THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN 1840

FROM THE DIARY OF A NEW ENGLAND BOY

BY

RICHARD FREDERICK FULLER

(1824-1869)

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RICHARD FREDERICK FULLER was born in Cambridge in 1824 and died in Wayland, Massachusetts, in 1869. He was the youngest of the Fuller children and Margaret, the most distinguished of the family, was the oldest. The children were all born in the Fuller home on Cherry Street in Cambridgeport. It is now used as a Community Centre, and called the Margaret Fuller House—a fitting memorial to one who cared so profoundly for the betterment of the human race.

As we turn the closely written pages, where the ink is now faded and brown, we seem to go with Richard Fuller into the home of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and to take long walks through the Concord woods with Henry Thoreau. We hear once again an echo of the voice of Margaret Fuller, helping and advising her younger brother in his college life. We breathe again that atmosphere of plain living and high thinking which in our modern complex, hurrying life we seem to have lost.

It is difficult to know just what to share with others in the old volume. Perhaps, before we open it, you should know that the burden of a large family fell upon Margaret Fuller by the sudden death of her father, Timothy Fuller, at Groton, Massachusetts, in 1835, after a few hours of what was said to be Asiatic cholera. He was a brilliant lawyer and at different times a member of various branches of the State Government of Massachusetts, and from 1817 to 1825 he was a Representative in Congress. After his father's death, Richard, the youngest of the family, felt that he must give up going to Harvard and business. So, leaving his father's farm in Groton, he went to work in a store in Boston. Later it was possible for him to go to Harvard, from which he graduated in the class of 1844.

The following extracts from his journal were compiled by his daughter.

— Margaret Fuller Marquand

THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN 1840

. . . After father's death, mother sadly but resolutely applied herself to the dairy and the economies of a farmer's household. Margaret regularly instructed the younger children. Arthur was bright and Ellen was diligent, but I was rather slow of apprehension. Margaret tried to stimulate us to a noble ambition. In the study of history she would dwell upon what was excellent in distinguished characters and try to incite us to emulation. I was deliberate in my judgment and not impressible. I remember discouraging her after one of her historical talks, in which she urged us to be ambitious of attaining what was valuable in life, by remarking that I would never be ambitious. Cæsar was ambitious, and I knew it was not right. She despaired at that time to enlighten my slow as well as obstinate understanding and left me to my obscure fate.

On the whole we were by no means superior scholars; and, being the first Margaret taught, she measured us principally by her own achievements. She could not conceal from us, even if she tried, that our progress was unpromising and unsatisfactory. She openly reproached us with mediocrity of understanding.

I desired particularly to eschew Greek, which I declared was a dead, useless language, and nothing but a weariness to the flesh, but Margaret would not allow the point to be yielded to me. She was equally firm, too, in inducing mother to refuse the offer of a farming relative of considerable property and no children to adopt me as heir and make me a farmer. My special disgust for Latin grammar made me urge the acceptance. How

grateful I have since been to this good sister as I have enjoyed the delights of an enlarged education, and felt that I had acquired treasures which would be precious in eternity instead of spending my strength in what Carlyle describes with disdain as 'making a little earth greener.'

The following, year, when I was thirteen and Arthur fifteen, the farm was confided to our sole management. And I can proudly say it did not suffer.

One of the last winters of our stay in Groton, our housekeeping was suspended and all the family left Groton except myself. I boarded at a neighbor's, went to school, and took care of our cattle. I think Arthur was at Leicester Academy this winter, Margaret teaching school in Providence. Mother was seeking rest in boarding with the other children. When she departed she left me three dollars to serve as spending money for several months until her return. How large this sum seemed to me for such a purpose! And it proved very ample.

I come now to the time when we left Groton. After a good deal of effort we succeeded in selling the farm. I was almost fifteen and must soon take some decisive step in the career of life.

Margaret now rented a house in Jamaica Plain. We were obliged to rely upon what she earned by taking lady pupils into the house to make up the large deficiencies of the family income. Here I attended school, and made rapid progress, completing preparation for college during the summer. I was fitted for college, and my teacher strenuously advocated my graduating. But Margaret and mother thought I had better engage in mercantile life. Besides, my practical talent in negotiation and management on the farm indicated my fitness for business life.

My uncle, Henry H. Fuller, a distinguished Boston lawyer, got me a place in the store of one of his clients, a dry-goods jobber in number forty Kilby street, Boston. A store which had given me any enlarged views of commerce, which had been connected with foreign shipping or managed on a large scale, might perhaps have engaged my interest. But here I was boy to sweep and dust and carry heavy bundles over the city, in short to 'grunt and sweat under a weary life,' with no initiation into business methods. I was sadly disappointed; and yet for a long time I dared not think of giving it up, so much did I shrink from discouraging my friends and incurring the imputation of being unsteady.

The work in the store was more irksome than any I had hitherto done. It had not the variety nor the outdoor scenery of farm work. I was a mere subordinate, therefore my mind was not called out in planning as it had been on the farm, nor had I the interest which results from responsibility. My eye ached too for the face of nature to which I had become habituated, and whose changing beauties had contributed much to my happiness. Whatever reminded of the country had a charm for me. I sometimes stole down to Haymarket Square to regale myself with the smell of the loads of hay and to look at the slow oxen. I resolved to go to college, and to enter, if possible, far enough in advance to make up for the year I had lost.

I resolved also, if any efforts of mine could accomplish it, to do this at a very small cost. Margaret gave me a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, of Concord, that I might talk my affairs over him.

This interview is fresh in my mind.

I had small expectations from it, I regarded him as a great man and myself as a little one; I did not expect him to be willing to take a microscope to look at me or my affairs. I was thoroughly astonished when he came in and took me by the hand and with words soft and sweet as music talked with me like a brother. I saw that his gentleness made him great. There was no condescension. He believed in the innate greatness of men and had a prescience to forecast unfolded powers while they yet lay in the unconscious germ. Every sincere person, therefore, interested him, and he, in regard to the capacities common to every human being, already gave them credit for attainments which were far distant it the future.

My dread of the presence of a great man was at once taken away when I saw he almost seemed bashful himself. This was, however, only the demeanor of a perfect sincerity and simplicity, for he had the same confidence in himself which he generously extended to others.

He at once entered into my feeling about mercantile life and my desire for a sphere of activity not only more elevated, but better conformed to conscience. He told me such feelings as mine were shared by many.

One sentence particularly impressed me, as he said of the favored classes in society, with rhythmic sweetness: 'Their bread no longer gives them comfort; their cake is no longer sweet to them.'

I was delighted with my interview and encouraged to prosecute my studies in Concord. Margaret had always liked Concord: not only on account of the deep thinker who had there lighted his 'golden lamp,' but also for other friends, and for the natural beauties of many localities in that town.

She had wished father to go there when she purchased in Groton, but after looking he could find no suitable residence.

I hired a room in an old unpainted house, and here I lived and studied for five months. Except for a small portion of this time, the house had no occupant beside myself. The rent I paid was a mere trifle. Here I kept house in the cheapest and simplest style. I had a pint of milk each day, a loaf of brown bread on Saturday, and some potatoes. My breakfast was made on a thick piece cut out of the brown bread loaf, with a dipper of water. I then put some potatoes in the ashes of my peat fire, which were only baked at noon. These with milk then made me a wholesome and agreeable dinner. My supper was brown bread again with water. I purchased no meat, tea, coffee, or butter. My great object was by this rigid economy and by hard study to enter college at the next Sophomore turn, no poorer than if I had entered as Freshman when I went into a store, and thus make up for my last years.

I hoped this would restore the confidence of my mother and sister and friends, and make them still regard me as a youth of promise.

I studied fourteen hours a day and only occasionally exercised, when invited to walk by Henry Thoreau or Reverend Mr. Frost. I sometimes felt as if I must give out; but I would then call to mind my object and renew my resolutions. My condition was greatly amended by the sincere kindness of several persons in Concord.

I hesitated to go much to Mr. Emerson's for fear of being burdensome. I felt I had nothing to impart to him and ought not to take up his time. I disdained to make amends for my commons by his good table. But he complained of my not coming to see him; so I feared he might think

me not to appreciate his kindness, and hen he invited me to come every night to tea I concluded he must like to see me and I would feel free to come often. I did not, however, go to the extent of his invitation.

Mrs. Emerson was in the habit once a week of sending round pies to a good many objects of her benevolence. It was winter and some dozen pies she sent to various quarters were drawn by a boy on a large sled. This regularly stopped at my door with a pie for me. I am sure I was as grateful as any of the pensioners of her bounty and I think it did me as much good as any. It helped the brown bread wonderfully. Mrs. Samuel Hoar also was very mindful of me. She feared I had some prejudices against meat and butter which might injure my constitution. She often made and sent me a rich meat-pie which served as an excellent condiment for my food.

I also often took tea at her house and at that of Mr. Frost as well as Mr. Emerson's. I believe I never had better health in my life, and my spare diet accorded well with severe application.

For a short time I availed myself of the aid of a teacher of an Academy, to whom I recited. But I found my progress with him would not do and I gave him up. I had got to do the work myself. Miss Elizabeth Hoar, an admirable classic scholar, heard me recite once a week or oftener. She was of great help to me. She required elegance in translation as well as literal exactness.

In five months I reviewed my preparatory studies and went over the studies of the Freshman and the first half-year of the Sophomore, relying on making up the balance after my admission. I must except mathematics, which I pursued only as far as the first six months of the Freshman year; this study was voluntary after the Freshman year.

I did not really expect to get admitted, for it did not seem possible. But I meant to spare no possible effort and leave the event with Providence.

At the time for examination, I walked from Concord to Cambridge. But before I leave Concord I must pay my devoirs to the kind persons who have befriended me. Elizabeth Hoar I have spoken of. I think she seemed as much like an angel as any person I ever knew.

Mr. Emerson's family was quite as much a magnet for me as Mr. Hoar's. If I had been a distinguished person whose hospitality he was returning, Mr. Emerson and his family could not have treated me with more consideration. Though I have often met persons of celebrity at his home or his own personal friends, he never allowed them to cast me into the shade. Nor was his conduct singular toward me in this respect. Such was his admirable courtesy that there seemed to be 'no great and no small' in his presence. His politeness was perfect. No, it was not politeness; for that never could or did attain such entire, consideration for all others that persons of different degree in the same society felt perfectly satisfied. This was no labor with Mr. Emerson, but sprang spontaneously from his almost feminine delicacy and refinement. Besides, he not only served his guests, but made them serve him. Men were his books. I could see that clearly, and it often pleased me to notice these books read unconsciously to themselves. Indeed he made them their own enumerators, and as they talked it was a feast to me to watch the interest in his eyes. I could read too by what I saw reflected in his vision.

I was rejoiced when I could sit, as perhaps the disembodied do, as unnoticed observer. I gained much culture in this way.

Emerson did not like old or stale books, dictionaries, or spelling-books. Each of these human books had something piquant and peculiar about it. Generally it was quickly read—often a glance at the title-page and table of contents was enough; and then I wished it closed and needed not to open it again. Too often, however, the book would continue to read and reread itself after it was emeritus.

This was the principal drawback to Emerson's informers; and this infliction he could not escape. I could and did, by taking refuge in the society of Homer, Virgil, Cicero, and other savants.

A delightful remembrance is the fireside-reading by Emerson of his lectures. Elizabeth Hoar used to be there and she acted as chorus; so I lead to say nothing, and indeed I had nothing to say. I admired the coruscations of his style. I knew he would teach us to be self-reliant and brave. But beyond a spirit of exhilaration from his intellectual fireworks, shooting like star: from the spheres, what could a boy of my years apprehend of such profound idealism? It did, however, stimulate me to think. He once carried me to a neighboring town to hear him lecture. How different he seemed to me from the men who gathered to listen, but not to understand him! He was like Orion, stalking among the stars of that wintry night, stepping far above their heads.

Although among Emerson admirers, and with gratitude mingling with admiration, I do not claim to be of his school. Indeed I believe he is misjudged by those who fancy he has fitted a system of philosophy to

square men's minds withal. I find his writing stimulating to thought, but his system nowhere.

He was as truly a scholar as any person I have ever known. For he was always learning. You never could tell and you cannot to-day what he will acquire next. You think he does not love music, you think there is a music of soul as well as sound, a devotional sphere of which he has no cognizance. But in his development he is protean, and this maybe his next shape. Emerson is an iconoclast; that is his mission.

The idolatry of dead antiquity, the turning back to fall at great men's feet, instead of pressing forward to realize ourselves great lives—with all this he has waged an exterminating war. And who can compute what he has done in this respect as the vanguard of American literature.

Often I palliate some sentence of his by regarding it as a shot he sent at Pharisaism and Formalism; its meaning was not in itself, but ulterior in its purpose and aim.

I think these considerations are necessary to do justice to Emerson. A sweeter and a truer gentleman never graced our American circles. He is to be thanked for stimulating thought. He is to be followed—by me at least—no further than I find my own convictions to agree with his statements.

I must speak yet further of the household of Mr. Emerson. I have already paid a tribute of gratitude to Mrs. Emerson. Her devotional spirit has found much quickening in the thoughts of Swedenborg; but she was not alone and merely an æsthetic Christian, for the warm fountain of charity welled generously in her bosom and flowed abroad in rills of beneficence.

Well I remember, too, the dignified and matronly Madame Emerson, Mr. Emerson's mother. No gift of her son could make her gentle graces forgotten; and none more than he kept them in thoughtful remembrance. Two children of his household attracted my frequent observation. Waldo, a lovely boy of six or eight years, made an impression on me which time has not effaced. He was singularly grave and dignified in his bearing and like an angel in his thoughts—a child angel, to be sure, inquiring with a child's eye into the things of life. Henry Thoreau—of whom I shall soon speak again especially interested him by little feats of mechanic invention.

Waldo had a pure unconsciousness of the sins and sorrows of earth. He made once inquiries as to death and the grave which it seemed hard to answer to such unsullied thought as his. His gentle brow, pure as that of a seraph, we were not willing to trouble with the realities of this lower world. But his intelligence in its germ was grave and inquisitive, and the endeavor to present things in a suitable light to him disclosed our own need. This gentle boy was tenderly loved, but his singular childish dignity rather restrained affection from the usual caresses. His fair form was seen among us a little while and 'he was not, for God took him.'

I hardly dared enter their home after this unexpected stroke. What could I say to relieve, and dared I intrude upon such sorrow? I, however, received a note from Elizabeth Hoar, mentioning the time when 'they would lay the little statue away,' and I attended. Waldo's bearing toward his little sister interested me. She had a certain directness of character which marked her family resemblance to the dear little brother.

Henry Thoreau, to whom I have already alluded, furnished me a good deal of companionship. He was a college graduate of high culture,

but still more intimately versed in nature. He was thoroughly unselfish, truly refined, sincere, and of a pure spirit. His minute and critical knowledge of the everyday affairs of nature, as well as his poetical appreciation of her fleeting graces, not only attracted me, but helped my education. Thoreau abounded in paradox. This led me to review the grounds of opinions rather than change them.

I saw it was his humor, and his vane would whip round and set in the opposite quarter if the world should conform to his statements.

Of Indian relics and history he was a careful student, and of the savage character an inveterate admirer; he had a good deal to say too of the Indian over the sea, which I thought better unsaid, as his natural bent rather apprehended the North American than the Asiatic.

His books, like his conversation, have veins of pure gold. Time will probably dip out his paradoxes and present his nice appreciation and beautiful sense of nature.

The Reverend Mr. Frost was another friend of mine in Concord. I took some walks with him, as well as occasional dinners and teas at his house. He was as unlike the others as possible, and for this reason, when their new world overstrained my thought, I found his more conservative sphere a resting-place.

Let me now resume my walk from Concord to Cambridge. I had a package with me and a letter of recommendation to the President of Harvard. I was caught in a shower on the way, and this letter got wet and I had to present it in this condition with an apology. But President Quincy told me he was an old farmer and did not mind it.

I underwent my examinations with small expectations of success. But the way appeared to have been smoothed for me and I suspected my Concord friends of having spoken a good word beyond what was in the letter. All the professors receivers me graciously and seemed to require no information as to who I might be. Tutor Wheeler of Lincoln was a warm friend of Mr. Emerson, and I thought he must have exerted a kindly influence for me. At any rate, my herculean labors were brought to a close by success and to my astonishment, when I went to the President's office to learn the result, the only fault found with me was that I did not pronounce Latin correctly! So then I admitted in the middle of the Sophomore year.

Debating clubs were a valuable aid to me at college. A greater aid was the society of my beloved family. During my last two years in college, Margaret rented a house in Ellery Street, Dana Hill, Cambridge; and mother also made the house bright with her presence. Margaret's society was very valuable or, rather, it was invaluable to me.

She could not bear the distance of conventionalism, nor those walls which we build around ourselves insulating us from God and man. I have never known other conversation like hers either in degree or kind. It was not merely that it was superior—it was of a different species from other discourse. The mind soared, the heart expanded, the cheek glowed, and the eye was filled with light. Invigorating mountain air may affect the body as her conversation did the soul. She did not so much display herself as ourselves in her inspiring discourse, while the influence of her mind fell on us like genial sunlight quickening to conscious joy and life, which in itself half forgets the luminury to which it is indebted. The thought, in

leaving her company, was much less 'How remarkable she is!' than 'How remarkable I am! I had no idea my mind had such power, my tongue such eloquence, and my heart such ardor!' But when afterwards in solitude our thoughts were dispersed, disconnected, and ineffectual, or when conversation in ordinary life seemed like miserable degradation compared with hers, then we said to ourselves: 'Margaret must love a magnetic power and a certain elevation in discourse, more kin to a better world than to this.'

She had, to be sure, great eloquence and unrivaled words, but these powers were so much less than the effects she wrought with them that they attracted little comparative notice. They were too perfect to permit us to escape their Influence sufficiently to be spectators and admirers of their working.

I had the help of Margaret's rare critical powers in all my studies. She minted out the merits and demerits and the relative places of each writer in the great structure of literature. I was thoroughly satisfied with her reasoning and the results respecting books, and might have rested in her opinions with perfect confidence had she not habitually stimulated me to test them by my own thought.

Since I have lost her society, I have found her critical writings doubly precious, not only as furnishing a complete and impartial view of favorite authors and keeping their characters and works fresh in my mind, but as recalling those genial hours when she introduced me to the classic friendship of great and good books. It is with pleasure and admiration of her kindness that I recall the sacrifices she made to put me in the path of the beautiful and good. Her literary efforts, especially the 'Conversations'

which she conducted in Boston, produced almost invariably torturing headaches, in which her nervous agony was so great that she could not always refrain from screaming; yet she could not remit these efforts without giving up a home for mother and me, and she bravely endured them. She would besides stint herself to give me tickets to concerts of Beethoven's Symphonies, which she regarded as very elevating. I accepted the tickets, nor can I think it too chivalrously generous for her to bestow, or unsuitable for me to receive at her hands, an entertainment which could not be without a lasting influence on my character.

She would, sometimes, give me a very favorite book, though depriving herself of it by this means; and there could have been no more expressive token of her sisterly regard.

She did not bestow books that she had done with or found very dispensable, but only such as she loved as her own benefactors would she deign to give. I remember once when I was discussing a present I proposed to make and declared my purpose of having it costly of its kind, she expressed approbation and said if the thing was done it should be done handsomely and well, though, of course, not out of proportion to the occasion or my circumstances. One book she gave me was Elizabeth Barrett's poems, which were very dear to her. She accompanied the gift by saying she was glad she could believe me worthy of the book. She knew I should read it and reverence it as her book, which she had well read and which she bestowed because not able to buy me a new one. She particularly spoke at that time of the poem called 'The Swan's Nest.' How much I have loved Mrs. Browning's poetry since, not only for its benefit to me but for what it did for Margaret!

She spoke to me of Mrs. Browning with love and reverence and she seemed especially pleased when an author she admired was a woman. She often pointed out to me intellectual and moral excellency of her sex, and trained me to a respect for woman as the equal of man which I have never lost.

Books that she did not think it necessary to give she would place in my ands as tenant in common with her, and speak of leaving them to me when she should be no more. Thus she did Shakespeare, a fine edition which her Providence scholars had presented to her, and Wordsworth, made precious by her marks of emphatic approbation. These books I now have. Shelley, Coleridge, and Keats she also sought to interest me in. The first, in his beauty, was too disordered for my approbation. I admired a good deal of Coleridge, though I thought him sometimes needlessly subtle and occasionally bordering on the garrulous. She had a lady relation of Keats as one of her pupils—a girl who possessed the splendid eyes of the poet and resembled his likeness in the frontispiece of his poems.

The moral element transfused Margaret's whole character. Brilliancy, success, achievement, had yet one test which they must undergo before admission within the pale of her approbation: were they noble in their character, purpose, and aim? Without a moral grandness which conforms the human to the divine, many things and many people esteemed great among men were in her view pitiably small. All the energies of her life were bent to a high aim and she wished others to form and follow out a noble purpose in life.

Candor distinguished her intercourse, and the sincere words of truth were always to be expected from her undissembling lips. It was on this

account that the self-deceived, who avoided the searching of their hearts, did not find themselves pleasantly or comfortably situated in Margaret's society. To her own family she was as frank as affectionate. Margaret herself had a disinterestedness which indeed made the greatness of her character. When she was in Europe, a person here, whom I considered as troublesome and who had no claims upon her precious time, wished me to request her to select some engravings for him. I communicated the message, at the same time writing that I hoped she would not trouble herself about it. In her answer she gently reproved me for want of interest in this person's project, and reminded me that 'mankind is one.' This maxim was the watchword and formed the key to her life. The grand interests of mankind were the theme of her constant study and thought. She was intimate with current events, made herself familiar with her own and past times, and sought out the laws of man's develop as a social being. She was an ardent patriot and often sought to rouse me to a just appreciation of my privileges in this free, expansive country and my own corresponding duties. But no warmer tie than universal brotherhood could limit her interest in the welfare of her race. There was and still is a band of generous hearts fired with the same noble sentiment.

I cannot tell whether the common flame has been communicated from one to the other or fallen like the fire of Pentecost directly from Heaven.

I had many pleasant walks with Margaret in Cambridge. A grove on the riverside, where the cemetery is now located, was a favorite resort with us. Here I shared the sisterly confidence of one who I knew was bound to the whole human family with same kindred feeling and tender

benevolence which rendered her useful to me. On this account, regarding her as everybody's sister, I have spoken of her more warmly and freely here than might otherwise have been thought prudent. What I say, however, can do very little justice to her merits. I have met no one in life who had her inspiring influence upon me and upon others. I do not expect the like again in this narrow and conventional bit of our social state.

- A note on the text: from *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1923) pp. 216-224
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