

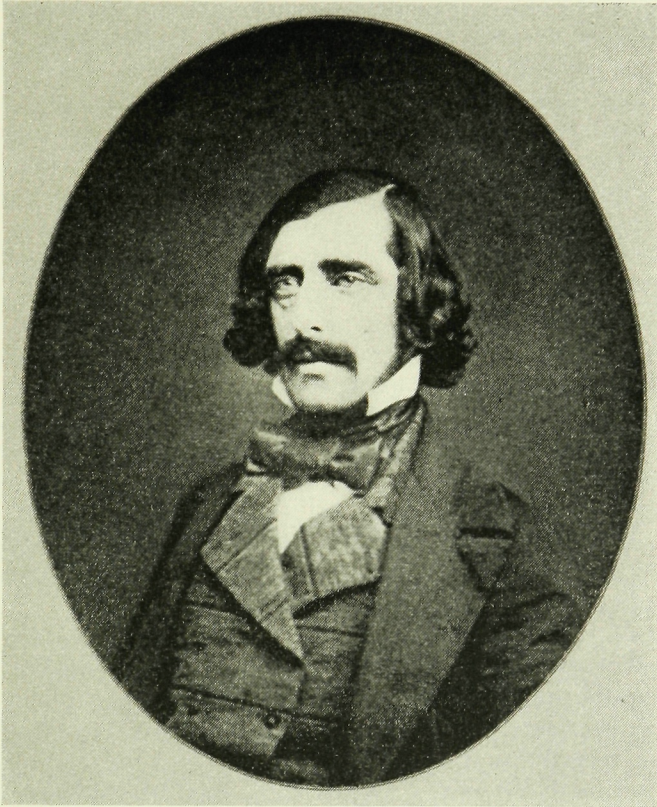


BOOKS AT BROWN

VOL. VIII NO. II

JANUARY, 1946

FRIENDS of the LIBRARY OF BROWN UNIVERSITY: PROVIDENCE, R. I.



CHARLES KING NEWCOMB
Class of 1837

"I would rather know his real mind than any
other person's I have met". R. W. EMERSON.

THE JOURNALS OF CHARLES KING NEWCOMB*

CHARLES KING NEWCOMB grew up in Newport and Providence and was graduated from Brown in 1837, at the age of seventeen. From 1841 to 1845 he lived at Brook Farm, where he was the center of an extraordinary interest. After Brook Farm, he returned to Providence and lived there with his mother until her death in 1865. The next six years were spent in Philadelphia, and the following twenty-three years, in Europe, where he died in 1894, at the age of seventy-four.

Save for the Brook Farm venture and three months' service during the Civil War with the Rhode Island Volunteers, Newcomb's life was uneventful in a public sense. Privately, however, he was extremely busy devoting his full energies to writing, but with no desire for immediate publication. Nothing of his, in fact, has heretofore been published, except a short piece in Margaret Fuller's *Dial*. Some people, Newcomb reasoned, write for their contemporaries; others write for posterity. It was among the latter that he chose to number himself. His work, he modestly thought, might be "curious if not valuable in coming times."

The writing took the form of a private journal which runs to approximately three million words. The manuscripts are now owned by the author's great-nieces, Miss Sarah N. Gallagher and Mrs. R. Edwards Annin of East Greenwich, Rhode Island, and are deposited for safe-keeping in the Brown University Library. Through the kindness of the owners, the manuscripts were made accessible several years ago to Mrs. Judith Parker Johnson, who prepared as a doctoral dissertation in English at Brown a volume of selections, together with a biographical and critical Introduction. Regarding Mrs. Johnson's edition as a work of uncommon interest and value, the Publications Committee, of which Dr. H. B. Van Hoesen is Chairman, sponsored its publication as the tenth volume of Brown University Studies and the first volume of a new Americana Series.

Prior to Mrs. Johnson's researches, probably no one except Newcomb's mother and Ralph Waldo Emerson had ever looked extensively into the unpublished manuscripts, though many biographers and historians have been intrigued by Emerson's comments upon them. Emerson, indeed, repeatedly referred to Newcomb and his writings in very laudatory terms. Newcomb, Emerson said, was "the subtlest observer and diviner of character" he had ever known. He would "rather know Newcomb's real mind than any other person's" he had ever met. New-

**The Journals of Charles King Newcomb*, edited by Judith Kennedy Johnson, Ph.D., Providence, Rhode Island, Brown University, 1946. 299 pp. \$4.00.

comb was his "best key to Shakespeare" and was "just beyond authorship." Newcomb's mind was, he felt, "far richer" than his own.

Although Mrs. Johnson's findings, at first or even second glance, seem scarcely to justify such high praise, they unquestionably reveal, along with the author's eccentricity, an extraordinary acuteness and originality. The style is crabbed, often tortured. Nothing is organized or rounded out into a literary whole. But Newcomb's comments on his reading—particularly on Shakespeare—his descriptions of nature, and his observations on the conduct of life are often penetrating. As a diarist, he obviously belongs to the school of Emerson, Thoreau, Alcott, and Hawthorne, whose writings in this kind, it should be recalled, also remained unpublished until long after their deaths: their diaries, too, were written for posterity. Although it is too early to say how far Newcomb's *Journals* will bear comparison with the now classic diaries of his New England contemporaries, Mrs. Johnson has given to the world enough to furnish an adequate basis for judgment, and by so doing has filled a long-recognized *lacuna* in New England literature and literary history. *The Journals of Newcomb* is an important contribution to our knowledge of the flowering and Indian summer, the growth and decay, of the New England Renaissance.

The Selections, which comprise about one-fortieth of the whole or about 75,000 words, are conveniently arranged under the author's favorite topics: "Arts and Letters," "Nature," "Society and Government," and "Man and Morals." In her Introduction, the editor not only interprets Newcomb's treatment of these subjects but writes revealingly of his life and personality. Newcomb was clearly, as we say today, a case for the psychologist, but it is doubtful if even a professing psychologist could exhibit the case more deftly than Mrs. Johnson. Newcomb was torn by more than one inner conflict. While longing for a wife, he allowed himself to be monopolized by his mother. And while cherishing the ideal of a life of "action," he gave his days and nights to "diarising." The two-fold tyranny of Mrs. Newcomb and "Newcomb on Morals, Politics, Shakespeare, and Nature," as he called his diary, he was powerless to resist. The result was an abnormal introversion.

But what is bad for the author may be good for literature. Emily Dickinson had more introversion than a mental hygienist would recommend. In her case, and in Newcomb's also, the fact is in no way prejudicial to the value of their writings.

Randall Stewart

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Library of Brown University is greatly indebted to Miss Sarah Newcomb Gallagher, Mrs. R. Edwards Annin, Jr., and Mr. Henry Mason Gallagher for the deposit within its walls of rich and varied material on, or by, Charles King Newcomb, graduate of Brown in the class of 1837.

This deposit, the principal part of which was made in June 1938, consists of four Commonplace Books, seven Journals dated between 1839 and 1860, letters, manuscripts, newspaper clippings, a map, the account book of Mrs. Rhoda Newcomb, the mother of Charles King Newcomb, and most important of all twenty-seven manuscript journals. These journals are entitled, *A Diary of Thought on Principles of Life*, and run from October 1851 through May 1871.

The presence of this material at the library made possible the recent publication of *The Journals of Charles King Newcomb*, edited by Judith Kennedy Johnson, Ph.D., Brown University.

In the fall of 1945 Miss Gallagher, Mrs. Annin, and Mr. Gallagher were most generous in loaning the Library additional material for an exhibition in connection with the publication of Mrs. Johnson's book. This included a daguerreotype of Charles King Newcomb; a miniature of his father, Lieut. Henry Newcomb; Emerson's *Essays*, Boston 1841, with the signature of Rhoda Newcomb and a letter from Emerson tipped in; Emerson's *Society and Solitude*, Boston 1870, inscribed by Emerson to C. K. Newcomb; Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, New York 1845, inscribed by Miss Fuller to Charlotte Newcomb, sister of Charles King Newcomb; and a notebook of Charles King Newcomb (Lectures upon Animal Anatomy and Physiology, by Professor Chace, 1836-37).

Miss Gallagher, Mrs. Annin, and Mr. Gallagher made a further contribution to the Library in December 1945 when they presented a photograph of a portrait of Mrs. Rhoda Newcomb.

DESIDERATA

Have any of the FRIENDS copies of the following which they would like to send back to the Library: Annual Report of the Librarian of Brown University for 1940 - 1941, Annual Report of the Librarian of Brown University for 1941 - 1942?

Address mail and make checks payable to

BROWN UNIVERSITY, *Friends of the Library, John Hay Library, Providence, R. I.*