose we look at the economical and sanitary considerations."²² When Sanborn finally turned his full attention to the matter of Thoreau and Emerson, his judgments were quite creditable. He rated Thoreau very highly as a literary artist, and early saw him as a figure of at least equal artistic stature to Emerson.²³

IV

AN APPRECIATION of the "aspects of Nature" and a determination to be a poet are the only parts of the central Transcendental position that Sanborn seems to have seriously adopted for himself as a young man. If residence in Concord tied him to the Transcendental context, and Abolitionism—even as it carried him away from Emerson and Thoreau—attached him to the wing of the movement headed by Parker, it was poetry that allied him with the creating energy of the Emersonian vision. Here the vocation (poet) and the subject (nature) could come together in a relationship that might have an immediate meaning for the young Harvard graduate. Sanborn's treatment of the poet's relation to nature follows Emerson, and is finally more theoretical than practical. His poetic stance is summarized in an essay, "Poetry," published in 1855:

When we speak of this or that person as a *poet*, we do not mean simply to refer to his power of making verses, for one may be a poet who never wrote a line in his life; but we use the word to denote a certain elevation and subtilty of thought, by which the soul, as it were, approaches nearer to nature, and so gives to other souls a truer transcript of what this wondrous play of life unfolds to us, than common spectators could get for them-

22. Kenneth Walter Cameron, "Thoreau's Disciple at Walden: Edmond S. Hotham," *The Emerson Society Quarterly*, No. 26 (1 Quarter 1962), 34-45.

23. Sanborn, "Thoreau and Emerson," pp. 218-27.

selves. Thus, as he seems to create what he only translates out of the unperceived wealth of Providence, the poet among the ancients got the name of Maker (*ποιητής*), and, again, that of Sayer (*Vates*), because he uttered clearly what had before been but a dim thought in the minds of men. (*Poems*, 116)

Sanborn's "Poetry" is in fact a successful grafting of Emerson's argument in "The Poet" and elsewhere onto the tree of literary nationalism. Sanborn even seems to foreshadow the great book that was to appear six months after his essay, suggesting that the American poet "may come forth from the insane din of factories, blackened with the smoke of toil, and singing the songs which have come to him amid the noise of machinery and the weary bustle of cities" (*Poems*, 119). As a manifesto for the young Transcendental poet of 1855, "Poetry" leaves little to be desired.

Yet Sanborn was no Walt Whitman. Sanborn had called for a poet who would "not deal with Nature at second hand" (*Poems*, 119). His own poetry, however, shows no understanding of the Emersonian organic universe, and employs none of the Transcendental rhetoric that had informed this essay. The usual means of relation between man and nature is, instead, the pathetic fallacy, as in the first stanza of "The Return of Summer" (October, 1854):

When Autumn, lusty, vigorous, and gay,
Was garnering the increase of the year,
Sweating with cheerful toil, and, day by day,
Plucking the orchard's fruit, the corn's ripe ear,
The grapes that clustered 'neath the foliage sear,
And all his harvest plentiful and wide,—
With drooping head and dropping tear on tear,
The Old Year stood the fading woods beside,
And wrung his withered hands, and feebly moaned and cried.
(Poems, 30)

Sanborn's dominant poetic mode in the fifties is accurately represented by "The Return of Summer." In these poems, nature is an aspect, a scene. Usually nature is beautiful; often, it is personified: "Ah, mournful Sea! Yet to our eyes he wore / The placid look of some great god at rest" (*Poems*, 29). Later, Sanborn was to turn increasingly to polemics and occasional verse, at which he was somewhat more successful. But Sanborn was never able to write poetry that reflected any recognizable Transcendental doctrine. His own work reflected the popular poetry of the day and his early reading in Thomson, "Campbell's poems and Longfellow's earlier volumes," and other similar models (*R*, II, 257). He read Emerson's poems "as they were copied into the newspapers" (*R*, II, 261), but they did not touch his art. Only in some of his early occasional poems does Sanborn begin to parallel an aspect of Emerson's poetics. The sense of New England place communicated in, for example, the opening lines of "Hamatreya" may be compared to Sanborn's exercise in a far different key, the "Original Poem" of 1858:

In ancient days, before the date
 Of Everett's earliest speeches,
 'Tis said our sires were next of kin
 To hackmatacks and beeches;
 The same strong soil that bore the oak,
 Shot up a crop of giants,
 And turpentine and blood of man
 Confessed a close alliance. (*Poems*, 51)

Here Sanborn writes out of a common regional background with Emerson, not, obviously, out of a common aesthetic or philosophy.

V

THE Transcendentalists' attachment to Concord, in all its New England specificity, is what finally became the key to Sanborn's view of them. It was the regionalist contraction of Transcendentalism, the movement's identification with New England rather than its angle of vision toward the nation or the universe, that fascinated the aging Sanborn. History had, as we have seen, split him away from the dying movement in the fifties, even as he was being given a chance to join it. Sanborn had intended to go to Concord and write the Emersonian mystic's art, if not live the mystic's life. But this was not to be: Sanborn's life dramatically illustrates the destructive effect of the Civil War and its aftermath on Transcendentalism. The most vital part of his experience in the fifties in relation to the Transcendentalists themselves was the association of their Concord and its community with the pastoralism and deeply regional quality of his own youth. In recreating that Concord community in the later years of his life, Sanborn seems to return to the lost emotional verities of his own rural beginnings: "A husking-party, a game of checkers or of cards, a stroll in the pastures with young comrades, bearing guns and enlivened by dogs, tea parties and school examinations and evening debates in the district schoolhouse—such and a hundred other occasions for learning and practicing social good humor and the untaught lore of human nature, formed my character, such as it is, and made me, I dare say, a fair representative of myriads of my New England countrymen" (*R*, I, 32).

The counterpoint to the record of men seen and known and causes served is the "point of departure," the regional fact that made Sanborn "of Concord." He concludes his autobiography by coming "full circle," bringing his story back to where it began, "in the memories of rural New England" (*R*, II, 586). Amidst the regionalist enthusiasms current as he recollected the lost world of the Transcendentalists from 1880 onward, Sanborn colored his task with the emotional overtones of a lost New England world. In this aspect of Transcendentalism, Sanborn found a feeling he could share as deeply as he had shared John

D. R. WILMES

247

Brown's anger. It may well be that the books written in the last thirty-five years of Sanborn's life are as much memorials to the force of that regionalist attraction to Concord as to the energy of the passionate new beliefs held by men who walked its streets in the thirties and forties.

The Pennsylvania State University
Sharon, Pennsylvania