

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

NCLC

167

Volume 167

Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

*Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800
and 1899, from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations*

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Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

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NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

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An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting

those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Amos Bronson Alcott

1799-1888

American essayist, poet, prose writer, and biographer.

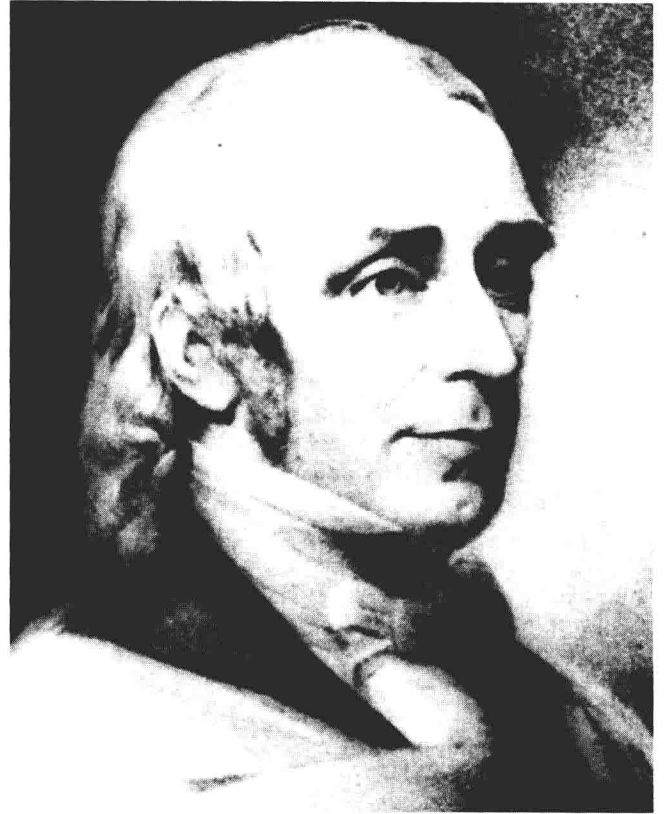
The following entry presents criticism on Alcott from 1836 to 1997. For additional information on Alcott's career, see *NCLC*, Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

Writer, educator, conversationalist, and mystic, Alcott was, in many ways, the embodiment of the American Transcendentalist movement. He lived during an era of intellectual ferment and radical social change in America, and his essays and poetry reflect the confidence and enthusiasm of his age. Antigovernment and nonconformist in his philosophy, Alcott devoted his life to exploring the potential of the human spirit as both a source of new ideas and as a repository for limitless optimism, with the aim of teaching the individual how to overcome the repressive burden of society's conventions. While Alcott possessed an indomitable will and great intellectual passion, he never succeeded, however, in reining in his powerful energies in the service of a single, coherent purpose. Throughout his life he struggled to find a practical application for his energies, and his dogged refusal to work within the framework of American capitalist society often placed his family in serious economic jeopardy. For much of his life he struggled to earn a living, generally relying on the generosity of friends for his family's survival. During his own lifetime his reputation rested primarily on his gifts as a raconteur, and contemporary accounts testify to the eloquent and engaging, albeit unstructured and improvisational, qualities of Alcott's conversational style. Modern critics and scholars generally find Alcott's writings to be labored and unoriginal, and his work attracts few readers today. In spite of his failings as an author, however, Alcott remains a representative figure of his age, and his ideas played an indisputable role in the formation of a distinctly American intellectual culture in mid-nineteenth-century New England.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Alcott was born in Wolcott, Connecticut, on November 29, 1799, the son of a poor farmer. After abandoning his education at the age of thirteen, he worked briefly in



a clock factory before becoming an itinerant peddler, an occupation that took him to the Carolinas. Alcott's first-hand observations of slavery in the South, coupled with his brief sojourn in a Quaker community, exerted a powerful impact on his intellectual and moral development and helped shape the radical social views that would form the foundation of his life's work. He struggled for several years to earn a living selling his wares, and by his early twenties Alcott found himself burdened by numerous debts. He returned to Connecticut and embarked on a career as a teacher. He taught for a few years at schools in the towns of Bristol and Cheshire and became increasingly interested in school reform, but found little support and eventually felt pressured to quit. He then taught at an infant school in Boston, where he hoped to find greater enthusiasm for progressiveness and reform. In 1830 Alcott married Abigail May; they would eventually have four daughters. Alcott spent the next few years teaching at various schools in Philadelphia before returning with his family to Boston in 1834 to found the Temple School.

Inspired by his early experiences as an educator, Alcott set out to develop a new system of instruction that cultivated the innate spiritual and imaginative potential of the child. He eschewed traditional rote instruction and forms of discipline in favor of a conversational, Socratic method of teaching, encouraging his students to seek knowledge from intuition rather than memorization. As his teaching philosophy evolved, Alcott had begun to write essays describing his pedagogical methods. In these early writings, published in the *American Journal of Education* and its successor, *American Annals of Education and Instruction*, Alcott expounded his conviction that the educational process was essentially moral and that instructors could impart a strong sense of values only by nurturing the unique spiritual development of each student. In 1834 Alcott's assistant, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, began keeping an account of activities at the Temple School, which she published in 1835 as *Record of a School*. With the publication of Peabody's work, Alcott's educational methods quickly achieved notoriety among critics and readers, who were troubled by his liberal attitudes toward religion and sex. But also during these years Alcott became acquainted with like-minded writers and intellectuals, among them Ralph Waldo Emerson and Orestes Brownson. In 1836 Alcott helped form the Transcendental Club, a society devoted to progressive ideas of social reform, art, and spirituality. That same year Alcott also published the first volume of his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, with a second volume appearing in the following year. This work exacerbated the public's suspicions concerning Alcott's educational philosophy, and by 1839 Alcott found enrollment at his school in such serious decline that he was forced to close. In April 1840, disenchanted with what he perceived to be the corruption and degradation of city life, Alcott moved his family to Concord, where he managed to eke out a modest living as a farmer. While living in Concord, Alcott also played a role in creating a Transcendentalist journal entitled the *Dial*, which published his aphorisms known as the "Orphic Sayings"; fifty of them appeared in the *Dial* in 1840, another fifty in 1841, and twelve in 1842. Unfortunately the "Orphic Sayings" met with widespread ridicule among critics and readers, and more than two decades would pass before Alcott published again. In spite of the difficulties of these years, Alcott's ideas began to attract supporters abroad, and in 1842 he traveled to England to meet with a group of Transcendentalists led by Henry Wright. At this time Alcott became friends with Charles Lane, with whom, in 1843, he founded a short-lived commune, Fruitlands, in Harvard, Massachusetts.

For the next decade and a half Alcott and his family lived in various New England towns, finally settling permanently in Concord in 1857. At around this time Alcott began to secure speaking engagements, and for the next several years he engaged in numerous public

"conversations" throughout the Midwest, which earned him a modest following. In 1868 Alcott finally achieved financial stability when his daughter, Louisa May, published her best-selling novel *Little Women*. Alcott himself wrote prolifically over the last two decades of his career, largely poetry and essays, but also an acclaimed biography of Emerson. As he grew older, Alcott became increasingly conservative in his views, and he even embraced organized Christianity in the face of new ideas concerning human evolution and women's suffrage, theories he found too radical. In the last years of his life Alcott gained acclaim as an elder spokesman for the Transcendentalist movement, delivering lectures and helping to found the Concord School of Philosophy in 1879. Alcott's career was cut short in 1882, however, when he suffered a massive stroke, leaving him unable to speak or write. He died six years later, on March 4, 1888.

MAJOR WORKS

While during his lifetime Alcott achieved greater renown as a conversationalist than an author, he did produce a handful of literary works of some merit and lasting significance. His first published work, "Observations on the Principals and Methods of Infant Instruction," which appeared in 1830, was based on his experiences teaching at the infant school in Boston and provides a record of American educational theories in the early nineteenth century. The two-volume *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, which provides a valuable chronicle of the spiritual views of Alcott's students, helped promulgate new attitudes toward the importance of early education in America. Alcott generally enjoyed greater success with his later works. He published the well-respected biography *Ralph Waldo Emerson* in 1865. *Concord Days* (1872), a collection of essays and poems, represents the culmination of Alcott's mature philosophical thought. Alcott produced another collection, *Table-Talk*, in 1877 and that was followed by a volume of poetry, *New Connecticut*, in 1881. His last work, *Sonnets and Canzonets*, appeared in 1882. Although unpublished during his lifetime, Alcott's exhaustive journals, which first appeared in 1938 under the title *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, represent the most articulate and complete expression of his ideas concerning spirituality, literature, and politics. Equally valuable as a document of Alcott's life and times is *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*, published in 1969.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Alcott's writings were generally met with indifference and, at times, derision. Emerson himself, while one of Alcott's closest and most loyal friends, had little praise

for Alcott's writings and even discouraged his friend from publishing his book-length documentation of his daughter Elizabeth's first years, *Psyche*. By the time of Alcott's death, however, he had begun to gain recognition as an important and highly original thinker. In 1893 Franklin Benjamin Sanborn and William T. Harris published *A. Bronson Alcott, His Life and Philosophy*, a valuable early appraisal of his life and work. A more detailed and objective account of Alcott's career, Odell Shepard's *Pedlar's Progress*, appeared in 1937. Also in the 1930s, Arthur Christy was among the first to recognize Alcott's pivotal role in introducing and popularizing Eastern philosophy in New England, and during the 1940s scholars of education such as Dorothy McCuskey produced book-length studies of Alcott's educational philosophy. Since the 1970s scholars of the American Renaissance, notably Joel Myerson, have begun to recognize Alcott's crucial contribution to the development of Transcendentalist philosophy as well as his indisputable influence on the writings of Emerson. Although Alcott has never attracted substantial critical interest as a poet or prose stylist, the diversity and versatility of his ideas and interests have struck a chord with prominent thinkers and writers outside literary circles. In recent years Alcott's teaching philosophy has attracted renewed interest, and child psychologists such as Robert Coles and Joseph Chilton Pearce have praised Alcott's *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* as a seminal work in the field of early childhood education.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Observations on the Principals and Methods of Infant Instruction (essay) 1830

Conversations with Children on the Gospels. 2 vols. (essays) 1836-37; also published as *Record of Conversations on the Gospels, Held at Mr. Alcott's School*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (biography) 1865; also published as *Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Estimate of His Character and Genius*, 1882

Tablets (essays and poetry) 1868

Concord Days (essays and poetry) 1872

Table-Talk (essays and poetry) 1877

New Connecticut: An Autobiographical Poem (poetry and prose) 1881

Sonnets and Canzonets (poetry) 1882

The Journals of Bronson Alcott (journals) 1938; also published as *Journals*, 1966

†*Orphic Sayings* (prose) 1939

The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott (letters) 1969

†Originally published in 1840, 1841, and 1842 in the journal *Dial*.

CRITICISM

Ralph Waldo Emerson (journal date 24 June 1836)

SOURCE: Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Journal entry from *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, with Annotations, 1836-1838*, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, p. 75. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910.

[In the following excerpted journal entry dated 24 June 1836, Emerson responds to Alcott's *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*.]

I have read with great pleasure, sometimes with delight, No. 5 of Mr. Alcott's *Record of Conversations on the Gospels*. The internal evidence of the genuineness of the thinking on the part of the children is often very strong. Their wisdom is something the less surprising because of the simplicity of the instrument on which they play these fine airs. It is a harp of two strings, Matter and Spirit, and in whatever combination or contrast or harmony you strike them, always the effect is sublime.¹

Note

1. This passage is followed by those about Prayer being "a true study of truth" (*Nature*, "Prospects," p. 74, Centenary Ed. [; Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-4]), and that about every man or boy having a trust of power, whether over a potato-field or the laws of a state. (*Lectures and Biographical Sketches* [in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883)], "Education," p. 128.)

Orestes A. Brownson (review date October 1838)

SOURCE: Brownson, Orestes A. Review of *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*, by Amos Bronson Alcott. *Boston Quarterly Review* 1 (October 1838): 417-32.

[In the following excerpt, Brownson praises Alcott's idealism and originality as a thinker, while critiquing the limitations of his philosophy.]

This [*Conversations with Children on the Gospels*] is a difficult book for Reviewers. It is not easy to say what it is, or what it is not. It is hardly safe to assume it as an index to the views and opinions of its editor, or to the character and worth of the school in which these *Conversations* were held. The *Conversations* published are incomplete; they comprise only one year of what

was intended to be a four years' course. The very nature of such conversations precludes the possibility of recording them with perfect accuracy, though these were recorded with great fidelity; and then, they constituted the exercise of the scholars for only a part of one half-day in a week, the rest of the time being taken up with the studies common in other schools. As it regards Mr. Alcott, these *Conversations* very imperfectly reveal him, or his system of instruction. One is in constant danger of misapprehending him, and of ascribing to him views and opinions which belong solely to the children. Even his own questions, if we are not on our guard, may mislead us; for they were frequently suggested by the remarks of the scholars, and designed merely to induce them to carry out their own thought. . . .

Still we are not at all surprised that Mr. Alcott and his publications are so little appreciated, and so greatly misapprehended. Mr. Alcott is a reformer. He does not believe that the Past has realized the highest worth man may aspire to; he does not believe that the methods of teaching usually adopted, or the systems of education contended for by our teachers and professors generally, are at all adapted to the purpose of rearing up MEN, and of making them walk as becomes moral and intellectual beings, made in the image of God and possessing a Divine Nature; he thinks that the aim of our systems of education, whether private, public, domestic, or social, is too low, and that the methods adopted are destitute of science, above all of vitality, that they are too mechanical, and make of our schools only commendable "tread-mills." Now to think and say all this is to reflect no great credit on our thousands of school-teachers and learned professors and their friends, nor upon those who boast the efforts we have made and are making in the cause of Education. This is as much as to tell his disciples, that unless their righteousness, in this respect, exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the Chief Priests and Elders in the teaching Art, they shall in no wise be qualified for undertaking to rear up men and women, fit to be the citizens of a free and Christian Republic. Can the Chief Priests and Elders, the Scribes and Pharisees, be made to believe this; or to regard him who utters it in any other light than that of a reviler, a blasphemer? Reformers are never understood and appreciated, till the reforms for which they contend are to a good degree realized.

Then again, Mr. Alcott is a peculiar man. He has observed more than he has read, and reflected more than he has observed. He is a man, though eminently social in his feelings and tastes, who has lived mostly in communion with himself, with children, and with Nature. His system is one which he has thought out for himself and by himself. It has therefore almost necessarily taken the hues of his own mind, and become somewhat difficult to communicate to minds not constructed like his

own. The terms he has made use of in his solitary reflections to express his thoughts to himself have a special meaning, a special value in his use of them, of which those with whom he converses are ignorant, and of which it is often extremely difficult for them to conceive. In consequence of his solitary reflections, of his little intercourse with the world at large, and his limited acquaintance with books, he has framed to himself a peculiar language, which, though formed of the choicest English, is almost, if not quite wholly unintelligible to all who have not become extensively acquainted with his mode of thinking. He very easily translates the thoughts of others into his language, but it is with great difficulty that he translates his thoughts into their language. People generally in hearing him converse form no conception of his real meaning; and if they attach any meaning to what he says, it will in nine cases out of ten be a false one. This, however, though it accounts for the misapprehension of people, in regard to him, is not altogether his fault. People may misapprehend him, because they do not understand themselves. There are not many men who have thoroughly analyzed their own minds, become masters of their own ideas, and so familiar with them that they can recognise them when clothed in a new dress. We are familiar with certain words, which we suppose we use as signs of ideas, but which we use very often as substitutes for ideas. When we find these words defined, or hear them used indeed as signs of ideas, and as signs of the very ideas for which we should have used them, had we used them for any, we are at fault; we find ourselves introduced to entire strangers with whom we can hold no conversation. We know not our own ideas; and very likely are frightened at them, and run away from them as though they were the Evil One himself. . . .

Mr. Alcott is known mainly as a schoolmaster, but as a schoolmaster, as we usually think of schoolmasters, he must not be viewed. Unblessed with an abundance of this world's goods, he has often been obliged to confine himself to the drudgery of mere schoolmaster duties; but he is an original thinker, and he aspires to be an educator, not of children only, but of mankind. His system of Human Culture is designed for the human race, and is valued by him as true in itself, and as the means of raising all men to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. He professes to have a whole system of Theology, Morality,—a philosophy of Man, of Nature, of God. His method of teaching is but the means by which men are to be led ideally and actually to the Absolute. His philosophy he regards as the philosophy of the Absolute. It is as the theologian, the philosopher, the moralist, and the philanthropist, rather than as a schoolmaster, that he is to be regarded. But we proceed to develop his system.

Suppose a man who has no means of knowledge but his five senses. Such a man can take cognizance, of only

material objects, of sensible qualities. Color, form, extension, solidity, sound, odor, taste, comprise all the objects of knowledge he can consistently admit. In a word, external nature is all he knows. External nature is to him what it appears. It is real, not symbolical. It indicates nothing which it is not,—nothing on which it depends, and of which it may be regarded as the sign or apparition. It is what it appears, and when seen it is known, and when known that is the end of knowledge. Nothing more is to be known.

In Nature everything, as known by this man of five senses, and of five senses only, is concrete. Nothing is abstract. There are particulars but no generals. Mankind is merely a collective name, and has no meaning beyond the number of individual men and women it designates. A tree is a tree and nothing more. Truth and virtue are abstract nouns, invented for the convenience of conversation, but void of meaning. There may be true stories, true views, but not truth, conformity to which makes the individual story or view a true one. There may be virtuous men and women, but no virtue, conformity to which makes one virtuous.

But is this true? Are all things what they appear? And does all that is appear? Is the Appearance the Thing? Or is the Thing that appears always back of the Appearance? Is it the Thing that we recognise with our senses, or is it only the sign, symbol, or shadow of the Thing? In man, is it the man that is apparent to the senses? The senses perceive the body, but is the body anything more than the symbol of the man? Take all the phenomena with regard to a man, presented us by the senses, and do they constitute the man? The man is evidently a collection of forces, moral, intellectual, and physical. We observe in him moral affections; we know that he performs the act of thinking; we see that such things as growth, decay, digestion, nutrition, and the like, are constantly going on in him. Now is there not back of these Something that produces them? Is it the feet that walk, or is it the man that walks? Does the brain think, or is it the man that thinks? The stomach, does it digest, or is it the man that digests? The heart, does it love, or is it the man that loves? Back then of the sense-phenomena lies the real Man, the Thing, the Reality, of which what is apparent to the senses is the mere symbol, or sign. The appearance, the apparition is not the man, but a mere index to point us to where the man is and to what he does.

Take a plant. The senses show us a certain number of phenomena. But in that plant are there not things which the senses do not show us, of which they can take no cognizance? Back of this sense-plant is there not the spirit-plant, that is, the real plant of which the senses show us only the appearance or symbol? The real plant is the law that is manifesting itself; the force which pushes itself out in what we call growth, in the bud, the

blossom, the fruit; and which makes it precisely what it is, and not something else. It is not meant by this that the senses deceive us; it is only meant that they do not show us the Thing, but its sign; not the reality, but the phenomenon, as a word is not the idea, but its sign or symbol.

We do not give these examples as demonstrations, but merely as illustrations to make our meaning obvious. Now apply the remarks we have made of man and of the plant to all nature, and you have Mr. Alcott's doctrine of Nature, or more properly of the external world. The external world is merely the world of the senses; it is not a real but an apparent world, not substantial, but phenomenal. He does not distrust the senses as do the Idealists, but he denies their power to attain to realities. They stop short of the Thing, and merely give us its sign. They show us where the Thing is, but leave it for the spirit to see what it is.

Pursuing the path in which we have started we may go much further. The Real is always the Invisible. But the invisible world which we have found lying immediately back of the sensible or apparent world, is it the ultimate world? Is there not another world which the soul may discover back of that? All effects are included in their causes, and we have not attained to the Thing till we have attained to the ultimate cause. Absolute reality of all things can then be found only in the absolute cause of all things. A cause in order to be a cause must be free, self-sufficing, and self-acting. If absolute then it must be one, for more absolute causes than one is an absurdity which the reason rejects. The world of the senses must then be resolved into the invisible world of the reason, which may for distinction's sake be called the *intelligible* world; and the intelligible world must then be resolved into the Absolute world, the world of Unity, which, if we understand Mr. Alcott in his terminology, may be called the world of Faith. In man he recognises sense, understanding, or reason, and Faith or Instinct; each of these has a world of its own. The absolute world, that is, Absolute Reality is found only by Faith or Instinct, and is the world of Absolute Unity.

Now, Absolute Unity, in the bosom of which all things exist, is God. In the last analysis all Reality resolves itself into God. God is the sum total of all that is; the only Substance, the only absolute Being, the only absolute Reality. God is the Universe, and the Universe is God;—not the sensible universe, nor the intelligible, but the Instinctive;—not the universe seen by the eye of sense, nor that seen by the eye of reason or understanding, but that seen by the inner eye of the soul, by Faith or Instinct.

Now the universe of the senses and that of the understanding are both manifestations of God. The sensible universe is God as he appears to the senses; the intelli-

gible universe is God as he unfolds himself to the intellect; the universe beheld by Faith or Instinct, that is, by the highest in man, is God in his absoluteness; as he is in himself, the real, not the manifested God. We take our stand now on the revelations of Instinct; that is, in God himself, and from his point of view examine and interpret all phenomenal worlds and beings. In descending from him through the intelligible world and the sensible, we perceive that all laws, all forces, all things, so far forth as they have any real being, are identical with God. God is not the plant as it exists to the understanding, or the senses; nevertheless, he is all the reality, all the absolute being there is in the plant; God is not man, and man is not God, as he exists to the senses, or to the understanding; nevertheless all the real being there is in man, all that is not phenomenal, appearance merely, is God, "in whom we live, and move, and have our *being*."

By a psychological examination of man, we find that he takes cognizance of the three worlds, or universes we have enumerated. Man must have then three orders of faculties, corresponding to these three worlds. He is not then merely endowed with five senses, as we supposed in the beginning; he has, above his five senses, reason or understanding; and above this, as that which attains to the Absolute, Faith or Instinct; which, so far as we can perceive, is very nearly identical with what M. Cousin calls Spontaneity or the Spontaneous Reason. Now in the business of education, we should have reference to these three worlds, or these three orders of faculties, and according to their relative importance. The education which has been and is most common has reference almost exclusively to the world of the senses; some few philosophers and teachers are laboring to make it conform to the world of the understanding; few or none labor to make it conform to the world of Instinct, to the absolute Truth and Reality of things. This last is Mr. Alcott's work. To call attention to this work, to show by his instructions what it is, and by his example how it may be and is to be done, is what he regards as his mission. As a partial experiment, as an intimation of what may under more favorable circumstances be accomplished, he had these *Conversations* recorded as they occurred, and has finally published them to the world.

Having thus far glanced at what may be called Mr. Alcott's metaphysical system, we may now proceed without much difficulty to seize his theory of education, and to a general comprehension of his views of Childhood and of Religion. These views have struck many minds as absurd, but the absurdity, we think we find in the views of others, is often an absurdity for which we alone are responsible. We assign to others very frequently the absurd views which originate with ourselves; and it is a good rule for us to observe, that so long as a man's views appear to us to be wholly absurd, if he be a man of but tolerable understanding, we should judge ourselves ignorant of his real meaning.

Instinct, which must be carefully distinguished from Impulse, is according to Mr. Alcott's theory the Divine in Man. It is the Incarnate God. Our instincts are all divine and holy, and being the immediate actings, or promptings of the Divinity, they constitute the criterion of Truth and Duty. They are what there is in man the most real and absolute. They are then the most Godlike, the most Divine, partake the most of God; they are then to be regarded as the highest in man, to which all else in him is to be subordinated. The instincts are to be followed as the supreme law of the soul.

The instincts, inasmuch as they are the Divine in man, the Incarnate God, contain all the truth, goodness, reality there is in man. The Divine in man, or the God Incarnate, is one with the Universal, the Absolute God. There is nothing in the sensible universe, nor in the intelligible universe, that is not in the Absolute God. All things are in God, and God is in man. In our instincts then are included, in their law, their reality, both the world of sense and the world of the understanding. To know these worlds then we must look within, not abroad. To become acquainted with God and his manifestations we must study the instincts. Knowledge, truth, goodness, all that can deserve to be called by either name, must be drawn out of the soul, not poured into it. Human culture, therefore, as the word *education*, (from *e* and *duco*,) literally implies, is merely drawing forth what exists, though enveloped, in the soul from the beginning.

As the child is born with all the instincts and with them more active and pure than they are in after life, it follows that the child is born in possession of all truth, goodness, worth, human nature can aspire to. Therefore said Jesus, "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Childhood is therefore to be revered. The wise men from the East do always hail with joy the star of the new-born babe, and haste to the cradle to present their offerings and to worship. The educator must sit down with reverence and awe at the feet of the child, and listen. Till this be done, little progress can be expected in human culture.

The child is pure and holy. It obeys freely and without reserve its Divine Instincts. It smiles, loves, acts, as God commands. The true end, or one of the great ends of Human Culture must be to preserve the child in the grown up man. Most people at a very early day lose the child, and go through life bewailing their lost childhood. The whole family of man may be represented as the distracted mother, who wept with loud lamentation for her children, because they were not. The only exception to this is, that they too often lose their childhood without being conscious of their loss. Childhood is lost; the innocence, the freedom, the light of the instincts are obscured, and all but annihilated, by the false modes of life which are adopted; by the wrong state of society which prevails; by intemperance, in eating,

drinking, sleeping, and the like; and by the mistaken education which men have unwisely encouraged,—an education which tends perpetually to raise sense and understanding above Divine Instinct, and to subject us to shadows and illusions, rather than to truth and reality. Hence, the necessity of strict temperance in all the habits of the body, and of early attention to the instincts, so that they may be called forth and strengthened before the senses and the understanding have established their dominion over us.

The body in its true state is to the soul what the outward universe is to God,—its veil or covering, or more properly, its symbol which marks to the senses the place where it is. What are called bodily appetites and inclinations, come from the soul, not from the body; proceeding from the soul, they should be regarded, in themselves, as of like purity and divinity, as any of the instincts of our nature. The exercise of them all, and in all cases, should be regarded as a religious exercise, and should be performed with all the feelings of awe and responsibility, with which we accompany the most solemn act of religious worship. All the functions of the body, as we call them, but which are really functions of the soul, are holy, and should be early surrounded with holy and purifying associations. Hence the conversations in the volumes before us with the children, on the mysterious phenomena attending the production and birth of a new member to the human family, or what Mr. Alcott calls the Incarnation of Spirit,—conversations which have caused him much reproach, and done him, for the moment, we fear no little injury. His motives were pure and praiseworthy, and his theory seemed to require him to take the course he did, and he should not be censured; but for ourselves, we regard as one of the most certain instincts of our nature, that one which leads us to throw a veil over the mysterious phenomena by which the human race is preserved and its members multiplied. Mr. Alcott's theory requires him to respect all the Instincts, and why this less than others? In attempting to eradicate it, he appears to us to be inconsistent with himself, and likely to encourage more prurient fancies than he will be able to suppress. Nature in this has provided better, in our judgment, for the preservation of chastity in thought and in deed, than man can do by any system of culture he can devise.

Pursuing the rules implied in these general principles, the educator aims to call forth into full glory and activity the grace and truth with which man is endowed. He labors to train up the human being committed to his care, in obedience to the Highest, to see, and respect, and love all things in the light, not of the senses, not of the intellect even, but of Faith, of Instinct, of the Spirit of God,—the “true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world.” If he succeeds in realizing his aim, the result is a perfect Man, “armed at all points, to use the Body, Nature, and Life for his growth and re-

newal, and to hold dominion over the fluctuating things of the Outward.” Realize this in the case of every child born into the world, and you have reformed the world,—made earth a heaven, and men the sons of God in very deed. This is the end Mr. Alcott contemplates; this end he believes can be attained by his method of viewing and disciplining the soul, and by no other. Hence the magnitude of the work he is engaged in,—the importance of his doctrine, and his method of culture to the human race.

If now for the word *God*, we substitute the word *Spirit*, and call spirit absolute Being, and the absolute, the real universe, which lies back of the sensible universe and the intelligible, also spirit, and therefore regard all power, force, cause, reality, as spirit, and spirit everywhere as identical, we may, with the expositions we have made, attain to a proximate notion of Mr. Alcott's theory of God, Man, and Nature, as well as of Human Culture. He sees spirit everywhere, and in everything he seeks spirit. Spirit regarded as the cause and law of organization is God; spirit organized is the universe; spirit incarnated is man. An identity therefore runs through God, Man, and Nature; they are all one in the fulness of universal and everlasting spirit.

Spirit, though incarnate in the case of every human being, attains rarely to anything like a perfect manifestation. A perfect manifestation, however, is not to be expected, because there are no bounds to the growth of spirit. Many bright specimens of the worth men may attain to have been exhibited at distant intervals in the world's history; among which Moses, Socrates, and Jesus are the worthiest. Of these three Jesus stands first.

With this estimate of the character of Jesus, the Records of his life must of course be regarded as the most suitable text book for the educator. They give the children for their study the model nearest to perfection, that can as yet be found. Besides all this, the identity of spirit, and therefore of human nature in all ages and countries of the world, implies an identity between Jesus, or the Instincts of Jesus, and the Instincts of the child. The coincidence, which we may discover between the manifestations of the pure Instincts of Childhood and those recorded of Jesus, becomes therefore a proof of the accuracy of the Record. If we can reproduce in children, as yet unspoiled, the phenomena recorded of Jesus, then we have a new proof, and a strong proof, that the Record is a faithful one. These *Conversations on the Gospels*, therefore, so far as the answers of the children may be regarded as a reproduction of Jesus, the doctrines or precepts ascribed to Jesus, constitute a class of evidence for Christianity, which the Christian theologian will find not without value.

These are, rudely and imperfectly sketched, the chief outlines of Mr. Alcott's system, so far as we have ourselves been able to comprehend it. Of the two volumes