

**AMERICAN MEN OF  
LETTERS; MARGARET  
FULLER OSSOLI**

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**THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON**

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American Men of Letters.

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MARGARET FULLER OSSOLI.

BY

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON.



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# MARGARET FULLER OSSOLI.

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## L

### INTRODUCTORY.

IT has long been my desire to write a new memoir of Margaret Fuller Ossoli, a person whose career is more interesting, as it seems to me, than that of any other American of her sex; a woman whose aims were high and whose services great; one whose intellect was uncommon, whose activity incessant, whose life varied, and whose death dramatic. Thirty years having passed since the publication of her "Memoirs," it has seemed possible that a biography might now be written almost wholly from new or unused material, thus affording a positive addition to what was before known of her, and not a mere restatement of what was already before the public. In this aspect, at least, the effort has been successful, nearly every citation in the book being from manuscript sources; and the study of these materials having in all respects controlled the delineation here given of her life. Recognizing the great value of the portrait-



ure already drawn of her character by the authors of the "Memoirs," and the excellence of Mrs. Howe's more condensed biography, I have sometimes ventured to vary from their estimate, and to rely on my own.

It so happened that Margaret Fuller was associated with me, not closely but definitely, by various personal ties. She was born and bred in the same town, though more than thirteen years older; she was the friend of my older sisters, and I was the playmate of her younger brothers; her only sister was afterwards closely connected with me by marriage, and came for especial reasons, with her children, peculiarly under my charge; and, though this was after Margaret Fuller's death, it yet contributed with all the other circumstances to make the Fuller family seem like kindred of my own. It moreover happened that Margaret Fuller had upon me, through her writings, a more immediate intellectual influence than any one except Emerson, and possibly Parker. All this guarantees that warm feeling of personal interest, without which no memoir can be well written, while there was yet too little of intimacy to give place for the glamour of affection. This biography may therefore serve as an intermediate step between the original "Memoirs" — which gave the estimate offered by personal friendship — and that remoter verdict which will be the judgment of an impartial posterity.

The sources on which I have chiefly relied are

(1) the five bulky volumes in possession of the Fuller family, into which a great variety of written material was transcribed by Rev. A. B. Fuller, after the publication of the "Memoirs," — and to which I have referred always as the "Fuller MSS.;" (2) Margaret Fuller's letters to Mr. Emerson, kindly lent me by Mr. Emerson's executors; (3) her letters to Dr. F. H. Hedge, lent me by himself; (4) those to the Hon. A. G. Greene, of Providence, R. I., sent me by his daughter, Mrs. S. C. Eastman, of Concord, N. H.; (5) those to the Hon. George T. Davis, shown to me by his son, James C. Davis, Esq.; (6) many letters and papers of different periods, sent to me from London by the Rev. W. H. Channing; (7) Margaret Fuller's diary of 1844, lent by Mrs. R. B. Storer, of Cambridge; (8) her traveling diary in England and Scotland, which I own; (9) several volumes of Mr. A. Bronson Alcott's MS. diary; (10) a translation of her letters to her husband in Italy, the version being made by the late Miss Elizabeth Hoar, and lent me by her sister, Mrs. R. B. Storer. To this I may add a store of reminiscences from Margaret Fuller's old Cambridge friends. In the cases where I have used the same written material with the editors of the "Memoirs," the selections employed have been wholly different. A few printed books, issued since the publication of the "Memoirs," have given some aid, especially Horace Greeley's "Recollections of a Busy Life," Weiss's "Life of Theodore Parker,"

and the "Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence;" but the main reliance has necessarily been placed on material not hitherto made public; and to all the friends who have helped me to this I am profoundly grateful.

If my view of Margaret Fuller differs a little from that of previous biographers, it is due to the study of these original sources. With every disposition to defer to the authors of the "Memoirs," all of whom have been in one way or another my friends and teachers, I am compelled in some cases to go with what seems the preponderance of written evidence against their view. Margaret Fuller was indeed, as one of them has lately said to me, many women in one, and there is room for a difference of opinion even in assigning a keynote to her life. In their analysis, these biographers seem to me to have given an inevitable prominence to her desire for self-culture, perhaps because it was on this side that she encountered them; but I think that any one who will patiently study her in her own unreserved moments will now admit that what she always most desired was not merely self-culture, but a career of mingled thought and action, such as she finally found. She who, at the age of thirteen, met young scholars returned from Europe with enthusiastic vindications of American society against their attacks; she who, a few years after, read with delight all Jefferson's correspondence, was not framed by nature for a mystic, a dreamer, or a book-worm. She longed,