THE INFLUENCE OF NEGRO SLAVERY ON
EMERSON'S CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

APPROVED:

Floyd Stovall
Major Professor

James H. Dougherty
Major Professor

Floyd Stovall
Director of the Department of English

Jack Johnson
Dean of the Graduate Division
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THESIS

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Leon Cashiel Matthis, B.A.

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FOREWORD

Freedom was the cornerstone in the founding of our nation. The American citizens' ardent and innate desire for freedom has largely shaped the history of their country from the planning of the Mayflower Compact, through the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution of the United States, and through the fighting of the periodic wars from the Revolutionary War to the end of World War II.

Each of these eras in American history has had its political, economic, religious, and educational authorities with their powers of leadership as well as their limitations. In my own opinion, the literary figure who was a most worthy heir of the erudition of his age, who could not deny the Calvinistic and Puritanical influence on his life, but who rose above the mediocre level of thinking during the Abolition, Civil War, and Reconstruction Periods to herald the doctrine of true liberty for every individual was Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Since freedom is ever a momentous problem and since Negro slavery was the political question that helped to enlarge Emerson's opinions of personal liberty, I chose to write my thesis on "The Influence of Negro Slavery on Emerson's Concept of Freedom." Before completing my research work, I
read Marjory M. Moody's article, "The Evolution of Emerson as an Abolitionist" in the March, 1945 issue of American Literature.

In introducing my subject in Chapter I, I have discussed the sources of Emerson's concept of freedom, including family and geographical influences, the influence of two political leaders, and the influence of democratic and religious ideas of his day. Then in Chapters II and III, I have tried to show how Emerson in his lectures and writings met the intermediate question of Negro slavery from 1820 to 1860, and then plunged into the immediate problems of the North and South during the Civil War and Reconstruction Eras. Finally, in the last chapter, I have discussed his philosophy of a wise freedom that might include a natural servitude but always be free of a forced servitude and a savage license.
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CHAPTER I

SOURCES OF EMERSON’S CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

Ralph Waldo Emerson has long ago established his place as first among American writers and philosophers. One of his great philosophies - that of personal liberty - may be found throughout his writings. In the case of a person so versatile in his thinking and so broad in his outlook, it is hard to determine the most important influences that helped to develop a particular component of his philosophy. In this chapter, nevertheless, I shall attempt to explain the four outstanding sources of Emerson's philosophy of freedom as I see them. First, are the more immediate influences that no one can deny, that of his family and that of the geographical location of his home. Second, I shall discuss the influence on his life of two great leaders in the government of his country - Jefferson and Jackson. The third and fourth sources are considerably less concrete and tangible, but to me they are much more important: the influence of the ideas of democracy and religion prevailing in America at that time.

Emerson’s own family had a great deal of influence in the forming of his character. In a direct line of many
Puritan divines, he was born the son of Reverend William Emerson, pastor of the First Unitarian Church in Boston.\textsuperscript{1} For eight generations, the family contained ministers. Reverend Peter Bulkeley was the first American representative of the family. His granddaughter was married to Reverend Joseph Emerson. It was their grandson, Reverend Joseph Emerson, who prayed daily that none of his descendants should ever be wealthy. His mother-in-law went to church while her husband was a corpse. Reverend William Emerson gave his wife's only pair of shoes to a poor woman. William and his brother, Joseph, were outstanding army chaplains. William's eldest son, also named William, was Ralph Waldo's father.

Emerson's father died at an early age leaving his wife with six small children. In spite of their great poverty, the children were very ambitious, probably due to the influence of their Aunt Mary Emerson who had a great deal of family pride. In the immediate family, there were all types of ill-fortunes: tuberculosis, insanity, feeble-mindedness, early deaths.

Nevertheless, the culture, oddities, and training of his Calvinistic forefathers and the hard financial time he had had as a child gave him a sturdy, practical, working philosophy and religion that made him hate the stereotyped forms from

\textsuperscript{1}James Elliot Cabot, \textit{A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson}, Vol. I, p. 1. I have tried to check all biographical facts in this thesis with Cabot, Emerson's authoritative biographer.
which he rebelled and with which he saw people become restless and dissatisfied.

Emerson was born in Boston on May 25, 1803; and from many points of view, he was typically a New Englander. The conservatism of Boston, this "hub of New England," had its influence on him. James Truslow Adams explained some of the reasons for this conservatism in the following passage:

Throughout all the varying phases of the economic and political life of New England one of the marked influences has been the geographical isolation of the section, which lies wholly to the south of St. Lawrence and to the east of the Hudson—the two great northern highways to the interior of the country. New Englanders, therefore, for most of their history, have looked eastward rather than westward, and their interest has been maritime rather than continental. ... New England possessed no great hinterland from which to draw and had but an ungenerous soil within her borders. Her carrying trade, therefore, was mainly made up from the export of a moderate agricultural surplus, of horses, lumber, and fish, and from the exchange of commodities between ports of other colonies and Europe in a circuitous trade. Even before the Revolution, Boston, by far the most important commercial center in New England, had begun to decline rapidly as compared with her growing rivals, New York and Philadelphia. For forty years the population of the Massachusetts capital had remained almost stationary at about fifteen thousand, whereas that of New York had passed twenty thousand and Philadelphia numbered almost thirty-five thousand. 2

Emerson himself commented:

New England lies in the cold and hostile latitude, which by shutting men up in their houses and tight and heated rooms a large part of the year, and then again shutting up the body in flannel and leather defrauds the human being in some degree of his relations to external nature; takes from the muscles their suppleness, from the skin its exposure to the air; and the New

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England, like every other Northerner, lacks that beauty and grace which the habit of living much in the air, and the activity of the limbs not in labor but in graceful exercise, tend to produce in climates nearer the sun. Then the necessity, which always presses the Northerner, of providing fuel, many clothes and tight houses and much food against the long winter, makes him anxiously frugal, and generates in him that spirit of detail which is not grand and enlarging, but goes rather to pinch the features and degrade the character.  

Thus we can understand why it was that the people of New England became so static and why Emerson's modern philosophies seemed almost radical to them at times. We can understand further why he had occasion to write of Massachusetts: "From 1790 to 1820, there was not a book, a speech, a conversation or a thought in the State."  

Emerson had not only a geographical but also an historical inheritance. Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy paved the way for his famous declarations: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction . . . that imitation is suicide," and "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."

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3The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson, Vol. XII, pp. 195 - 197. Later references to this collection will be under Complete Works.

4Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, Vol. VIII, p. 339. Later references to this collection will be under Journals.


6Ibid., Vol. II, p. 47.
Many of the rituals that had been used and the customs that had been followed by the Federalists were practically ignored by Jefferson from the time he was inaugurated. The chief reason for his resorting to annual written messages rather than employing the annual speech to Congress was to avoid any regal attitude toward the people. Preferring to ride horseback unattended through the capital city, he did not use the carriage of state. Simplicity characterized his inauguration. After staying in a Washington tavern as a private citizen, he walked to the Capitol where he took the oath of office.\textsuperscript{7} By increasing the national domain one hundred forty per cent, the Louisiana Purchase, one of the foremost achievements of Jefferson's administration, broadened the horizon of the American nation politically and philosophically, even in conservative New England.\textsuperscript{8} Woodbridge Riley explains this relationship of politics and philosophy by showing how the Anglo-Americans rebelled against the Puritan divinity of the seventeenth century where man's chief interest was God and the king was the center of interest in the government; how in the eighteenth century people were interested in both man and God, and how likewise in politics the king and the people were of great importance; and finally, how the philosophers' interest in the nineteenth century

\textsuperscript{7}John Spencer Bassett, \textit{A Short History of the United States}, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{8}Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 235.
was transferred to nature and the politicians' main interests were in the people themselves. 9

Jefferson was outstanding for his originality of thought. The period from the death of Edwards to the birth of Emerson was covered by Jefferson's life, 1743 to 1826. Primarily he was interested in political and social questions; but a great deal of his time was devoted to a study of religion, art, history, and natural science. 10 Jefferson once declared: "I have sworn hostility to every form of mental slavery over the human mind." 11 His idea of education was to present students with selected literature and through a proper reading program draw them into unorthodox ways. 12

Many New England clergymen believed that with Jefferson's accession to the presidency the approach of the antichrist was heralded. They were afraid that by his replacing the Federalists by Democrats the stability of government would be threatened. However, the changes he made were gradual. 13

Being very proud of the work he had done toward the liberation of his people, Thomas Jefferson asked that the following inscription be put on his tombstone: "Author of

9 Woodbridge Riley, American Thought from Puritanism to Pragmatism, pp. 1-2.

10 Harvey Gates Townsend, Philosophical Ideas in the United States, p. 70.


12 Riley, op. cit., p. 78.

the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and the Father of the University of Virginia."\(^{14}\)

In Emerson's writings we find that he recognized the value of Jefferson. In a letter to Edward Bliss Emerson, he referred to Thomas Jefferson as one of "our distinguished countrymen."\(^ {15}\) Again in the Letters we find: "What a fine book Jefferson is."\(^ {16}\) Emerson quoted from a letter by Jefferson to Judge Roane about his fear of the federal judiciary. Apparently Emerson agreed with Jefferson, but he made no comment.\(^ {17}\) At Jefferson's death, Emerson made this notation in his Journals:

Yesterday I attended the funeral solemnities in Faneuil Hall in honor of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. The oration of Mr. Webster was worthy of the august occasion.\(^ {18}\)

Emerson's admiration for Jefferson involved a loyalty that would overshadow any of the trite criticisms of him:

To a right aristocracy, to ... Jefferson ... to the men, that is, who are incomparably superior to the populace, showing them the way they should go, doing for them what they wish done and cannot do; - of course

\(^{14}\)Riley, op. cit., p. 77

\(^{15}\)The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, edited by Ralph L. Rusk, Vol. I, pp. 64-65. Letters to Edward Bliss Emerson, Cambridge, June 12, and Boston, June 17, 1818. Later references to this collection will be under Letters.


everything will be permitted and pardoned, - gaming, drinking, fighting, luxury.19

In a letter to his aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson, he seemed, however, to have outgrown his earlier ideas of perfection in Jefferson and was seeking for a truer example of a democratic life:

I think respectfully enough of Statesmen, - yet I have been reading Jefferson & can't but think that he and his great mates look little already, from this short distance where we stand, & he would be sorry to know my feelings about their ambition. -20

Freedom of thought advanced further during Andrew Jackson's presidency. Many United States citizens went to Washington to see this man, dubbed the "people's champion," take the oath of office on March 4, 1829. He walked with friends from a hotel and up Capitol Hill, and after the inauguration rode horseback to the White House, where a reception was open to all who wished to attend.21

Jackson's determination and his industry attracted Emerson's attention. He wrote:

General Jackson was a man of will, and his phrase on one memorable occasion, 'I will take the responsibility,' is a proverb ever since.22

President Jackson's connections with his political party aroused Emerson's disapproval:


21Bassett, op. cit., p. 392.

If I want a favor of the President of the United States I need not cultivate his personal kindness, I will ask it of his President, the bad party in the country, and if they say yea, I shall be sure of Mr. Jackson's bow and smile and sign manual. 23

Both Jefferson's and Jackson's political strategy seemed to bother Emerson:

Men expect from good whigs put into office by the respectability of the country, much less skill to deal with Mexico, Spain, Britain, or with our own malcontent members than from some strong transgressor, like Jefferson or Jackson, who first conquers his own government and then uses the same genius to conquer the foreigner. 24

Even though Emerson was far from putting his stamp of approval on the many things that Jefferson and Jackson did, their crude manner of execution, and their short-sighted vision of the needs of the American people, he was indebted to them for their attempt to make the common people realize that they had a voice in the government, and for provoking his thinking along the line of democracy and thus preparing the way for his gospel of universal freedom of the spirit.

Emerson's views of democracy grew out of the needs of the day, and they were obviously more mature than those held by politicians like Jefferson and Jackson. Emerson realized the failure of American democracy when he said "... with us [it] is charged with being malignant, and I think it seems aimless, selfish resistance, pulling down, and wild wish to


have a physical freedom, - but for what? Only for freedom; not to any noble end."²⁵ In referring to affairs in Kansas, he spoke thus:

But this is Union, and this is Democracy; and our poor people led by the nose by these fine words, dance and sing, ring bells and fire cannon, with every new link of the chain which is forged for their limbs by the plotters in the Capitol.²⁵

Knowing that many people misunderstand the meaning of true democracy, he tried to define the term, speaking in the negative:

When I spoke or speak of the democratic element, I do not understand that ill thing, vain and loud, which writes lying newspapers, spouts at caucuses and sells its lies for gold, but that spirit of love for the general good whose name this assumes. There is nothing of the true democratic element in what is called Democracy; it must fall; being wholly commercial. I beg I may not be understood to praise anything which the soul in you does not honor, however grateful may be the names to your ear and your pocket.²⁷

Many situations and events caused the essayist to shy away from democracy. In surveying democracy in New York, he began to doubt whether it was the right thing and to wonder what end it had.²³ He often saw the democrat after a promotion become a conservative.²⁹ The two parties differed only in age, he said.³⁰ Democratic meetings were so coarse that

³⁰Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 256-257.
he was afraid if he actually saw them his desire for longevity would be destroyed. 31

One of the greatest arguments against democracy as it existed in our country, Emerson thought, was that some of the best qualified people were not putting their highest interests and loyalty behind its noblest purposes. He wrote in his Journals:

The objection of practical men to free institutions is that responsibility is shirked. Every power is exerted by a committee which is every moment composed of new persons. If you should take an Irishman out of the street and make him despotic in your town, he would try to rule it well because it was his own. But these rotating governors and legislators go for their own interest, which is the only permanency they know. They go for their party, which is much more permanent than their office, and for their contract or claim, or whatever private interest. 32

Again he wrote:

The philosopher, the poet, or the religious man... can rarely accept the persons whom the so-called popular party propose to him as representatives of these liberalties. They have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it. 33

In speaking of aristocracy, he told how democracy had failed in our republican government as the French Revolution had failed to abolish poverty, inequality, and tyranny. 34

Seeing the failure of democracy in America, he still felt the need of a democratic society. The antagonism between the low and the high, the rich and the poor, the conservative and

34 Ibid., Vol. X, pp. 34-35.
the democrat brought about this realization of failure. Emerson felt that a practical democracy was more nearly possible in America than in any other place because most of the people were laborers. It was more the form of government we needed, he thought, because it is in accordance with the religious sentiment of the time. Once in speaking of its being undesirable, he said, "... it is indispensable to resist the consolidation of all men in a few men." The identity of man and nature gives all men equal rights; thus, the universe demands a democracy, he explained.

In showing the need of a democracy rather than an aristocracy, Emerson said that "... in a Democracy, every movement has a deep-seated cause." This deep-seated cause is in the gospel of individualism and self-reliance which he perpetually preached: "The root and seed of democracy is the doctrine, Judge for yourself. Reverence thyself." Further he explained what he meant by expression of true democracy when he felt that an English view of our democracy, published in the Quarterly Review, was overrating our social system. He wrote:

The only ambition which truth allows is to be the servant of all. The last shall be first.

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37 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 207.  
41 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 369.  
42 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 509.
The religious teachings in America formed a fourth and a very strong influence on his life. The concept of God changed radically from Calvinism to Transcendentalism. Calvinism was probably the most powerful so far as Emerson was concerned. Arminianism marked the trend away from absolutism. Deism, Unitarianism, and Transcendentalism following Arminianism bring us up to Emerson.\textsuperscript{43} I shall discuss these five developments in relation to Emerson, using his writings as the source material.

The good qualities of Calvinism were never denied by Emerson. He praised the culture of Calvinism:

\begin{quote}
I trace to this deep religious sentiment and to its culture great and salutary results to the people of New England; first, namely, the culture of the intellect, which has always been found in the Calvinistic Church.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Another time he spoke in favorable terms of its practicability in a letter to John Boynton Hill:

\begin{quote}
Presbyterianism and Calvinism at the South, at least makes Christianity a more real and tangible system and give it some novelties which were worth unfolding to the ignorance of men. And this, I think, is the most which can be said of orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Its substantiality was another characteristic of Calvinism which he thought was good to a certain extent.\textsuperscript{46} He referred

\textsuperscript{43} Floyd Stovall, \textit{American Idealism}, pp. 38-39.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Complete Works}, Vol. XII, p. 195.


to the fact that some critics believed Calvinism to be the
one safeguard of our society.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. III, p. 211.} His own period in comparison
with the Calvinistic Age was frivolous and ungirt.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. X, pp. 203-204.} Writing
to James Elliot Cabot, he expressed a regret that his friend
had not had the influence of Calvinism in his childhood.\footnote{\textit{Letters}, Vol. V, p. 145. To James Elliot Cabot, Concord, May 10, 1859.}
This tribute was paid to his aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson:

> Then it [Miss Emerson's character] is a fruit of
Calvinism and New England, and marks the precise time
when the power of the old creed yielded to the influ-
ence of modern science and humanity.\footnote{\textit{Complete Works}, Vol. X, p. 399.}

Emerson was amazed, nevertheless, that so many people
could have been strengthened by the grim system of Calvinism.\footnote{\textit{Journals}, Vol. X, p. 155.} Particularly was he astonished that many of the great mathema-
ticians were Calvinistic and unable to unite science with
their poetic spirits.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. VIII, p. 32} Detecting the infantile church in-
struction of the Calvinists, Emerson was not pleased to see
the powerful, but complexional, faith dominate the temperament
of an individual to an extent that he was inconvertible:

> In general, I recognize, in stagecoach and elsewhere,
the constitutional Calvinist, the inconvertible. And in
all companies we find those who are self-accused, who live
in their memories and charge themselves with the seven
deadly sins daily, like my Queen without guile [his wife];
and the other class, who cumber themselves never with
contrition, but appeal from their experience always hope-
fully to their faith.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. VI, p. 208.}
Further he explained this situation by saying that a Calvinist denied the inner light by which the intellect lives, thus making it impossible to communicate God's will to him. 54

Noting the marked impression that Calvinism had made on Lidian's (his wife's) life, Emerson saw the great need of a philosophy that included activity, freedom, and optimism. In his Journals, he made the following observation of her:

Lidian remembers the religious terrors of her childhood, when Young tinged her day and night thoughts, and the doubts of Cowper were her own; when every lightning seemed the beginning of conflagration and every noise in the street the crack of doom. I have some parallel recollections at the Latin School when I lived in Beacon Street. Afterwards, what remained for one to learn was cleansed by books and poetry and philosophy, and came in purer forms of literature at College. These spiritual crises no doubt are periods of as certain occurrence in some form of agitation to every mind as dentition or puberty. Lidian was at that time alarmed by the lines on the gravestones. 55

Besides being impressed with the power of Calvinism, Emerson was infuriated with the doctrines and practices of the religion. This "sulphurous Calvinism" 56 painted death as a terrible experience. 57 The doctrines relating to punishment and reward, love and hate, right and wrong were "narrow, ignorant and revengeful, yet devout." Quoting from Burnap in the Cambridge Divinity School, he listed the legs on which

56Ibid., Vol. V, p. 245.
Calvinism stood: "Dr. Watts's Psalms and Hymns, Milton's Paradise Lost, and the Westminster Catechism, - or was there a fourth, - King James's translation of the Bible?" Emerson felt that the Calvinists placed too much emphasis on obeying the letter of the law when the letter of the law was not enough:

It is more than I can do now to keep the commandments. Yet they want more than these. I can't keep these. Can they? do they? I think they have no idea how much is contained in them. Yea, Calvinism lays the salve to this very sore, and says, Because you can't keep them, here is Blood to expiate; only give your assent; and it produces no higher level of obedience in the multitude than in the professors of another faith. ... Try to keep the ten commandments a day. You will find they mean enough literally, Well, then take them with the New Testament exposition and keep them from the heart.

The fatalism that can be seen in Calvinism was objectionable to Emerson. Its doctrines are not self-evident as in the case of real spiritual truths.

All of his writings are full of his personal reaction to Calvinism. This "imperfect version of the moral law" stood only as a "mere shell" in his day. New England orators, who as children had gone through the hard drill of Calvinism, seemed to be more sarcastic than any of the other assemblymen.

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60 Complete Works, Vol. VI, p. 5.
63 Ibid., Vol. III, p. 323.
The vindictiveness of Calvinism caused him to write:

Every nation is degraded by the goblins it worships instead of this Deity. . . . Purgatory, the Indulgences, the Inquisition of Calvinism are examples of this perversion. \(^{65}\)

The first departure from the predestination of Calvinism to free will was made by the Arminians. Emerson wrote of the Arminians:

The young men were born with knives in their brains, a tendency to introversion, self-dissection, anatomizing of motives. The popular religion of our fathers had received many severe shocks from the new times; from the Arminians, which was the current name of backsliders from Calvinism, sixty years ago. . . . \(^{66}\)

Deism, which was also a breaking away from determinism, was introduced during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) by the English Army. \(^{67}\) From that time to about the year 1776, deistic beliefs were giving activity, freedom, liberty, optimism to the discontented Puritans. Before Emerson had developed his more mature philosophy of transcendentalism, which included a belief the deity was so much a part of nature that the two could hardly be distinguished, he was rather deistic, believing perhaps that the powers of the deity were limited by the law of nature. That is the reason I think that during that period of his life he had such a great love and admiration for nature. \(^{68}\) At that time he wrote:

\(^{67}\)Adams, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 75.
\(^{68}\)Journals, Vol. V, p. 58.
The thermometer, the microscope, the prism are little deists. They stand like pagans, have a very pagan look when the creed and catechism begin; they are little better than profane; and so a doctor of medicine, a chemist, an astronomer do never remind one of Athanasius. 69

A fourth development, Unitarianism, was very ethical but denied the Trinity and preached the salvation of society as well as the individual. 70 Emerson could agree with some of the Unitarian doctrine: "I am so much a Unitarian as this: that I believe the human mind can admit but one God, and that every effort to pay religious homage to more than one being goes to take away the right ideas." 71 When a Unitarian minister preaches a faith and truth deeper than the creed of any church, all denominations will want to claim him. 72

Even though Emerson thought that Unitarianism was a step forward, he saw the immaturity of its teachings:

This way of thinking [Transcendental] falling on Roman times, made Stoic philosophers; falling on despotic times made patriot Catos and Brutuses; falling on superstitious times made prophets and apostles; on popular times, made protestants and ascetic monks, preachers of Faith against the preachers of Works; on prelatical times, made Puritans and Quakers; and falling on Unitarian and commercial times, makes the peculiar shades of Idealism which we know. 73

However, the Unitarians who ripened out of Calvinistic teachings, he thought, were the most powerful. 74

Even though religion had progressed to Unitarianism, its pale forms were due to the many religious traditions that had been lost through the various ages.\textsuperscript{75} One of the weaknesses he could see in its adherents was that they complained of being excluded from the communion table by the Calvinists, rather than feeling self-sufficient.\textsuperscript{76} He wrote of the sham in Unitarianism:

Luther would cut his hand off sooner than write these against the pope if he suspected that he was bringing on with all his might the pale negations of Boston Unitarianism. I will not now go into the metaphysics of that reaction by which in history a period of belief is followed by an age of Criticism, in which wit takes the place of faith in the leading spirits, and an excessive respect for forms out of which the heart has departed becomes more obvious in the least religious minds. I will not now explore the causes of the result, but the fact must be conceded of as frequent recurrence, and never more evident than is our American church. To a self-denying, ardent church, delighting in rites and ordinances, has succeeded a cold, intellectual race, who analyze the prayer and psalm of their forefathers, and the more intellectual reject every yoke of authority and custom with a petulance unprecedented. It is a sort of mark of probity and sincerity to declare how little you believe, while the mass of the community indolently follow the old forms with childish scrupulosity, and we have punctuality for faith, and good taste for character.\textsuperscript{77}

The culmination of these four developments of thinking - Calvinism, Arminianism, Deism, and Unitarianism - was Transcendentalism, in which Emerson was most prominent. Even though the origin of the name Transcendentalism is uncertain,\textsuperscript{78} it

\textsuperscript{75}Complete Works, Vol. X, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{76}Journals, Vol. V, p. 243.
\textsuperscript{77}Complete Works, Vol. X, pp. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., Vol. X, pp. 342-343.
may be that Emerson agreed it meant "a little beyond."\(^{79}\)

On board a ship with several missionaries who were very enthusiastic about their own church doctrines, he wrote to his wife voicing his own transcendental belief: "But the liberal ocean sings louder and makes us all of one church."\(^{80}\)

Every person, whether rich or poor, high or low, has a way of expressing his philosophy, which is inevitably and unconsciously the transcendentalism of life.\(^{81}\) Emerson thus explained the language of transcendentalism:

> Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture.\(^{82}\)

Emerson painted a portrait of an undesirable transcendentalist: reclusive,\(^{83}\) doubtful,\(^{84}\) disinclined to civic-mindedness,\(^{85}\) and critical.\(^{86}\) However, a well-matured transcendentalist is a great lover and worshipper of beauty.\(^{87}\)

His belief is quite inclusive:

> The Transcendentalist adopts the whole connection of spiritual doctrine. He believes in miracle, in the perpetual openness of the human mind to the new influx of

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light and power; he believes in inspiration, and in ecstasy.88

Realizing that his age was the most philosophical of all ages and that transcendentalism was no child's play,89 he wished that two or three great people who were devoted to the cause by spirit and power could be found.90

Emerson with his transcendentalism was the salvation of the thinking of the American people because Calvinism, Arminianism, Deism, and Unitarianism had played out. Transcendentalism inculcated the good points of the earlier philosophies of America with "the faith of the seventeenth century, the reason of the eighteenth, the feeling of the nineteenth." His faith involved self-reliance; his reason, nature; his feeling, fellowmen.91

In concluding this study of the sources of Emerson's concept of freedom, I recognize the influence that his family, his New England home, outstanding political leaders, and prevailing philosophies and religious movements had on his life. With enough of the conservatism of New England and his family and with adequate dislike for the political and religious shams of the day, Emerson became a leader in the "New England Renaissance." Delighting in leading the American people into

89 Journals, Vol. VI, p. 98.
90 Ibid., Vol. VI, 521.
91 Riley, op. cit., p. 140.
new avenues of thought and abandoning their materialistic standards, he influenced them to believe more and more that each person has a right to somewhat plan his own life. This new freedom of thought which had begun to take root in the philosophy of the American people was expressed rather crudely in the political question of Negro slavery. Nevertheless, in the next two chapters we shall see how the periods of Abolition, Civil War, and Reconstruction, gave rise to a rapid development of Emerson's ideas of liberty.
CHAPTER II

EMERSON AND THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT

By nature Emerson was constructive rather than destructive. He was not primarily interested in politics; but as the problem of Negro slavery became more and more of a vital issue, he would not shy away from his duty of guiding the American people in their thinking regarding the handling of these oppressed slaves.

The first mention Emerson made of slavery in his writings was in the 1820's. As politics were taboo in the church at that time and as the problem of Negro slavery was not too pressing, he gave little space in his works to the treatment of the subject. During the 1830's, still less was said about the matter, however, because of major disturbances in his own life. It was in 1832 that Emerson entirely gave up his career as a minister of the church on account of his personal attitude toward the administering of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The latter part of the 1820's and early part of the 1830's not only included this upset but also the death of his wife and his brothers, Edward and Charles. It was not until the year 1841 that he seemed to have recovered enough from the blows to enter into the hated controversy of the Negro question. In the 1850's Emerson had developed into a full-fledged
abolitionist, not by choice but by lot. My treatment of this chapter will include a discussion of Emerson's attitude toward Negro slavery during the four decades 1820-1860, taken chronologically.

Even by May, 1822, Emerson was so far removed from the Negro situation that he could not believe his home city of Boston could ever enter into riots over slavery. At that time, he wrote to John Boynton Hill, "A mob is a thing which could hardly take place here. . . ."¹

That same year, remembering the recent problem [in 1820] of Missouri's entering the Union as a slave state, Emerson penned his vision of slavery. In his dreams, he was on the shores of the African River of Golden Sands at dawn. Lions roared in the distance, and a leopard came to the water to drink. As the leopard attempted to swim to the farther side of the river, an arrow was shot into his head, and he was dead as he floated ashore. The natives rushed from their cane huts singing a sun hymn. They carried nets in their hands prepared to fish. A beautiful bird sang cheerful tunes to the happy families. Foreigners rushed out from the forest upon the people, capturing and removing them to strange lands throughout the world where they were sold into slavery. In his vision, Emerson attempted to save the people from their

promised bondage but could never overtake the captors. The noise of the bound captives' hideous howls were louder than the murmur of the ocean. Having been taught that man is made in the image of God and that human souls should become perfect as Christ is perfect, Emerson in his dream realized that there were weak links in our American philosophy which needed to be strengthened.

In a note attached to this story, Emerson acknowledged the design of Providence that there be an inequality among races, and among the people within a race. The reason for this plan is that some people or groups should be followers. This relationship of master and servant makes for a universal dependence of one man upon another. A distinction between natural servitude and forced servitude (slavery) is drawn with the faculty of the will. Whatever one's station in life at birth is, is due to fortune, Emerson explained. Weaker races and the lower classes are under our subjection because of their lack of reason, adaptability to our wants, and value to masters when domesticated. Emerson spoke first of animals under these three circumstances, and then applied the same situation to negroes, where the boundary lines became narrower and narrower until the mingling of the classes was accomplished when the limits of the classes were eventually lost. Admitting that some negroes are happier and more prosperous as slaves than as freemen in America, Emerson said that was the only good point of slavery, which he called "the hydra" and
also "the worst institution on earth." He concluded this long discussion on slavery by saying that any free man offends God by taking liberty away from another man.²

The next year in a letter to his Aunt Mary he asked her what she thought became of the slave who was born in chains living in stripes & toil, who has never heard of Virtue & never practised it and dies cursing God and man?³

In August, 1824, Emerson in his disgust of idle talk of servants, again voiced his belief in natural servitude when he wrote that we "are all the disciples and slaves, & your only true Masters & Emperors are Time and Chance."⁴

Then for almost two years he let the subject rest so far as his writings were concerned. At that time, in a sermon "Pray Without Ceasing," he explained that "our free agency consists in this, that we are able to reach those sources of gratification, on which our election falls." If this is true, he said, the person who shuts his eyes to the slave's misery will some day reap sorrow and disappointment."⁵ Calling slavery the "debtor to all Justice human and divine," Emerson advised that the nations band together to abolish

⁴Ibid., Vol. I, p. 143. To Sarah Ripley, Roxburg, Massachusetts, August 1, 1824.
⁵Young Emerson Speaks, edited by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., pp. 5-6.
the slave traffic. It was just a few months later in St. Augustine that he first saw people buying negroes for slaves. A few weeks later, he recorded the paradoxical religious attitudes of the American people after he attended a meeting of the St. Augustine Bible Society in the same place that a slave-auction was being held:

And almost without changing our position we might aid in sending the Scriptures into Africa, or bid for "four children without the mother" who had been kidnapped therefrom.

Battling constantly with the condition of his own health, Emerson, who was beginning to be distressed about the question of Negro slavery disgustingly wrote in a letter, "Have you read that contemptuous chapter of Rousseau's Emile upon the Slavery of the Sick?"

Thus, this period of the 1820's was rather uneventful. However, Emerson was beginning to realize and to try to impress his readers with the fact that forced servitude of any kind was slavery and was in direct disobedience to God's will. It was here that he received his first glimpse of Negro slavery in the South. Already his general ideas of slavery were beginning to take enough shape that when he is eventually driven into the controversy over Negro slavery, he will have a good sense of judgment in the matter.

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7 Edward Waldo Emerson, Emerson in Concord, p. 34.
In Emerson's first reference to slavery in the 1830's, he called such movements as the abolition of slavery a "fruit of the life and teaching of the lowly Nazarene." 10 Confessing that he had no apology for the holder or trader of slaves and that he did not want to live in a slave country, Emerson explained that sin is the only slavery that Christianity recognizes. 11 One of the worst of the violations of nature in slavery that Emerson could see at this period was the horrible middle passage, which grieved Lidian, his wife, very much. 12 As Emerson was beginning to awaken to the horrors of negro slavery, he was impressed by various aspects of the question. The ignorance of theoretic slave-drivers and kidnappers was very disgusting to him. 13 Realizing the bad economy of the slavery system, Emerson declared that the farmer who worked his own land was the true abolitionist because his products were far superior to those of forced labor. 14 One of the remarkable characteristics of the human body that Emerson could note in his study of the slavery question was its plasticity made possible by its self-adapting strength. Crucifixions come only to the barbarous who have gratifications that a civilized person would not understand. Emerson philosophized:

10 Young Emerson Speaks, p. 198.
12 Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 302-303.
Most suffering is only apparent. We fancy it is torture; the patient has his own compensations.\textsuperscript{15}

At the close of this second rather obscure decade of his fight against Negro slavery, Emerson was more impressed than before with the fact that this great national curse was beginning to bring a great deal of suffering to humanity.

The year 1841 saw a revival of Emerson's interest in slavery. In lecturing on the times, he said that their age would be noted as a reform period and that the leaders of the crusade against Negro slavery were worthy successors of such people as Luther, Knox, and Wesley. Disturbed by the defense that slave-traders were building for themselves, Emerson urged that all neutrals actively take sides on the question of negro slavery.\textsuperscript{16} Emerson commented on Cuba and slavery when he wrote at this time of "Man The Reformer." Only men slaves were used on the Cuban sugar plantations; and because of the miserable living conditions under which they existed, one out of every ten died each year. Then reverting back to the American slavery, Emerson described it as a system of selfishness, distrust, and concealment. Everybody was responsible for the sins of the trade, but no man felt called upon to shoulder the responsibility of obliterating the vice for all people.\textsuperscript{17} At this time he wrote of freedom of religion,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 415.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., Vol. I, p. 269.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 232-233.
\end{itemize}
saying that freedom is available to a slave who has the proper religious sentiments and that slavery is open to any master who lacks proper religious convictions. This freedom of religion Emerson explained as a literary spirit. Even though he admitted this was at times commanded by certain heights in Nature, this freedom of intellectual life had the sanction of Nature. By the vastness of a thought, a slave might have a freedom that would make his master’s liberty appear as a slavery.  

That same year he again spoke of the selfishness of slavery and the freedom obtained by religion when he lectured on the times at the Masonic Temple, Boston, December 2:

But the man of ideas, accounting the circumstance nothing, judges of the commonwealth from the state of his own mind. 'If,' he says, 'I am selfish, then is there slavery, or the effort to establish it, wherever I go. But if I am just, then is there no slavery, let the laws say what they will. For if I treat all men as gods, how to me can there be any such thing as a slave?'... I am afraid our virtue is a little geographical. I am not mortified by our vice... but I own our virtue makes me ashamed. ... Then again, how trivial seem the contests of the abolitionist, whilst he aims merely at the circumstance of the slave. Give the slave the least elevation of the religious sentiment, and he is no slave; you are the slave; he not only in his humility feels his superiority, feels that much deplored condition of his to be a fading trifle, but he makes you feel it too. He is the master.

As much as Emerson wanted to see slavery abolished, he often became disgusted with wasting time among the abolitionists. One day he wrote in a letter, "He [Rev. Adin Ballou]  

18 Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 342.  
and his friends and Lyceum have eaten up all my afternoon and evening. . . ."20 The last of this year he wrote of the slave trade:

Higher natures overpower lower ones by affecting them with a certain sleep. The faculties are locked up, and offer no resistance. Perhaps that is the universal law. . . . Is there no love, no reverence? Is there never a glimpse of right in a poor slave-captain's mind; and cannot these supposed to be available to break or elude or in any manger overmatch the tension of an inch or two of iron ring?21

For almost three years after these last quoted passages were written, Emerson made no mention of slavery. However, in 1844, he put in a very active year. In his Journals at this time, Emerson wished for strong men for the abolition movement.22 The big abolitionists, such as Garrison and Phillips, were the ones who were on the coals. Emerson was quite disturbed that the planter during the hot summer would go to the northern merchants, bargaining with them and receiving their sanction on the South's slavery enterprise:

Intense selfishness which we all share. Planter will not hesitate to eat his negro, because he can. We eat him in milder fashion by pelting the negro's friend. . . . I like the Southerner the best; he deals roundly and does not cant.23

Describing the anti-slavery agency as a suicidal business, Emerson again urged that people abolish slavery by


23Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 538-539.
working hard at their own jobs rather than hiring some one else to do the work and rushing off to do the speech at an Abolition meeting. Emerson really approved of the abolition movement, but he heartily disapproved of the methods used by the leaders. The true abolitionist, he thought, would let the defender of slavery make the long speeches; and he, refusing to use the farm products raised by the Negro slaves, could obtain freedom for the slave by love for him. Emerson was convinced that the planter did not love slaves and whips and that he would be just as happy with a machine.\(^24\)

It was on August 1, 1844, the anniversary of the emancipation of the negroes in the British West Indies, that Emerson delivered an address on "Slavery" to the people of Concord. The first of his talk he devoted to a resume of the history of English slavery. Emerson referred to the occasion as a day of reason. The history of mankind is a disgrace to civilized nations because commercial nations have always made an article of luxury out of the negro. Very sordid is the negro tradition that the black man has always worked with the hoe because he was greedy, taking the larger box when the Great Spirit allowed him to choose between two boxes. The smaller box went to the buckra or white man.

In Emerson's address, he described the horrors of slave trade in England and the efforts of the Quakers and certain

\(^24\)Ibid., Vol. VI, pp. 534-535.
political groups to abolish it. After the House of Commons voted for Parliamentary inquiry of slavery in 1788, he said, the horrors of the trade were made known. It was not until 1807, however, that slave-trade was abolished by Parliament. Nevertheless, the slave-trade continued unlawfully. Outrages against the Negro became worse, and missionaries who tried to befriend the slaves were persecuted by the planters, Emerson explained. In 1834 a bill proposing gradual emancipation was introduced into the House of Commons. Most of the insular possessions of England accepted this system, but Antigua used a plan of absolute emancipation which was extremely satisfactory. Before the years of apprenticeship were over, several of the islands gave up the remaining years and adopted absolute emancipation.

The second division of his address was devoted to the slavery situation in America. Emerson spoke of the American civilization as cheap and barbarous. Our culture is an expansion of the English. We are the shopkeepers, and the English lord is retired. We whip the Negro down because he is a lazy shopkeeper and is less energetic and less warlike than we. We did not see blood in the cotton, tobacco, sugar, or brandy that the negro produced. But slavery proved to be a demoralizer. England had the advantage of dealing with slavery at a distance, while America saw its evils every day. A very outstanding evil in the United States, Emerson thought, was the arresting of Negroes from ships that remained several days in
ports of certain southern states as South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana and keeping them until the shipmates could pay for the official arrest. Emerson urged that the people of Massachusetts go before Congress in a body demanding that the Federal Government defend its own people. When one citizen of Massachusetts is outraged, the Union is at an end. Government is for the purpose of protecting the weak, Emerson said, for the strong can take care of themselves.

In explaining to the people of Concord the emancipation of the negroes in the British West Indies ten years previously, Emerson said that the event was an outstanding moral revolution because the tyrant, rather than the oppressed, revolted against the system. The civilization of the Negro became a new element in politics, and slaves had to be taught to defend themselves. By means of intellect, Emerson explained, progress is made by causing people to do right and by making crime appear mean and ugly.

The speech was concluded with these words:

The sentiment of Right, once very low and indistinct, but ever more articulate, because it is the voice of the universe, pronounces Freedom. The Power that built this fabric of things affirms it in the heart; and in the history of the First of August, has made a sign to the ages, of his will.25

Even though Emerson felt that slavery was wrong, he wrote in his Journals a regret that slavery had not been explained.

scientifically to the South. All the efforts of the anti-slavery societies were lost by pronouncing the word nigger, he thought. In 1845, Emerson put his efforts toward getting the people interested in his home lyceum to accept a slavery lecture by Wendell Phillips. Resistance to slavery had been a fine nursery for orators, for Emerson thought that the best university for a thinking man was experience with the mobs. Realizing the need of good leaders in the society, and knowing that birth, cast, and encompassing acts had failed in various countries permanently to produce good leaders, Emerson felt that the one good that could be seen in slavery was the pricing of man:

In Rome or Greece what sums would not be paid for a superior slave, a confidential secretary and manager, an educated slave; a man of genius, a Moses educated in Egypt? I don't know how much Epictetus was sold for, or Aesop, or Toussaint l'Ouverture, and perhaps it was not a good market-day. Time was, in England, when the state stipulated beforehand what price should be paid for each citizen's life, if he was killed. Now, if it were possible, I should like to see that appraisal applied to every man, and every man made acquainted with the true number and weight of every adult citizen, and that he be placed where he belongs, with so much power confided to him as he could carry and use.

26 Journals, Vol. VII, p. 84.
28 Ibid., Vol. VII, pp. 5-6.
During this period, Emerson's interest in Negro slavery had grown rapidly. He was much in favor of abolishing slavery but was greatly disgusted with people who thought the work could be done by long, idle speeches while they made no effort to erase selfishness from their lives as well as from the lives of their fellow-countrymen.

In beginning the discussion of Emerson's anti-slavery activities of the 1850's, we must remember that it was in this decade that he was forced to enter actively into the abolition movement. On December 3, 1850, Emerson stamped his approval on the Chronotype, a daily newspaper, which was strongly against slavery.\textsuperscript{31} Writing to his wife, Emerson told about seeing some peaceable-looking planters carrying pistols who were travelling with their slaves.\textsuperscript{32} In thanking Theodore Parker for his Fast-Day Sermon, which was inspired by his anger over the Fugitive Slave Law, he said:

\ldots Nothing has restored to me a degree of hope & the promise of returning spirits, like this brave harangue, more excellent than even its excellent forerunner of Thanksgiving (was it?)\textsuperscript{33}

An 1851 entry in his Journals said that the money power of America was attempting to do a great wrong but that the world would be turned against it because of the conscience of the people.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 210-211. To Lidian Emerson, St. Louis, June 16 and 17, 1850.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 249. To Theodore Parker, Concord, April 18, 1851.

\textsuperscript{34}Journals, Vol. VIII, p. 164.
On May 5, 1851, Emerson spoke to the citizens of Concord on the Fugitive Slave Law. In the introduction to his speech, he explained that he had been forced into politics within the past year. Men who were sensitive to the signs of the times were already discontented, and Emerson believed that the whole American population would be affected soon. The actions of the citizens of Boston had particularly horrified him. America's love of freedom and sense of injustice had been proved idle brag. Emerson could not see any use in law-forms, a Federal Bench, courts, or constitutions if such statutes as the Fugitive Slave Bill were going to be passed. Men who should have been friends of the poor man were found to be his bitterest enemies.35 He spoke of slavery as the greatest calamity:

Africa has its malformation; England has its Ireland; Germany its hatred of classes; France its love of gunpowder; Italy its Pope; and America, the most prosperous country in the Universe, has the greatest calamity in the Universe, negro slavery.36

In characterizing the nature and impracticability of the law, he explained that it was contravened by the sentiment of duty, by the combined force of all sentiments, by the written laws themselves, by the mischiefs of its operation, and by the resistances that appear in the history of the law. Emerson told the citizens that the only benefit that he could see from this law was that it had forced the people to think, to debate,

36 Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 186.
to speak, and to study the natural law. White slavery was one of the main obstacles in the abolition of Negro slavery. This filthy law about fugitive slaves ended Mr. Webster's fame. Even though Webster was a brilliant man, he became a man of the past by allowing himself to be solely a commercial representative and head of the slavery party. His writings became merely eulogies of liberty. The Union, Emerson explained, was composed of the North and the South, two nations. Climate and temperament, and not slavery, were the forces that were severing them. The Union was no longer safe, he thought, because the constitution ordained disunion when it ordained this immoral law. No proclamation can abolish slavery, for she is very industrious, taking no holidays. 37 Emerson presented his solution to the American slavery problem in this speech:

Why not end this dangerous dispute on some ground of fair compensation on one side, and satisfaction on the other to the conscience of the free states? It is really the great task fit for this country to accomplish, to buy that property of the planters, as the British nation bought the West Indian slaves. I say buy, - never conceding the right of the planter to own, but that we may acknowledge the calamity of his position, and bear a countryman's share in relieving him; and because it is the only practicable course and is innocent. Here is a right social or public function, which one man cannot do, which all men must do. 38

The people of Massachusetts could not answer for the Union, but they could keep their own state true. Even though

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37 ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 186-207.

38 ibid., Vol. XI, p. 208.
Massachusetts was a small state, she could be great in her ideas. Being the mother of the New England states, Massachusetts could wield a great influence over all the other New England states as well as parts of the South and West. Emerson thought that the government had tried very hard to get Massachusetts' sanction to the law. Impressing the people with the strength of Massachusetts, Emerson attempted to get each citizen to identify himself with the cause of making the Fugitive Slave Law inoperative.  

The next year Emerson made this entry about slavery in his *Journals*:

But how, then, can you maintain such an incredible and damnable pretension as to steal a man on these loose innuendos of the law that would not allow you to steal his shoes? How, but that all our northern Judges have made a cowardly interpretation of the law, in favor of the crime, and not of the right. The leaning should be, should it not? to the right against the crime. The leaning has been invariably against the slave for the master.

A few months later Emerson recorded in his *Journals* a proposed scientific extermination of slaveholders, which he read in a letter written to an acquaintance of his by another person, both names being withheld. This plan for the Southern States provided for the manufacture on an enormous scale of flour containing large quantities of sulphate of copper. After much eating of the bread, the Southerners would be very docile and much less stubborn; thus, the removal of slavery would


40 *Journals,* Vol. VIII, pp. 337-338.
be made much easier. Those who proposed the plan were advised by a prominent scientist that it was outrageous because the article could be a rank poison and that high penalties for its use existed in England and France.41 When Charles Sumner made a series of speeches on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill while it was in the senate, Emerson wrote him a letter of appreciation of them saying that they were rooted in principles and history.42

In his Journals, Emerson said our fathers made a blunder back in 1787 when they made a concession to slavery by saying that three-fifths of the slaves should be counted when population is used as a basis of representation and also by allowing fugitive slaves to be returned to their owners. If no solution to freeing the slaves could have been found at that time, there should have been two nations formed, Emerson thought. Any abolitionist who is human and divine and not clannish or selfish or geographical immediately demands the respect of men.43

On May 7, 1854, the fourth anniversary of Daniel Webster’s speech in favor of the Fugitive Slave Law, Emerson gave a lecture against slavery in New York City. Even though this was toward the end of his activities as an abolitionist, the

41Ibid., Vol. VIII, pp. 386-387.


introduction is very characteristic of his early attitude toward this political question:

I do not often speak to public questions; they are odious and hurtful, and it seems like meddling or leaving your work. I have my own spirits in prison; spirits in deeper prisons, whom no man visits if I do not. And then I see what havoc it makes with any good mind, a dissipated philanthropy. 44

Emerson acknowledged Webster's great intellect but thought it was a tragedy that he had such a poor moral sensibility as to support the Fugitive Slave Bill. 45 He was much disturbed that one of the foremost Americans should have said to his countrymen that "... Slavery was now at that strength that they must beat down their conscience and become kidnappers for it." 46 The worthlessness of constitutions, Supreme Courts, and state sovereignty to bad workmen was being shown in the matter of this law. Slavery would fail, Emerson believed, because it was not consistent with the laws of nature. He insisted that we deal not in abstractions but in parties that have a working apparatus. 47 In closing his lecture, Emerson again urged the people to action:

... I hope we have reached the end of our unbelief, have come to the belief that there is a divine Providence in the world, which will not save us but through our own cooperation.

47 Ibid., Vol. XI, pp. 226-244.
48 Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 244.
In February, 1855, Emerson listed his speaking schedule showing that he was very busy on public lectures about slavery. Just a few weeks previous to this, he had written that he was working hard to understand the slavery question, about which he planned to lecture. The same year he invited Sumner to lecture on slavery. In the drive to abolish slavery, Emerson could see that woman had acquired a greater degree of self-respect and sense of public duty. He thought that the free statesmen were accomplices to the crime of poor legislation. When it looked as if slavery would not be suppressed, Emerson wrote:

I am looking into the map to see where I shall go with my children when Boston and Massachusetts surrender to the slave trade. . . . Nothing seems left, but to form at once a Northern Union, & break the old.

The last reference Emerson made to the slavery problem during this period had to do with resistance to slavery:

It is the old mistake of the slaveholders to impute the resistance to Clarkson or Pitt, to Channing or Garrison, or to some John Brown whom he has just captured, and to make a personal affair of it; and he believes, whilst

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he chains and chops him, that he is getting rid of his tormentor, and does not see that the air which this man breathed is liberty, and is breathed by thousands and millions; that men of the same complexion as he, will look at slaveholders as felons who have disentitled themselves to the protection of law, as the burglar has, whom I see breaking into my neighbor's house; and therefore no matter how many Browns he can catch and kill, he does not make the number less, for the air breeds them, every school, every church (every domestic circle) every home of courtesy, genius, and conscience is educating haters of him and his misdeeds.55

In concluding this chapter, we might say that Emerson was quite unique as an abolitionist. When the times demanded that he take an active part in the crusade against Negro slavery, he voiced his extreme dislike for the institution. However, he never failed to explain that his primary mission in life was to free all slaves who were bound in spirit. We shall see in the following chapter how this same policy carried over into the Civil War and Reconstruction Periods.

CHAPTER III

EMERSON AND NEGRO SLAVERY DURING THE CIVIL WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION PERIODS

The Civil War brought a certain peace to Emerson's perturbed mind. He never could conscientiously enter wholeheartedly into the Abolition Movement. His enthusiasm over lectures against Negro slavery was always from the surface, for he understood thoroughly that the buying and selling of people was only the fruit of greedy thinking and living. There was always a reluctance to strike at the result without making the proper attempt to remove the terrible cause, which would inevitably breed more corruption. With his partial admiration for the abolitionists, his slight sympathy for the Southern slaveholder, his conviction that the primary need was for the American people to build up a healthier attitude toward themselves and toward every man and woman living in their country, and his constant hope that the Union could be preserved, Emerson became rather bitter in his writings toward the end of the Abolition Period.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Emerson saw that there was no possible way of mending things without the clash of arms. The calm, which he had maintained as he wrote of politics from the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill in 1850 to the beginning
of the Civil War in 1861, was gone. Seeing that no real Union existed, and had not for many years, he buckled down to the task of trying to persuade his fellow countrymen that Negro slavery must be abolished and the Union must be restored.

In this chapter, I shall try to show how Emerson's interest in Negro slavery gradually declined during the Civil War and was immediately replaced at the beginning of the Reconstruction Period with his old desire to help his American people establish a peace and a Union that would be lasting because they would be built upon an intelligent understanding of true freedom. I shall again use a chronological development in the discussion of the Civil War as I did in the previous chapter. His ideas of Reconstruction I shall present mainly as excerpts from his Journals written in 1866 and 1867, trying to weave them into a somewhat unified plan.

In his Fast-day sermon back during his days at the Second Church, Emerson listed the signs of potential civil war, which I believe he thought were the causes of any war within our country regardless of what current political or economic problem it might be blamed upon:

"Our treatment of the Indian in one portion of the country, a barefaced trespass of power upon weakness and vindication of that wrong by the law of the land and the general indifference with which this outrage passes before the eyes of the whole nation is a most alarming symptom of how obtuse is the moral sense of the people. . . . The ferocity of party spirit . . . The low esteem in which the Union of this country stands, ready to be sacrificed to any momentary pique or trivial interest . . . The increasing habit of regarding power as a prize instead of a trust . . . The absence of stern uncompromising men of principles from the helm of
power in its ordinary administration. . . . The desperation of our trade. . . . A madness or avarice in the young . . . . The love of display, of fine houses, fine clothes, fine furniture; the ambition of the young to begin their house-keeping at the same rate of expense where their fathers left off."

However, by the year that our Civil War began, Emerson had blinded himself temporarily to the primary causes of the war and had become very eager to see the war fought in order to subdue the power of the slaveholder and free the Negro slaves. In June, 1861, Emerson was beginning to feel an assurance that the institution of Negro slavery in America would be wiped out. In writing to his aunt about her grave site, he said:

It does not now look probable that the foot of any slave-owner or slave-catcher will pollute that ground. Let us hope that the very South wind will come to us cleaner & purer of that taint, until it is sweet as the air of Maine Mountains."

Admitting that the beginnings of the war were very despicable, Emerson saw that no hermitage could hide any one because the war had taken such enormous proportions. He knew that fighting was better than the idle talk of the "integrity of the Republic." To him this amputation by means of the war was better than the cancer from which the country was suffering. America could still be redeemed, Emerson thought, if heaven could provide them with "a fair share of light and conscience."

At first he had believed that the war was caused by the

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1Young Emerson Speaks, edited by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., p. 229. [Taken from the editor's notes.]

Southerner's impatience of the Northerner's rough manners. But finally he saw the green and gold reptile. Emerson felt that his own state of Massachusetts was despised because she loved honesty, law, and culture, and that the people of Massachusetts were being forced into virtues by the crimes of the South. He wrote James Elliot Cabot that he hoped all people, including scholars and hermits, would recognize their public duty and speak to save their country.  

At the beginning of the year 1862, Emerson delivered an address on "American Civilization" in which he discussed his opinion of the Negro slavery situation in America. A very royal motto, he said, is "I serve." Because God is the servant of all people, He is God. Emerson explained that the conspiracy of slavery was a destitution and not an institution. Men have been stolen and put to work, he said. The thief has pronounced labor disgraceful and has lived off the fruit of the slave's labor. Only a very small quantity of rice, cotton, and sugar had been produced as a result of this terrible system. Labor is the most imperative interest in any country. Governments and constitutions are only for the protection of the laborer. If a country permits labor to be considered vile, that country will regress to an uncivilized state.

Emerson explained that the children were the ones who were suffering so much from the war. Boys and girls were having to do without trips, gifts, clothes, and the proper formal education. Hopes and joys had been replaced by anxiety and stern

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duties, he stated. This situation had been brought about, he thought, by our governments trying to hold under one law two states of civilization: a higher type where labor is predominant and a lower type where a few people have the power to rule over many slaves. Even though America has been considered a land of opportunity and the Divine Providence seems to have favored our people, God will not act as a justice of the peace to straighten out the problems of slavery. It is up to the American people to strike at the cause.

Emerson admitted that slavery is a general economy. However, as slavery existed in the United States with many small owners, some without even owning land, it is a very bad economy. Argument was not needed in the national crisis, he said; but courage committed to a principle allied by Nature would destroy any harmful profit in a society. Government should never get to the point of acting as a parish clerk even though it is given absolute powers in time of a crisis. If a government, however, fails to follow its highest inspirations, then the people should leave their old government and form a new one with the proper executors. During war times, Emerson felt that there were Scriptures to be read from men's hearts that have been visible otherwise.

Compromise with slavery was absurd, Emerson said. Every compromise meant a surrender with more demands from the slaveholders. Emancipation was the only answer. Then each laborer would be put in natural relations with all other laborers.
Emerson thought that war suited the Southerner in his semi-civilized condition. On the other hand, the Northerner, who had advanced to a higher scale of progress, was very put out by the war. All the members of the Union army were laborers, while the South lost no labor because the slave worked for him at home.

Emerson felt that just conquering the South would not solve the problem because the Southerners would still have to be kept under control. He felt that the only solution to the problem was for Congress to abolish slavery and pay a good price for the slaves. He hoped that the people would not become impatient and accept the easiest peace. If they did, then slavery would reappear when injustice would again find expression. Emerson explained that while slavery keeps disunion, emancipation would remove the cause of disunion. American citizens would reconcile themselves to emancipation because it was a good measure even though they disapproved of it in the beginning. By this one stroke, slavery, which causes wars and ruins nations, would be destroyed. Since justice is loved by all, there is no use thinking that the blacks would be angry with their wages and freedom. For this measure to be worthwhile, it must come speedily.

Emerson explained that the end of all government is morality; legislation, free institutions, a republic, a democracy are only means to that end. Ideas are no better than dreams if they do not work through the minds and hands of strong, brave men.
Since Emerson had begun the writing of his talk, President Lincoln had asked Congress to have the government help any state that presented its own plan of gradual abolition of slavery. This was the first step, Emerson thought, that the American Executive had taken on the side of freedom. Although he considered Congress somewhat backward, he felt that the President had made quite an advance. If Congress would cooperate with the President, it would not be too late for immediate emancipation, he said; but past experience agrees that it should not be gradual.\(^4\)

Several months later, in July, 1862, Emerson was still convinced that the war must be fought. The war certainly was no recommendation of slavery, he said. The destruction of slavery was so necessary that he thought ten years of war and ten years of reconstruction would not be too high a cost to pay. However, Emerson felt that would not be necessary. Knowing how France had recovered quickly several times after being overrun with armies, he said that sometimes the damage from a long war could be repaired in "one perfect summer day."\(^5\)

After President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, that Negro slavery would be abolished in the United States on January 1, 1863, Emerson delivered an address in Boston that same month supporting the President's action. This talk was one of his most outstanding at that time.

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In his introduction, Emerson explained that a step toward catholic interests is often taken by our political leaders in a time of danger when they completely disregard class and local legislation. Liberty, in its growth, seems to come slowly in small amounts, as if needing a certain cultivation in order to make it workable and permanent. President Lincoln's Proclamation was the latest mark of progress in political liberty. It, like many other such measures, was received with sympathy and understanding as if a new public were formed for this particular event - a public that had been hitherto passive but was now very much concerned for mankind, including all nationalities. In describing the event as a "dazzling success," Emerson urged that the people quickly forget all of Lincoln's shortcomings.

President Lincoln's deliberation in issuing the Proclamation was very necessary, Emerson thought. The virtue of his decision would probably straighten out many problems. In four months, all Africans who crossed over the Union line would be assured of government protection. It was an act of justice and an irrevocable measure. This great victory over defeat, Emerson explained, did not assure the Negro's redemption; but it did relieve the whites of their crime. Emerson urged that the best that was in the government support this policy. He was very eager that this be more than a paper proclamation. Assuming that Lincoln would be as absolute in his adhesion as in his proclamation, Emerson pointed out the fact that the
citizens also had duties. This act has restored our national honor and made our government secure and permanent, he said. Thus our country will once again be attractive to Europeans as a place to make a home.

In his address, Emerson said that the Proclamation was not only opportune but also imperative. Much to his disgust, the inevitableness of the war was ignored by the blinded Peace Party. The war could not be avoided even though it was formidable, he explained. Before the cannonade of Sumter, the combatants had war in their minds. He spoke of the need for the war as he could see it at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation:

And the aim of the war on our part is indicated by the aim of the President's Proclamation, namely, to break up the false combination of Southern society, to destroy the piratic feature in it which makes it our enemy only as it is the enemy of the human race, and so allow its reconstruction on a just and healthful basis. The new affinities will act, the old repulsion will cease, and, the cause of war being removed, Nature and trade may be trusted to establish a lasting peace.  

Emerson continued to explain that this was a very wise act of the government. It had given potential joy and hope to all the nation. The young citizens would have better opportunities, and the older people would be made much happier knowing that their own society had been purified again. In closing

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his address, Emerson praised the Proclamation for the benefit it would be to the Negro:

Meantime that ill-fated, much-injured race which the Proclamation respects will lose somewhat of the dejection sculptured for ages in their bronzed countenances, uttered in the wailing of their plaintive music, — a race naturally benevolent, docile, industrious, and whose very miseries sprang from their great talent for usefulness, which, in a more moral age, will not only defend their independence, but will give them a rank among nations. 9

The following year, 1863, Emerson was still justifying the North for its part in the war. He felt that as bad as the war was, it still was much better than the foregoing peace. The one hope for the Union to be saved from Southern domination and slavery was for all the people in the North to accept whatever duties and sacrifices they might find. One of our most serious foreign disadvantages was that England had failed to support the Union in trying to throw off slavery by refusing to allow ships of war to be built in her ports for use in the war. 10

In recalling the political developments that led up to the secession of the Southern States, Emerson was glad that the war had begun as it did rather than for the presidential campaigns to have been reversed and for the North to have been the rebels. He wrote in his Journals of the escaped dangers of slavery:

9Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 326.

I remember when I feared - what one newly escaped shudders to think of - that a little more success, a wiser choice of candidates by the Southern Party, - say, of Jefferson Davis, instead of Pierce or Buchanan, - had enabled them by a coup d' état to have strained the whole organism of the Government to the behoof of Slavery, to have insisted, by all the courts, marshals, and army and navy of the Union, on carrying into effect a right of transit with slaves from State to State. It had then only been necessary for rich Democrats in New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut to buy slaves, and it is not easy to see how the ardent Abolitionists - always a minority hated by the rich class - could have successfully resisted. The effect, however, would have been to put the onus of resistance on the North, and at last, the North would have seceded. We had been the rebels, and would have had the like difficulty to put our States into secession as the Southerners had.\(^{11}\)

The proslavery scholars, Emerson explained, were traitors to their profession. If they defended slavery, they ceased to be scholars. They were living by their weakness and not by their strength.\(^{12}\) On May 7, 1864, Emerson wrote a letter in which he accepted an invitation to attend an Emancipation League in Boston but refused to lecture as "Much experience has taught me to be cautious in making speeches in behalf of any cause to which I have a good will."\(^{13}\) In December, 1864 and January, 1865, Emerson gave a series of lectures on American Life.\(^{14}\) In one of his lectures on "Resources," Emerson had a very cheerful and welcome note on the disappearance of slavery:


Resources of America? why, one thinks of Saint-Simon's saying, 'The Golden Age is not behind but before you.' Here is man in the Garden of Eden; here the Genesis and the Exodus. We have seen slavery disappear like a painted scene in a theatre; we have seen the most healthful revolution in the politics of the nation, - the Constitution not only amended, but construed in a new spirit.\textsuperscript{15}

At the close of the war, Emerson made note of the fact that the race prejudice problem was yet to be solved. A very capable young boy of Philadelphia was colonel of a colored regiment in the Union army. When he returned to his home, there were those of his former friends who cut him. However, Emerson thought that the interest of freedom would win out as it did in the case of Mr. Webster. During the time of the Fugitive Slave Law, the opponents of Mr. Webster, feeling that the spirit of God and the need of humanity were on their side, put forth every effort to make their views clear in spite of the way Mr. Webster glared upon them. Soon Mr. Webster cut off his own head in the same way that Mr. Calhoun had done by going against the laws of nature.\textsuperscript{16}

Emerson seemed to acknowledge at the time of the Civil War and the Reconstruction Period that making slaves of the African Negroes was the most obvious form of American servitude. In spite of the fact that slavery was prohibited in two of the New England colonies, a very lively slave trade had been built up during the eighteenth century. Even the

\textsuperscript{15}bid., Vol. VIII, p. 142.

thinking Southerner was forced to admit that greed was the only reason for having negro slavery. If one negro were free, then there was no justification in enslaving the negroes because the race was inferior. Because of the rights of freedom provided by our constitution and the traditions of liberty in the United States, the problem of political reconstruction was very difficult. The method of military occupation used in Europe would not suit the Americans, Emerson knew.

The Southern attitude was a very important factor in reconstruction. Military defeat was accepted by the Southern people. However, they were perplexed by the social adjustments that had to be made. It seemed absurd to them to admit to citizenship a race of people who they sincerely thought were inferior. The Southerners, believing strongly in state rights, found it difficult to understand that a federal government could change a state's constitution. Johnson's attempt at reconstruction even increased the South's good feeling toward the conquerors. However, in 1866 and 1867, the radicals made the Southerners angry and almost devoid of a national feeling.

At the close of the Civil War, there was marked activity in the business world. The four fields of development included railroad construction, agricultural expansion, the increase in capital, and growth of immigration. The North, East, and West were enjoying the effects of peace. Only the South,
with its disrupted social system, seemed not to be prospering. 17

Emerson knew that the problem of reconstruction involved the rebuilding of both sections of the United States because a Civil War tears up an entire country. In reestablishing the principle of freedom within a country, Emerson understood that all clannish desires and ambitions had to be forgotten. Speaking at the dedication of the Soldiers' Monument in Concord, on April 19, 1867, Emerson said:

Reform must begin at home. The aim of the hour was to reconstruct the South; but first the North had to be reconstructed. Its own theory and practice of liberty had got sadly out of gear, and must be corrected. It was done on the instant. A thunderstorm at sea sometimes reverses the magnets in the ship, and south is north. The storm of war looks like the miracle on men. Every Democrat who went South came back a Republican, like the governors who, in Buchanan's time, went to Kansas, and instantly took the free-state colors... Every principle is a war-note. When the rights of men are recited under any old government, every one of them is a declaration of war. War civilizes, rearranges the population distributing by ideas, - the innovators on one side, the antiquaries on the other. It opens the eyes wider. Once we were patriots up to the town-bounds or state-line. But when you replace the love of family or clan by a principle, as freedom, instantly that fire runs over the state-line into New Hampshire, Vermont, New York and Ohio, into the prairie and beyond, leaps the mountains, bridges the river and lake, burns as hotly in Kansas and California as in Boston, and no chemist can discriminate between one soil and the other. It lifts every population to an equal power and merit. 18


The forced peace that the South accepted, Emerson thought, was better than a negotiated peace. He knew, however, that the reconstruction problems were very intricate. Although the negro would eventually be given his vote, Emerson could not decide on the qualification of voters beyond the voter's being able to read and write.\textsuperscript{19}

In his \textit{Journals} Emerson seemed to think that the salvation of the nation was in the school. The town of Concord was especially needed for the manufacture of school-teachers for the West and the South, he said. The American schools were an economy that should be enlarged and extended for the greatest number of students and the longest period of time.\textsuperscript{20} One reason he thought the schools were so important at this time was that the war had given people more chances to express themselves than they had before; thus it is more necessary for people to have better training so as to develop the mind properly. The war had made very important "the truth . . . as seen by one mind."\textsuperscript{21}

Freedom and slavery, which Emerson described as two incompatible states of society were shown up by the war. He felt that no peace, constitution, or treaties would solve the difficulties of the country until all parts were somewhat

\textsuperscript{19}Journals, Vol. X, pp. 93-94.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., Vol. X, pp. 12-14.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., Vol. X, pp. 141-142.
equally civilized. The people of various sections of the country must organize themselves into just activities.\textsuperscript{22}

In regard to the matter of reconstruction, Emerson said he was an idealist:

I speak the speech of an idealist. I say let the rule be right. If the theory is right, it is not so much matter about the facts. If the plan of your fort is right, it is not so much matter that you have gotten a rotten beam or a cracked gun somewhere; they can by and by be replaced by better without tearing your fort to pieces. But if the plan is wrong, then all is rotten, and every step adds to the ruin; every screw is loose, and all the machine crazy.\textsuperscript{23}

A strict constructionist, he said, would be driven out of his wits if any bargain was made with the rebels in the reconstruction. Anything less than forcible subjugation of the South would be an act of disloyalty on the part of the North.

Emerson insisted that in reconstructing, the cornerstone be laid on a strong morass. This could be done only by leaving slavery out. Prejudices should be smothered. Every sane and honest man should have an equal vote and a fair chance. The interests of individual men and parties should be ignored; and regardless of how small a beginning, it must be just. No crimes, no concealment, no compromises should be made in ambiguous terms. Even the smallest state can have a strong foundation, made stronger by its own strength, he stated. Its limits can never be reached unless there is interference by a cunning, jealous political or social climber.\textsuperscript{24}

In conclusion, I think the Civil War was very important in bringing Emerson down to earth and making him see that two sections of his own country were so far from understanding each other that fighting was the only means of settling the immediate differences between the two. With the beginning of the Reconstruction Period, Emerson, who had greatly matured emotionally during the Abolition Period and Civil War, emerged a much stronger apostle of personal liberty. Emerson felt the proper reconstruction could be accomplished only by the education of the people of all parts of the country to the level of respecting each man's rights, regardless of his color or his work. In the next and last chapter, I shall analyze his great philosophy of freedom.
CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF EMERSON'S

CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

Emerson's interest in Negro slavery was always subordinate to his concern about the enslaved spirits of men. We might easily imagine his agreeing with Ingersoll, who said in regard to Negro slavery that "rather than interfere with any human being in his efforts to secure his liberty, I would be condemned to be chained in the lowest depths of Hell."\(^1\) But from a broader point of view, we might say that we can hear him throughout his writings relating the allegory of Agar and Sara\(^2\) and saying with St. Paul, "But I was free born."\(^3\) As a young preacher in his sermons, he advocated the use of a freedom that was in keeping with the greatness of the Gospel.\(^4\) In leaving the church pulpit, his opportunities became greater because when he left the cramped, narrow position he held in the little Boston church, he became a prophet of all New England and the Western frontier. Finally,

\(^1\)Sidney Warren, America Freethought 1860-1914, p. 82, quoting from New York Daily Tribune, October 12, 1876.

\(^2\)Galatians 4:22.

\(^3\)Acts 22:23.

\(^4\)Young Emerson Speaks, edited by Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Jr., p. xxi.
he has worthily attained the rank of minister to all dormant, imprisoned, and questioning minds everywhere who need to enjoy full freedom. 5

I shall discuss Emerson’s philosophy of freedom in this chapter under four topics: Emerson’s definition of freedom, the practicability of freedom so defined, the durability of freedom according to Emerson, and Emerson’s philosophy of freedom in relation to the transcendental movement. In defining freedom, I have included an explanation of its scope, limitations, degrees, and types, as Emerson explained them.

Recognizing the omnipresence of freedom within the hearts of all people regardless of how unapparent it might be in their lives, Emerson wrote of the terrible freedom in which he admitted that he believed the only freedom is that of the spirit:

It well deserves attention what is said in New Jerusalem Magazine concerning External Restraint. It is awful to look into the mind of man and see how free we are, to what frightful excesses our vices may run under the whitened wall of a respectable reputation. Outside, among your fellows, among strangers, you must preserve appearances, a hundred things you cannot do; but inside, the terrible freedom. 6

In explaining what he meant by freedom, I believe Emerson would agree with Herrick that “the belief in freedom is freedom” 7 and with Russell that the free man is not doomed to worship fate:

7C. Judson Herrick, Fatalism or Freedom, p. 82.
But great as they [Time, Fate, Death] are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is greater still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and make it a part of ourselves. To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things — this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship. And this liberation is effected by a contemplation of Fate; for Fate itself is subdued by the mind which leaves nothing to be surged by the purifying fire of Time.

United with his fellowmen by the strongest of all ties, the tie of common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love.\(^8\)

In his essay on "Fate," Emerson somewhat agreed with Russell that fate is not the last word but that freedom is necessitated by fate, for fate is a part of nature, and nature rightly used develops man's intellect:

> Nor can he blink the freewill. To hazard the contradiction, — freedom is necessary. If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate and say, Fate is all; then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man. Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul, Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free. And though nothing is more disgusting than the crowing about liberty by slaves, as most men are, and the flippancy mistaking for freedom some paper preamble like a Declaration of Independence or the statute right to vote, by those who have never dared to think or act, — yet it is wholesome to a man to look not at Fate, but the other way: the practical view is the other. His sound relation to these facts is to use and command, not to cringe to them. 'Look not on Nature, for her name is fatal,' said the oracle. The too much contemplation of these limits induces meanness. They who talk much of destiny, their birth star, etc., are in a lower dangerous plane, and invite the evils they fear.\(^9\)

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In defining freedom, Emerson did not think that freedom necessarily is a true expression of conviction:

A very small part of man's voluntary acts are such as agree perfectly with his conviction, and it is only at rare intervals that he is apprized of this incongruity—'so difficult is it to read our own consciousness without mistakes.' Whose act is this church-going, whose this praying? The man might as well be gone, so he leave a Maelzel [inventor of an orchestral panharmonicon] machine in his place.10

The concept of natural freedom, which must be studied in an orderly sequence, admits that we must be free in regard to some definite context because freedom is largely a relative matter. All freedom for an individual will be destroyed if one succeeds in disobeying all the laws of nature.11 In defining man's liberty, Emerson once said that there is "no liberty but his invincible will to do right..."12 Later in the same speech, he described liberty as "the Crusade of all brave and conscientious men, the Epic Poetry, the new religion, the chivalry of all gentlemen."13 If a "Man's true freedom is in determination to worship only the God created by our love of the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments," then the scope of freedom is very large, freeing man from most of the tyrannies

11Herrick, on. cit., p. 59.
of life. The big range of freedom, as Emerson saw it, is described in the dirge which he wrote in honor of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and his colored regiments who were killed at Fort Wagner:

Freedom all winged expands
Nor perches in a narrow place;
Her broad van seeks unplanted lands;
She loves a poor and virtuous race.
Clinging to a colder zone
Whose dark sky sheds the snowflake down,
The snowflake in her banner’s star,
Her stripes the boreal streamers are.
Long she loved the Northerman well;
Now the iron age is done,
She will not refuse to dwell
With the offspring of the Sun;
Foundling of the desert far,
Where palms plumes, siroccos blaze,
He roves unhurt the burning ways
In climates of the summer star.
He has avenues to God
Hid from men of Northern brain,
For beholding, without cloud,
What these with slowest steps attain.
If once the generous chief arrive
To lead him willing to be led,
For freedom he will strike and strive,
And drain his heart till he be dead.

Any clear definition of freedom should include a discussion of the limitations of freedom. The study of the scope of freedom logically should be followed by a consideration of the limitations of its scope. There are four types of limitations of freedom: rational, psychological, voluntary, and physical.

16 Ibid., Vol. IX, pp. 206-207.
which can be found in Emerson's writings. He wrote of the rational limitation of freedom in which duty restricts:

It is not possible to extricate yourself from the questions in which your age is involved. Let the good citizen perform the duties put on him here and now. It is not by heads reverted to the dying Demosthenes, or to Luther, or to Wallace, or to George Fox, or to George Washington, that you can combat the dangers and dragons that beset the United States at this time. I believe this cannot be accomplished by dunces or idlers, but requires docility, sympathy, and religions receiving from higher principles; for liberty, like religion, is a short and hasty fruit, and like all power subsists only by new rallyings on the source of inspiration. 

Psychological limitations, which include fixed ideas that bar future progress and voluntary limitations whereby a broad range of freedom is narrowed down to a practical range, may be noted in Emerson's comment on the party of freedom:

I go for those who have received a retaining fee to this party of Freedom, before they came into the world. I would trust Garrison, I would trust Henry Thoreau, that they would be staunch for freedom to the death; but both of these would have a benevolent credulity in the honesty of the other party, that I think unsafe.

Since we live in a sequential world where people are not all spirit, we can understand fate as a part of freedom if we admit as Emerson did that there are physical limitations of freedom:

And last of all, high over thought, in the world of morals, Fate appears as vindicator, levelling the high, lifting the low, requiring justice in man, and always striking soon or late when justice is not done. What is


useful will last, what is hurtful will sink. 'The
deer must suffer,' said the Greeks; 'you would
soothe a Deity not to be soothed.' 'God himself
cannot procure good for the wicked,' said the Welsh
tried. 'God may consent, but only for a time,' said
the bard of Spain. The limitation is impossible by
an insight of man. In its last and loftiest ascen-
sions, insight itself and the freedom of the will is
one of its obedient members. But we must not run
into generalizations too large, but show the natural
bounds or essential distinctions, and seek to do
justice to the other elements as well. 20

Many people do not always recognize freedom because they
do not understand that there are different degrees of freedom.
Emerson admitted the degrees of freedom when he wrote that he
would not invite unnecessary slavery into his life:

I will, I think, no longer do things unfit for
me. Why should I act the part of the silly women who
send out invitations to many persons, and receive each
billet of acceptance as if it were a pistol-shot? Why
should I read lectures with care and pain and afflict
myself with all the meanness of ticket-mongering, when
I might sit, as God in his goodness has enabled me, a
free, poor man with wholesome bread and warm clothes,
though without cake or jaw-gawing, and write and speak
the beautiful and formidable words of a free man? If
you cannot be free, be as free as you can. 21

The relativity of freedom he explained:

I think the most devout persons be the freest of
their tongues in speaking of the Deity, as Luther,
Fuller, Herbert, Milton, whose words are an offence
to the pursed mouths which make formal prayers; and
beyond the word, they are free-thinkers also. 22

Emerson discriminated between the degrees of freedom attained
by various countries. The English freedom he praised:

The English mind turns every abstraction it can receive into a portable utensil, or a working institution. Such is their tenacity and such their practical turn, that they hold all they gain. Hence we say that only the English race can be trusted with freedom, - freedom which is double-edged and dangerous to any but the wise and robust. The English designated the kingdoms emulous of free institutions, as the sentimental nations. Their culture is not an outside varnish, but is thorough and secular in families and the race. They are oppressive with their temperament, and all the more that they are refined. I have sometimes seen them walk with my countrymen when I was forced to allow them every advantage, and their companions seemed bags of bones.23

The high degree of freedom available for many Americans seemed very dangerous to him. In writing of the people in his own state, he said:

Take as a type the boundless freedom here in Massachusetts. People have in all countries been burned and stoned for saying things which are commonplace at all our breakfast-tables. Every one who was in Italy thirty-five years ago will remember the caution with which his host or guest in any house looked around him, if a political topic were broached. Here the tongue is free, and the hand; and the freedom of action goes to the brink, if not over the brink, of license.24

This boundless freedom Emerson knew has its own guards:

But I hope the defect of faith with us is only apparent. We shall find that freedom has its own guards, and, as soon as in the vulgar it runs to license, sets all reasonable men on exploring those guards. I do not think the summit of this age truly reached or expressed unless it attain the height which religion and philosophy reached in any former age. If I miss the inspiration of the saints of Calvinism, or of Platonism, or Buddhism, our times are not yet their own legitimate force.25

Emerson was aware that the highest type of freedom is possessed by man. He knew that man is different from brutes, who are denied the privilege of hope, ambition, pride in progress. In writing of the perfection of man, he distinguished between "savage license" and the "liberty of the wise man."\textsuperscript{26} Death, he believed, increases the degree of freedom already enjoyed:

\begin{quote}
Death will presently come and will doubtless bring to all who deserve it much more freedom than they now possess and will permit them to exert their virtues and talents with far more efficiency than they can at present.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

The highest degree of freedom in man is attained by the poet, whose insight is greatest and whom Emerson called "the liberator."\textsuperscript{28}

In defining freedom, we need to understand the types of freedom. Emerson's philosophy seems to me to relate to a natural rather than a mystical freedom because he seems to emphasize throughout his writings the fact that people should build ideals that represent their own inner nature and which are dependent on natural casual sequences. Realizing that individual freedom differs greatly because of the vast difference not only in people but also in the environments in which they are placed, he chiefly classed the types of freedom

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., Vol. XII, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{27}Young Emerson Speaks, p. 168.

\textsuperscript{28}Complete Works, Vol. VI, p. 343. This is taken from the editor's Note I, commenting on essay "Fate."
according to those available to the group as well as to the individual.

Political freedom at its best is the result of united efforts of individuals who discriminatingly use their personal freedom, he wrote in a letter to Benjamin and Susan Morgan Rodman after the death of Colonel William L. Rodman:

I think daily that there are crises which demand nations, as well as those which claim the sacrifice of single lives. Ours perhaps is one, - and that one whole generation might well consent to perish, if, by their fall, political liberty & clean & just life could be made sure to the generations that follow. As you suffer, all of us may suffer, before we shall have an honest peace.29

While in Paris, Emerson wrote of the misconceived idea many people have of domestic liberty in a letter to Samuel and Sarah Bradford Ripley:

The charm of Paris to so many people seems to consist in the boundless domestic liberty which releases each man from the fear of the eyes & ears of all his neighbors, opens a public parlour for him to take his coffee & read his newspaper, in every street; go where his business may lead him he can always find an ice, a bath, a dinner, & good company at the next corner...30

Intellectual liberty was always supreme in his philosophy. In his discourse on "Persian Poetry," he again emphasized the primary importance of freedom of the spirit:

The other merit of Hafiz is his intellectual liberty, which is a certificate of profound thought. We accept the religions and politics into which we fall, and it is only a few delicate spirits who are sufficient to see that the whole web of convention is the imbecility of those whom it entangles, - that

the mind suffers no religion and no empire but its own. It indicates this respect to absolute truth by the use it makes of the symbols that are most stable and rever-end, and therefore is always provoking the accusation of irreligion.31

Another time he wrote of intellectual freedom when he praised the scholar's freedom:

Who are these murmurers, these haters, these revilers? Men of no knowledge, and therefore no stability. The scholar, on the contrary, is sure of his point, is fast-rooted, and can securely predict the hour when all this roaring multitude shall roar for him. Analyze the chiding opposition, and it is made up of such timidities, uncertainties and no opinions, that it is not worth dispersing.32

Absolute truth, he explained, is the result of the working of the liberty of the wise man; and other liberties such as civil, ecclesiastical, literary, domestic spring from it.33

After studying what Emerson means by freedom from a survey of the scope, limitations, degrees, and types of freedom, as he presents them, next we need to know something of the practicability of this freedom. In discussing this part of the chapter, I shall try to explain the means of obtaining freedom, the beginnings, growth, workings, and use of freedom, as I understand them in Emerson's writings.

Emerson admitted on several occasions that freedom is the gift of God. Once he wrote:

In the fact that the human character is much affected by the accidents of country, parentage and the like we trace the divine Wisdom operating a progressive education of the race. At the same time it were treachery to our souls to overlook the other fact, the power of man over his condition, which bespeaks the great gift of God in the endowment of the human race with liberty. 34

Again he wrote:

For He that flung the broad blue fold
O'er mantling land and sea,
One third part of the sky unrolled
For the banner of the free. 35

Discriminating between man and other animals, God gave freedom to man, Emerson explained. He wrote in a letter to his aunt, "And as to the old knot of human liberty, our Alexanders must still cut its Gordian twines." 36 However, in a letter to William Emerson, he was quite sure that no one could be an Alexander for his country by trying to import liberty as LaFayette attempted for fifty years for Europe. 37

Even though freedom is God's gift to man, there are requisites for obtaining it. Virtue, Emerson thought, is mainly essential to freedom:

All our political disasters grow as logically out of our attempts in the past to do without justice, as the sinking of some part of your house comes of defect in the foundation. One thing is plain; a certain personal virtue is essential to freedom; and it begins to be doubtful whether our corruption in this country

34 Young Emerson Speaks, p. 164.


has not gone a little over the mark of safety, so that when canvassed we shall be found to be made up of a majority of reckless self-seekers. The divine knowledge has ebbed out of us and we do not know enough to be free. 38

The most sham of all gifts in his day, Emerson thought, was that of freedom of a town or city because it is impossible for any one to receive freedom who does not already possess it. 39 "A man cannot free himself by any self-denying ordinances, ... only by obedience to his own genius. ..." 40

Almost eighteen years later he voiced nearly the same sentiment in his poem "Ode - Sung in the Town Hall, Concord, July 4, 1857":

Be just at home; then write your scroll Of honor o'er the sea, And bid the broad Atlantic roll A ferry of the free. 41

Liberty is obtained by the development of a high degree of justice and civility among the people of a country:

For I suppose that liberty is an accurate index in men and nations of general progress. The theory of personal liberty must always appeal to the refined communities and to the men of the rarest perception and of delicate moral sense. For there are rights which rest on the finest sense of justice, and, with every degree of civility, it will be more truly felt and defined. A barbarous tribe of good stock will, by means of their best heads, secure substantial liberty.

42 Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 229.
Freedom is expensive, for many hardships must be faced, testing the strength and refining the character, before an individual becomes free. After recognizing freedom as a gift from God and explaining the means of obtaining freedom, Emerson also says, "Liberty, like religion, is a short and hasty fruit of rare and happy conditions."

Emerson, in discussing trade before the Mercantile Library Association, Boston, February 17, 1844, explained that true liberty begins with the complete abolition of slavery:

The philosopher and lover of man have much harm to say of trade; but the historian will see that trade was the principle of Liberty; that trade planted America and destroyed Feudalism; that it makes peace and keeps peace, and it will abolish slavery. We complain of its oppression of the poor, and of its building up a new aristocracy on the ruins of the aristocracy it destroyed. But the aristocracy of trade has no permanence, is not entailed, was the result of toil and talent, the result of merit of some kind, and is continually falling like the waves of the sea, before new claims of the same sort.

Reflection, which is the beginning of freedom, is one of the outstanding issues in Emerson's teachings. In writing of the freedom of the wise, he shows how the individual soul identifies itself with the universal soul and begins enjoying its freedom:

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43 Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 240.
Wherever goes a man, there goes a great soul. I never more fully possess myself than in slovenly or disagreeable circumstances. When I stamp through the mud in dirty boots, I hug myself with the feeling of my immortality. I then reflect complacently on whatever delicacy is in my taste, of amplitude in my memory. In a university I draw in my horns. On nothing does a wise man plume himself so much as on independence of circumstances; that in a kitchen, or dirty street, or sweltering stagecoach, he can separate himself from impure contact and embosom himself in the sublime society of his recollections, of his hopes and of his affections. Ambassador carries his country with him. So does the mind. 47

The purpose of the existence of the world is to teach the science of freedom. Many of us never get beyond our first lesson, liberty from fear. 48

The growth of freedom is very peculiar. Its history shows us that the pendulum of liberty swings back and forth from cruelty to pity, from violence to collapse. 49 The progress of liberty, which is made possible by finding a cause that merits one's whole-hearted sacrifice, is slow, and the liberty itself lasts for short periods. According to Emerson, the steps in freedom's progress in modern history include

- the Confession of Augsburg,
- the plantation of America,
- the English Commonwealth of 1643,
- the Declaration of America in 1776,
- the British emancipation of slaves in the West Indies,
- the passage of the Reform Bill,
- the repeal of the Corn-Laws,
- the Magnetic Ocean Telegraph, though yet imperfect,
- the passage of the Homestead Bill in the last Congress,
- and now, eminently, President Lincoln's Proclamation on the twenty-second of September. 50

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The workings of freedom explain further the practicability of this freedom. Absolute freedom of every person puts him as the center of the rainbow's arch, thus again making him one with the universal soul. Emerson once wished to write poems on freedom so

That the slave who caught the strain
Should throb until he snapped his chain.

Eventually he realized, however, that freedom was not a gift to be bestowed by the poet on the reader of his verse, but was an awareness and sensitiveness that must be developed by the individual himself:

[The deity of freedom]
Draws angels nigh to dwell with thee,
And makes thy thoughts archangels be;
Freedom's secret wilt thou know? —
Counsel not with flesh and blood,
Loiter not for cloak or food;
Right thou feel'st, rush to do.

The cosmopolitan character of liberty, which is outstanding in its workings, was explained at Concord in 1852, when Emerson gave the address of welcome to the exiled Hungarian governor, Louis Kossuth, who had come to America soliciting her help for his oppressed people. Calling him the "man of Freedom" and one "elected by God" he described the workings of freedom expressing his typical romantic idealistic philosophy of freedom:

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53 *ibid.*, Vol. IX, p. 198.
54 *ibid.*, Vol. XI, pp. 623-624 [from the editor's note].
We only see in you the angel of freedom, crossing sea and land; crossing parties, nationalities, private interests and self-esteem; dividing populations where you go, and drawing to your part only the good.55

The interchangeableness of the words freedom and servant at their best was explained by Emerson when he spoke of disciplining one's self to rules and principles after reaching certain convictions made possible by his freedom of choice.56

In discussing the use of freedom, Emerson wrote that the progress of civilization demands that all people be treated "with an infinite freedom."57 Individuals, in order to make the proper use of freedom, must themselves be constitutions, laws, covenants, churches, bibles, and victories in their battle against wrong.58 The idealism of freedom interwoven with his realism is expressed in the stanza of one of his poems:

United States! the ages plead, -
Present and Past in under-song,
Go put your creed into your deed,
Nor speak with double tongue.59

The practicability of freedom we have viewed from the method of obtaining freedom, freedom's beginnings, its growth, and the workings and use of freedom. Now I shall discuss its

55 Ibid., Vol. XI, p. 399.
59 Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 199.
durability from the standpoint of the opposing forces of freedom, the control of freedom, and the destruction of freedom.

The opposing forces of freedom include those standards which are so well established and accepted that people lose their initiative. Civic norms cause people to arm and fight when war could be avoided, Emerson tried to explain in a letter to Edward Bliss Emerson.60 Sometimes men become so well satisfied with these political customs that they become indifferent to voting and to guarding the safety of mankind.61 Intellectual norms often take away the geniality and gentleness that make for better laws. It makes a person partake "of a willful treason."62 Religious norms are enemies of liberty as seen in the unsuccessful Crusades of mediaeval religion, where reason played very little part in their decisions.63

These opposing forces of freedom are not always bad because they sometimes serve for its protection:

How much, preventing God, how much I owe,  
To the defences thou hast around me set;  
Example, custom, fear, occasion slow, —  
These scorned bondmen were my parapet.


I dare not peep over this parapet
To gauge with glance the roaring gulf below,
The depths of sin to which I had descended,
Had not these me against myself defended.\textsuperscript{54}

Freedom can be controlled, for heaven guards freedom\textsuperscript{65}
by causing man to become its servant.\textsuperscript{56} In dealing with
freedom, we find that it has its proper checks and balances,
as Emerson said in his lecture on "Progress of Culture":

We wish to put the ideal into practice to offer
liberty instead of chains, and see whether liberty
will not disclose its proper checks; believing that
a free press will prove safer than the censorship;
to ordain free trade, and believe that it will not
bankrupt us; universal suffrage, believing that it
will not carry us to mobs, or back to kings again.
I believe that the checks are as sure as the springs.
It is thereby that men are great and have great
allies.\textsuperscript{67}

Freedom can be abolished by one wrong move in the natural
sequence of things. Misconceived ideas of liberty sometimes
cause the wrong action to be taken. Freedom and equal rights
for people of a nation are not the result of legislation. In
fact, Emerson thought that freedom could be destroyed by
law-making:

\begin{quote}
The men are ripe of Saxon kind
To build an equal state, -
To take the statute from the mind
And make of duty fate.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Complete Works}, Vol. IX, p. 359.
\textsuperscript{57}\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. VIII, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ibid.}, Vol. IX, p. 199.
Later in the same poem, he explained that when one's liberty
is being established others' are being destroyed:

    For sea and land don't understand
    Nor skies without a frown
    See rights for which the one hand fights
    By the other cloven down.69

The ode is completed with Emerson's advice about how to keep
from destroying freedom:

    For he that worketh high and wise,
    Nor pauses in his plan,
    Will take the sun out of the skies
    Ere freedom out of man.70

In considering freedom as Emerson tried to explain it,
one can easily see that in this, as well as in other philo-
sophical problems, Emerson was the true voice of transcendent-
alism. There were three outstanding factors in Emerson's
transcendentalism: German intuitionism, English idealism,
and Oriental immanence.71 Each of these can be detected in
his philosophy of freedom. Emerson's idealism was an ideal-
istic monism because the spiritual universe, rather than the
material, was supreme in his teachings. In explaining our
indebtedness to the poet who frees man from the material
world, Emerson wrote,

I think nothing is of any value in books excepting the
transcendental and extraordinary. If a man is inflamed
and carried away by his thought, to the degree that he
forgets the authors and the public and heeds only this

69 Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 200.
70 Ibid., Vol. IX, p. 200.
71 Augustus Hopkins Strong, American Poets and Their
Theology, p. 56.
dream which holds him like an insanity, let me read his paper, and you may have all the arguments and histories and criticism. Therefore we love the poet, the inventor, who in any form, whether in an ode or in an action or in looks and behavior, has yielded us a new thought. He unlocks our chains and admits us to a new scene. 72

Many of the paragraphs I have quoted in this chapter lead me to think that Emerson believed liberty to be a matter of intuition, a truth discerned directly by the mind without the use of deductive reasoning. The influence of Oriental immanence can be detected in Emerson's explanation that all the elements of power are internal or subjective, some being more conspicuous at times. 73

At the beginning of his short ministerial career Emerson was probably primarily theistic in his sermons; but in his more mature writings, the romanticism of the transcendentalism of his age changed his theistic tendencies into pantheistic expressions, acknowledging the immanence of God in man and nature which was related to his doctrine of the Over-Soul:

And so I think that the last lesson of life, the choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience, a necessitated freedom. Man is made of the same atoms as the world is, he shares the same impressions, predispositions, and destiny. When his mind is illuminated, when his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and does, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure. 74

In this chapter I conclude that Emerson's dislike of materialism and his revolt against religious forms that lacked

73 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 64.
74 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 240.
meaning had their parts in maturing his philosophy of freedom. The importance of the individual and his position in the world of nature so primed Emerson's thinking that he felt very disinclined to take part in activities that dealt with a freedom not in keeping with the laws of nature.
CONCLUSION

In completing this study, I can see first how Emerson's attitude on slavery was partly determined by his philosophy of freedom. Hating a physical freedom that was not rooted in a deep spiritual purpose, Emerson was reluctant for many years to enter into the coarse Abolition movement, which seemed to him to be somewhat commercial in motive, lacking a love for the general welfare of the country. Believing that liberty is the will to do right and that it comes only after victory over wrong, he found it difficult to give his time and effort to a cause that he thought dealt only with the secondary evil. Although Emerson understood that laws and constitutions were means to an end, he still was primarily interested in convincing his readers that morality is the end of all government, thinking the lesser work could be done by other people. Since his philosophy was that all men are slaves of Time and Chance and that the only way to free one's self is to obey his own genius, Emerson felt he had a great mission to help people reach as high a degree of freedom as possible.

Nevertheless, when he at last saw the Civil War beginning, he became indignant over the forced servitude that he had seen and that he felt was against God's will. The great poverty of Emerson's childhood caused him to honor labor
highly and to have a great concern for the many American laborers. Emerson thought that if the wise people in high stations of life would live rightly, it would be impossible for freedom to be taken from the other people in the world; nevertheless, with their failure to do this, he finally seemed compelled to enter into the war to abolish Negro slavery and the inequality and despotism carried with it.

In his ideas on reconstruction, Emerson depended mainly on the education of people in all sections of the country. This was in accord with one of the important sources of his concept of freedom - Calvinism, which laid great emphasis on the culture of the intellect.

A second general conclusion that I draw is that Emerson's philosophy of freedom was influenced by the problem of Negro slavery. Although Emerson's main interest was in a spiritual freedom, the periods of Abolition, Civil War, and Reconstruction made him understand better that we live in a world that is not all spirit, and that there are physical limitations of freedom. In answering his call to public duty on the Negro slavery question, his own philosophy went through a process of purification.

Not only Emerson but also his readers were changed by the war. Besides tearing down some of the bad combinations in Southern Society, the war caused most of the citizens to think, study, debate, and speak. By the middle of the nineteenth century, even the politicians were very much interested
in the people themselves. This made the people as a whole more receptive of a philosophy of intellectual freedom.

In spite of the strong federal government that was established at the close of the Civil War, there was a Union and a Democracy centered around a liberty made possible by the higher degree of justice that had been developed within the country. Emerson's new philosophy grew out of the needs of the people that he understood better after a closer contact with their social, political, and economic problems of the time.

Thus Emerson's philosophy of freedom and the problem of Negro slavery were mutually helpful in causing him to emerge the one true philosopher of the New England Renaissance and the prophet of freedom for all America.
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