

**MEMOIR OF GEORGE BARRELL  
EMERSON, LL.D., PRESENTED AT  
THE MASSACHUSETTS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, MAY 10,  
1883, WITH A SUPPLEMENT**

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Memoir of George Barrell Emerson, LL.D., Presented at the Massachusetts Historical Society,  
May 10, 1883, with a Supplement by Robert C. Waterston

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**ROBERT C. WATERSTON**

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*With the Writer's  
best regards.*

BOSTON, 71 CHESTER SQUARE,  
1884.



MEMOIR

OF

GEORGE BARRELL EMERSON, LL.D.

BY

ROBERT C. WATERSTON.

PRESENTED AT THE MEETING

OF

THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

MAY 10, 1883.

With a Supplement.

C.  
CAMBRIDGE:

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1884.







## MEMOIR.

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IN the town of Wells, Maine (then a part of Massachusetts), Sept. 12, 1797, George B. Emerson was born; and in March, 1881, at the house of his son-in-law, Hon. John Lowell, at Chestnut Hill, Brookline, he died, at the advanced age of eighty-four. His father was an able physician, a graduate of Harvard, a man of uncommon ability, with scholarly tastes and acquirements. Beloved and respected, he not only had a wide professional practice, but he made the schools a special object of his care. In the choice and appointment of teachers he was consulted, and as a visitor of the district schools his face was familiar, while his counsel and encouragement were always welcome. He had the right word both for parents and pupils, and exerted a beneficent influence wherever he went. Mr. Emerson's grandfather was a clergyman in Hollis, New Hampshire, and he not only was a very acceptable preacher, but he was widely known through all the county of Hillsborough for the pre-eminent skill with which he fitted young men for college. Thus the rare gift of teaching seemed to have been transmitted from generation to generation. As an inherited quality it had come down from father to son, not evidently wearing itself out, but gaining, with time, fresh impulse and inspiration.

Mr. Emerson's boyhood had nothing in it of special excitement. He was contented and happy with the simplest

method of life. Quiet in his manners, he was at the same time deeply in earnest. He had the most beautiful balance of character. There never appeared to be with him any great effort in acquiring knowledge, and when acquired it seemed to form a natural part of himself and had no tendency to be forgotten.

Let us look at the school-room. The building was such as is generally used for a common country school. It pretended to nothing more. It had the advantage of the watchful care of his father, Dr. Samuel Emerson, who, if the windows were broken or clapboards torn away, would at once send and have them repaired, so that there was not the disgrace of unreasonable dilapidation. But in justice it must be said that the teaching and discipline within the school always held the place of supreme importance. Only in the winter months did George attend school. In the summer he worked upon his father's farm and in the garden. At first thought, this may appear to have been a serious privation. Perhaps to many young people it would have proved so; but George always accounted this arrangement a piece of great good fortune. It gave him that out-of-door life, the benefit of which he felt through all his after years.

He worked with constant diligence,—sowing the early seed, watching each stage of growth, and gathering the autumnal harvest. Work on the farm he liked, and never grew weary of it. Every implement used he became thoroughly acquainted with. His own conviction was, that active life under the open sky tended to quicken his powers of observation, and was the best possible experience for him to have gone through. The most fragile plant he studied with unwearied care, and not a tree of the forest escaped his notice. The oak, the beech, the maple, the pine, the spruce, the hemlock, all won his attention, and revealed to him some secret law of their being.

Preparatory to his presenting himself at Cambridge, he attended for a time the Dummer Academy at Byfield, where he devoted himself to Latin and Greek. Any additional preparation for college was made at home, under the care of

his father. In 1813 he entered Harvard, and commenced his college life. Among his classmates were George Bancroft, Caleb Cushing, S. J. May, S. E. Sewall, and Stephen Salisbury. At that time President Kirkland was at the head of the college, Edward Everett was tutor in Latin, Professor Farrar was head of the mathematical department, while Dr. Hedge, Dr. Henry Ware, and George Ticknor held responsible positions. Such men could not but give life to the whole university.

Two letters have been received from those who were prominent in his class,—one from the Hon. Stephen Salisbury, and the other from George Bancroft, the historian. Mr. Salisbury writes:—

“My own rooms at Cambridge were at a distance from the college, which prevented that frequent intercourse which we might otherwise have enjoyed.

“We were therefore at that time not intimate, but when we did meet, it was always pleasantly. Our mature friendship sprang up in the last quarter of his life, rebuking the common notion that the happiness of love is the privilege of the young. . . . I can remember, but I cannot describe, the pleasure I had in Mr. Emerson's society and in his correspondence. That the enjoyment was mutual is proved, not only by his cordial welcome, but more tenderly and unequivocally by the neatly kept file of my occasional and not frequent letters which his daughter sent me after his decease.

“Such personal reminiscences as you ask will not be desired. You know, and can learn, all the particulars of his life. You appreciate and love his genial and wholesome character, and you will give us a memoir in which the old and the young will find pleasure and instruction.”

Mr. Bancroft says:—

NO. 1623 H STREET, WASHINGTON, D. C.  
18th May, 1882.

MY DEAR SIR,—George B. Emerson, of my class in Harvard, was so industrious, and so exact in the discharge of all his duties, that there is no story to tell about him. He was very sweet and amiable; always cheerful, and very industrious; so regular that he was distinguished from others of his family name as *Pater* Emerson. I remember that