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THE YOUNGER GENERATION

THEIR OPINIONS, PASTIMES AND ENTERPRISES

1830-1850

By DOROTHY S. TRUESDALE

Clarissa Reynolds was seventeen when, in the fall of 1841, her big brother, Mortimer, escorted her to Utica to spend a year at the Utica Female Academy. Clarissa was homesick, terribly homesick, and during that year she dispatched numerous letters to her family and friends in Rochester bemoaning the fate that kept her from her native city.

About the same time other boys and girls in and about Rochester were writing letters, keeping diaries, or recording the minutes of youthful clubs and societies. From such musty pages rises up the spirit of a generation which lived and laughed and wept in a little mid-western city a century ago. Here are the lines they traced and the thoughts they dreamed as fresh and living as though they had been written yesterday; and the words of these young people of long ago give a far more interesting and vivid picture of certain aspects of life in and about the Rochester of that day than all the efforts of later generations.

The two decades covered by these records, 1830 to 1850, were literally the beginning of the Victorian Era, for before the first was out, eighteen year old Victoria became queen of England. Fashionable women noted that skirts were growing longer and that a new material, crinoline, was being used for petticoats in Paris and London.

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The "up" hair-do was going out of style and spaniel curls, made familiar to another generation by *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, were the latest thing. Men's clothes were taking on a sober hue and the ubiquitous black broadcloth was already in sight. The 40's saw the coming of gas lights to Rochester stores, and on a Sunday in 1849 one observer noted that St. Paul's Church enjoyed a "very full congregation attracted by gas."¹ The canal was the busy artery of commerce carrying Rochester flour to all the world, and in spite of the existence of two railroads before the end of this period, conservative Rochesterians still patronized packet boats and stages. A good deal more comfortable than those cindery railroads, said they, and certainly much safer!

The younger generation of this period, if we may judge from their letters, bore a strong resemblance in many respects to younger generations before and since. They were enthusiastic, they were self-confident, and, while fancying themselves completely wise in the ways of the world, they were unconsciously naive. And they shared with the young of other epochs that perennial trial—the distrust and excessive advice of their elders! Take for instance, the tone of the letter Abelard Reynolds wrote in 1835 to his son, Mortimer, who was then twenty-one years of age and evidently showed no promise of acquiring the fortune that was to found Reynolds Library. "It behooves you," said Abelard solemnly, "to set your face with an unyielding firmness to business. I am well aware, Mortimer, that your intentions are good . . . but yet I am aware of the force of habit and knowing as I do, the unsteady business in which you have been engaged . . . I cannot resist the impression that you may have imbibed an influence . . . which . . . may have a tendency to lead you away from strict business habits, which is so desirable an accomplishment in a young man."²

In this emphasis on industry and enterprise, Abelard Reynolds was expressing the standards of the time. Not only in the economic sphere, but in the fields of religion and reform the need of earnest endeavor on the part of the individual was stressed. It was the period of the revival and of such social movements as temperance and moral reform, all of which emphasized the perfectionism of society through effort. It is no wonder therefore that the ideal youth of the period was characterized by an earnest outlook on life.

Nevertheless, the ideal is seldom attained in this world, and by their own evidence these young folk were often guilty of what can only be termed "lightmindedness." Even the lofty aspirations of the most serious "improvement" societies, as we shall see, were frequently weakened by the irrepressible high spirits of the members. Still it is probable that few young men of the period were guilty of quite the degree of frivolity displayed in the preceding decade by young Robert Fitzhugh. Robert had been primarily concerned with affairs of the heart and escapades at Geneva Academy—which had apparently resulted in his being retired to the family home near Geneseo. At the ripe age of seventeen, he could lightly recall a succession of thirty-seven sweethearts, although at one time he was so stricken "as to neglect washing my face for three weeks because my dulcina had given me a kiss on one cheek."³ How far removed from Cyrus Paine, who twenty years later, kept a diary in order to "commune with my own heart, examine myself, etc." and who recorded his love affair in the restrained phrase "Called on H."!

There was, however, no lack of gayety among the youths and maidens of the 30's and 40's. Although dancing and card playing were frowned upon by the godly, church socials, singing schools, and lively gatherings at home in part took their place. Apparently there were large numbers of the less regenerate who delighted in the elegant balls sponsored by the local military and fire companies, and who on less formal occasions indulged in the lively square dances of the type known in North Carolina as the "scampers." There was even a short-lived theater in the 40's conducted by Mr. Edwin Dean in Exchange Street, while the temperance forces did not disdain to present "The Reformed Drunkard" and "The Victim of the Cup of Woe." Circuses, too, visited Rochester and J. T. Andrews noted in 1846 that 1,500 persons attended a performance. The following year he "went to Tom Thumb" and also saw "a balloon ascension by Wise."

The reflections of youth mirrored in Clarissa Reynolds' letters certainly are not those of excessive sobriety. Just why Abelard and Lydia Reynolds preferred to send their daughter to school in Utica in 1841 rather than to one of the numerous "female academies" in Rochester is not known. They had relatives in New Hartford, just outside Utica, and it may be that some family propaganda was exerted

in favor of the fine new Utica Academy. Though there is no indication of any budding romance in her letters, it is interesting to note that five years later Clarissa married one of her cousins from Oneida County.⁴

At any rate Clarissa was homesick, so homesick that she was certain she could not stay unless her friend from home, Caroline, joined her. Her first letter begins mournfully, "When he [brother Mortimer] left me it seemed as though my last friend had forsaken me and I was a stranger without one to sympathize with or feel for me. I would have given ten thousand worlds to have returned with him next morning, but all in vain. Oh, Mother, if you have any pity for me, do persuade Caroline to come as soon as possible. . . . I cannot stay without Caroline. Oh, that I was through so that I could go home. I am sure I would never leave it again."⁵

Caroline fortunately joined her, but Clarissa's longing for home was not sufficiently cured to do without frequent letters. Her mother apparently was no correspondent, and her father, not unwillingly, for he was a prolific letter writer, took up the task. He found himself confronted with those demands for money so well known to all fathers with children away at school.

Says Clarissa: "I found the regulations entirely different from what I had supposed. Our washing is done out of the school at 3 shillings a dozen. Therefore I shall need more money than I have with me as I spent all of that for books."⁶ And again, "I am out of money, have not one cent to my name, and what is worse I owe considerable to my washwoman, and I do not like to let it run along so. And so, Pa, if you can, I will be much obliged to you if you will send me a little, if it is only enough to pay my debts."⁷

The Utica Female Academy at this time was housed in a fine three-story brick building and was headed by Miss Urania Sheldon, later the wife of Dr. Eliphalet Nott, the distinguished president of Union College.⁸ About 150 girls were registered and the out-of-town students like Clarissa were housed "in what we call the second and third halls. The west end of the third hall is known all over the country as a noisy place, but as good fate would have it, we have a room in the east end of the second where," remarks Clarissa virtuously, "they put the sober ones."⁹ The heating facilities were evidently not

all that could be desired, for Clarissa complained bitterly of the cold and asked her mother to send her some worsted stockings "as cotton are not warm enough for this cold winter."

Like all boarding school pupils before and since, Clarissa complained about the food and asked for donations from home. "Thursday morning we had the prisoner's food, viz. 'cold hash' for breakfast, and I suppose that is only the beginning of sorrows." Letters are full of requests for cake, cheese, or fruit, and "even doe nuts are very acceptable." Some of these gifts suffered strange accidents. Soon after her arrival at school Clarissa wrote facetiously, "I received that '*box of fine peaches*' you promised, and have no doubt but once they were very nice indeed, but when I opened them, I felt uncommonly charitable, and thinking the poor pigs needed them more than I did I contributed my '*box of fine peaches*' for their support. The truth of it is I did not open them until Friday, thinking them hardly ripe, but much to my surprise I found them nearly all decayed."¹⁰

Evidently Clarissa was scholastically ambitious, or at least she endeavored to give that impression to her fond parents. She had hoped to take seven subjects, but Miss Sheldon would not let her take more than five and "thought I must be crazy to think I could take seven." Her list of subjects sounds impressively weighty. In common with most pedagogy of the period, a "subject" meant the study of a certain text-book, and thus we find Clarissa studying Kames' *Elements of Criticism*, Abercrombie's *Intellectual Philosophy*, Hitchcock's *Geology*, and Smith's *Arithmetic*. After the purchase of these tomes, Clarissa had "but three shillings left."

Miss Sheldon, however, believed in a progressive curriculum. Among the innovations in the Utica Female Academy was that radically new subject, physical education, or as Clarissa styled it simply, "exercizing." Clarissa and her schoolmates were not as progressive as their principal and Clarissa wrote home indignantly, "I find no fault with any of the rules excepting that about our exercizing and that I think I ought to be excused from. Hope you will write immediately to Miss Sheldon stating the case and beg her to excuse me as it certainly injures me more than it does me good . . . We have to say a verse from the Bible every morning, and several of us are going to say that verse in the new testament (for bodily exercise proffiteth

little) tomorrow morning. I know it will make Miss Sheldon laugh. I suppose you understand why, for we all have to go to the attic to exercise and I assure you we do not like it exceedingly well."¹¹

Occasionally Clarissa's thoughts took on a melancholy hue and past short-comings loomed large in her mind. She wrote to her father, "I am continually thinking that perhaps I shall never see all my friends again. I acknowledge I have been a source of trouble to you and Mother, but I hope I may live to be a comfort to you even yet; I often think of things that I have done and said to grieve Mother with regret, and I shall endeavor to correct myself of the habit of speaking in a hasty manner without thinking of the consequences."¹²

At such times the future seemed no better than the past. "There is so little dependence to be placed in anything worldly," meditated Clarissa, "that I am almost afraid to look forward to the future. I feel as though everything that I place my affections upon is fated to be destroyed. To be sure I have friends left yet, or at least I hope I have, but still I have seen enough in this year that has just passed to convince me that there is little dependence to be placed on health and the bright visions of the future, as life is so very uncertain."¹³

To homesick Clarissa, Utica suffered by comparison with her beloved Rochester—especially after Caroline, the comforter, had to return home because of the illness of her sister. "I do think," she said, "Utica is about the meanest place I ever was in. Every Sunday we have to go to church over mud, stones and sticks, and I assure you we are not very slow about telling what we think and in praising Rochester to the skies. We never have such mean streets there, and everything that is not quite right that we see or hear of, we are sure to wonder what the Rochester folks would say could they see it." (According to the reminiscences of other Rochesterians, the condition of Rochester's streets was not much better!) "There is only one redeeming thing here, and that is the preaching. We have had a Mr. Wadsworth for several sabbaths, and I must say he is the best preacher I ever heard, but he is too decent to stay long in Utica."¹⁴ One wonders if the interesting Mr. Wadsworth was the Episcopalian minister on whose account Miss Reynolds later "about concluded to turn Episcopalian as I like the clergyman of the Episcopal Church much better than the Presbyterian clergyman."

Had Clarissa been in Rochester instead of Utica in 1842, she might have fallen under the spell of another religious leader—the Reverend Charles G. Finney. It was the earlier visit of this great evangelist in 1830 that had largely precipitated the era of religious revivalism in Rochester. Before that time, if we may believe Miss Mary B. Allen, a teacher in the Rochester High School, and later the proprietress of one of the city's leading schools for girls, religion was in a decidedly low state. In Monroe Academy in Henrietta, where she had taught before coming to Rochester, "not one of the scholars was a professing Christian," and the situation was almost as bad in Rochester High School where out of Professor Benedict's class of sixty boys, but two were "professors of religion."¹⁵ Undoubtedly Miss Allen was a somewhat prejudiced witness, but it is evident that the succeeding years saw a remarkable increase in godliness among the young folks of Rochester and the surrounding communities.

Another of the young persons of this period whose letters have come down to us has something to say of this movement of religious zeal. In 1839, young Clidia Gardner wrote of a revival in West Bloomfield, "I never attended a protracted meeting where the spirit of God was so manifestly present as it was during our meeting. Sinners would go to meeting thoughtless, unconcerned and to make ridicule, [and] would be struck under deep conviction before they returned home. Since our meeting closed the Methodist brethren held a meeting at Millers-corners. Is there not enough to call forth the feelings of every Christian to labour in this great field? Does it not rejoice your heart to hear the heathen are receiving a greater outpouring of the Spirit than we here? I trust this will be a year long to be remembered by thousands on account of the great outpouring of the "Holy Spirit," and feeling that they turned from the evil of their ways unto the living and true God."¹⁶ And she goes on to fill several pages with religious speculations and reflections.

Some time later Clidia left her home to attend school in Geneva, where "from appearances" the state of religion "was quite low." As she tells us, her time was so taken up with studying Milton's *Paradise Lost*, composition, arithmetic, grammar, moral philosophy, chemistry, and "practical knowledge, that she was hardly a competent judge. At home in Bloomfield however, "Mr. Littlejohn is holding a meeting and I hope he will be the means of doing a great deal of good

for there is need of it." And then follows the startling declaration, "Sometimes when I am thinking about it, it seems as though there was not another so-wicked place in New York State as Bloomfield!"¹⁷

Of all the records of life in Rochester as it used to be, perhaps none is so interesting for the picture it presents as the diary Cyrus Paine kept from 1848 to 1850. Cyrus came to the city from Albion and was just twenty-one years of age when he began the "history of my life." He was an earnest young man who took life seriously, but he was fairly typical of hundreds of other ambitious young clerks for whom religion and business comprised the core of existence. But it was not a gloomy life. Far from exerting an exclusively restrictive influence tempered solely by threats of hell fire, the church was a center of social life and the chief agency for meeting and making youthful friends. Prayer meetings were for the good of the soul, but they also supplied opportunities for Cyrus and his contemporaries to walk home with young ladies. And in a society which had few means of public entertainment, missionary lectures and revival meetings furnished the excuse for more than one social evening.

Cyrus spent long hours clerking in Sage & Brother Book and Drug Store (evidently the conglomerate nature of the modern drug store had an early beginning). He often began his day's work before breakfast and closed the store between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Yet, Cyrus did not feel overworked. He considered that long hours bred moral virtue as well as material benefit, and had little sympathy with those of his fellow clerks who were beginning to agitate for shorter hours. One of his entries reads, "There is a meeting of the merchants this evening at the Court House to consider upon the propriety of closing stores at an earlier hour in the evening. To some clerks, among whom I shall place myself, it would be quite a privilege to have the evenings, but I also think that it would be to the injury of others who have no fixed principles and who would mispend the time if given them."¹⁸ There were many spare moments on dull days which he employed in reading among the books stacked on the store shelves. In this way he read Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Abbott's *History of Charles I*, *The Monuments of Egypt or An Eye Witness for the Bible* by Francis L. Hawks and Sir Charles Lyell's *A Second Visit to the United States*. On the last he commented, "It

is quite interesting and amusing to an American to read an Englishman's views of Yankee Land."¹⁹

Like his contemporaries, Cyrus was ambitious to own his own business and early began to work toward that end. For his labors, he received the first year \$250, out of which he saved \$50; the second year his salary was increased to \$300, and he saved \$100. The third year his diligence was rewarded with \$350, and when in 1851 he felt able to support a wife, he was earning \$400 a year. It speaks well for his frugality that a year later he had enough in cash and credit to enable him to share in the purchase of L. B. Swan's drug store, an institution which still bears the name of Paine.

Elections were exciting and colorful affairs a hundred years ago and Cyrus wrote of his first opportunity to exercise the franchise in 1848: "Tomorrow is election day and both parties—Whigs and Barnburners—are making a great parade this evening. Bands of music, torches and bonfires excite the crowd, and, maybe, prepare them for the contest on the morrow. Today, after taking a sober second thought, made up my mind to vote for Gen. Z. Taylor for President, although I do not *exactly like* the man, but on comparing him with the other candidates for that office, and their principles, have concluded, rather than throw away my vote to cast it for him."²⁰

The next day, with most of his fellow townsmen, he "voted the entire Whig ticket." The new invention of the telegraph proved its usefulness and in the evening Cyrus repaired to the Arcade with crowds of other men "eager to hear the telegraphic reports from the eastern cities."²¹

The result, though even the new telegraph could not establish it over night, was gratifying to the Whigs, and the local party members proceeded to celebrate later in the month with a great illumination. Cyrus set to work to make a fine gold sign to adorn the store on this occasion, and on the 24th had the satisfaction of recording, "In the evening there was a large bonfire on the corner and a great many buildings were finely illuminated, but all said that our windows made the best appearance."²² It really was a pity that the new gas lighting could not have been ready for the great event, but it was December 13 before Cyrus could note, "This evening some stores commenced burning coal gas, the first used in the city."²³

About this time there was considerable agitation for the establishment of an institution of higher learning in Rochester, and we find echoes of this in Cyrus Paine's journal. A division in the Baptist college known then as Madison University and today as Colgate, made it seem probable that the college might be moved to Rochester. Thus, one Sunday in November of 1848 Cyrus wrote, "This morning Carlton and myself walked about 1½ miles west on Buffalo Street to the 'Mimger Tract' one of the proposed sites for 'Madison University'." This project was eventually abandoned. Colgate remained at Hamilton while in 1850 the Baptists established a separate college in the United States Hotel on Buffalo Street (now West Main Street) called somewhat pretentiously the "University of Rochester." Not only the city, but a great part of western New York was apparently enthusiastic over the embryo college, and Cyrus' home town of Albion, at least, evidenced this in a satisfying manner. On April 20, 1850, Cyrus noted in his diary, "Mr. Wilder returned from Albion today. He has obtained during the past week, in and about Albion, some \$5,000 for the 'University of Rochester'."²⁴

In spite of his long hours at work, Cyrus found time for recreation. At times almost every entry closes with the phrase "Called on H.", and once he recorded with underlinings that they spent the evening "in the *parlor*." On one of these occasions he read aloud to the appreciative Harriet "a new work by the Brothers Mayhew called 'The Fear of the World or Living for Appearances.'" On another evening Cyrus "heard the 'Empire Minstrels' discourse eloquent music in Corinthian Hall"—Rochester's newest center of entertainment which had just recently been opened. On still another evening he and H. "went to Mrs. Ferguson's where we met quite a company. Quite pleasant. We left about 10 o'clock although most of the company staid until eleven." On a visit home to Albion—"After tea, Kate and William came up to our house. We had a 'good time' singing sacred music." (This, be it noted, was on the Sabbath.) At least one of these social events had an unhappy ending for Cyrus. He had visited H. as usual where he had been regaled with "apples, etc.", and evidently overindulged, for the next morning "I awoke with a severe pain in my stomach. . . . It lasted some 5 or 6 hours . . . How little we know what a day may bring forth."

There were other more severe ailments abroad in the city at the same time. In December of 1849 Cyrus wrote, "There is some talk about the cholera which seems to be approaching fast. The streets and lanes are being cleaned." This seems to have been a false alarm, however, for it was in the warm summer days rather than in the winter that the disease was most to be dreaded, and it was an epidemic of a different kind that ravaged the youth of the city in the closing weeks of 1849. Says Cyrus, "The 'California Gold fever' has been the prevalent disease for a few days back, arising from some reports from California where tis said the mountains, hills and valleys are shining with the precious ore."²⁵

Cyrus, of course, attended all church activities regularly. On one Sunday he "attended the Baptist Church in the forenoon. In the afternoon I went to the 1st Presbyterian Church. This evening attended a meeting of the 'Evangelical Alliance' held at the Brick Church. After meeting assisted as bearer of the remains of a young lady lately a member of our S.[unday] School to the cars."²⁶ Home missionary work also found him a zealous participant. One Sunday Cyrus "distributed tracts in one of the western districts of the city. This is a new occupation for me, but I am willing and not only willing but really desire to do my duty, hoping I may be the means of doing something for the cause of those who have done so much for me. I visited 27 families and all accepted of them but one. . . ." ²⁷

Cyrus was also given to introspection and considerable spiritual stock-taking. More than one Saturday entry evidences the desire to improve every shining moment—a tendency highly approved and encouraged in that period. "This is the last day of another week and upon reflection, I am led to ask myself the question how have I improved its moments. Have I grown in Grace and in the knowledge of the Truth? Have I lived before my Maker and the world as it is the duty of every professor of Religion? I fear that many precious moments have passed by unimproved but they are gone and can never be recalled."²⁸

The diary becomes more sporadic as time goes on and finally closes on the note of the traditional happy ending to all tales of earnest and hard-working youth. On June 4, 1850, Cyrus married Miss Harriet Sage, the H. of the diary, and his leisure for keeping a journal was apparently lost.

Most of the surviving letters available for this study are from youthful Rochesterians who left their city. Many of them, like Clarissa Reynolds, whether through homesickness or the enchantment distance lends, seem to compare their new habitations somewhat unfavorably with the home town. In 1834 an anonymous young gentleman, known only by the signature "Old Reub," wrote back to young Miss Fox from the flourishing little village of Detroit, then boasting a population of less than 5,000. "I must say that what I have seen of Detroit and the adjacent country has not prepossessed me much in its favor. It is a good place to live provided one has lots of money, but that I am out of. . . . I find many acquaintances here but they are not of the right sort. And had I a small farm in or near Rochester, I would get me a *Wife* & live Lord of my *Own* & would not swap this little farm for the Whole Michigan Territory, but this is mainly building a Castle in the Air—I am too poor to buy the little farm & [have] too much honor to offer *myself for ever & a day* while poor. . . . I have not yet seen in Detroit what we in Rochester would call a pretty girl—but I have seen many very fashionable ones. The young men especially those that call themselves Good Society are very wild and if they were in Rochester some of them would be called rather dissipated. . . . However I think Yankee manners and customs will in a short time reform them."²⁹

Travel in those days was quite an adventure and this same young man writes of his heroic conduct in saving the Niagara-Buffalo stage. He had proceeded by boat from the Carthage Docks on the Genesee River to Queenston, and after viewing Niagara Falls started by stage-coach for Buffalo. "Our driver had drank too free & had got rather top heavy, and knowing we had some very pretty girls in the stage & one of them under my special protection I thought it best to take seat with the Driver. It was pitch dark and we went along quite well for about a mile when the Coach went into a Rut & threw our handsome sober Driver neck and heels into the mud. The Horses set off in fine stile and you may depend the Ladies set up a terrible shout." In this emergency, our young hero "jumped down upon the tongue of the Coach, gathered up the lines and stopped their speed. I found the driver was not hurt & to punish him for his negligence & sober him by a chase, [I] put on string & left him about ½ a mile behind. When he overtook us his liquor had evaporated & left him in a furi-

ous passion, but that we did not care for. He took us the remainder of the way in safety."³⁰

Another Rochester traveller whose comments on the outside world are preserved was young Mr. Silliman. It was the plague of consumption that took the Sillimans to the milder climate of Louisiana in search of health for Mrs. Silliman. Consumption was the bane of Rochester's young people in this period, and over and over again we find mention of friends and relatives afflicted with the dread disease. In 1847 John Ray speculated as to whether there was any cure for it. "I know a Doct. Fitch of Phila. has lately published a work on this disease in which he says that it is curable. I also saw a few days since an article taken from a foreign Journal that a celebrated French Physician had cured a great number of consumption which had been given over as incurable by many supposed eminent men. If such is the case, the sooner it is known, the better."³¹

Whether or not Louisiana helped Mrs. Silliman we do not know, but she and her husband apparently enjoyed their visit as much as they could under the circumstances—and were especially amused by one incident. Spring was backward that year near Natchez and on the 24th of March "we had a real snow-storm. Some of the people in Natchez," wrote Mr. Silliman to his parents, "seemed almost crazy. Some were out sleighing through the streets in their *jumpers** all night and some who could not enjoy that luxury (of a jumper) tied a cow or sheep-bell round a horses neck & rode about the city horse-back. Such a scene would have been nothing but a laughing stock in the North."³²

In a more serious vein, young Silliman wrote of the cult of Millerism and the theory of the end of the world which was causing so much excitement at home in Rochester, but which he was relieved to note "does not make much disturbance in this region. . . . There is, however, now & then one who has read some of Miller's arguments and have been somewhat disturbed in their [minds?] but still instead of leading different lives, they only seek for some opiate to quiet their consciences."³³

Young Rochester at an early period seemed fond of organizing. All sorts of clubs and associations flourished, ranging from the

*A type of sled.

"Young Men's Moral Reform Society" to the "Ever Ready Bucket Company No. 1"—a group of very youthful volunteer firemen. A good many of these organizations had some high and lofty purpose such as stamping out "licentiousness," curbing the evils of drink, or improving the mind; others were more frivolous. Any list of all the youthful organizations that flourished during the period would necessarily be incomplete, but some of the old minute books still survive, and glancing through their pages, we may obtain an idea of the aims and aspirations as well as of some of the problems of their youthful members.

Among these societies was the "Young Men's Moral Reform Society," organized in August of 1836 in order "by a virtuous personal example, by reproof, persuasions and exertion [to] use every means . . . to prevent and eradicate the vice of licentiousness." Unhappily the active program of this group was rather uncertain and a projected plan of supporting a city missionary and lectures on moral reform does not appear to have been particularly successful. The Society adopted a resolution condemning "obscene and indecent language as directly opposed to Moral Reform"—a proceeding which subsequently led to the expulsion of two members for using improper language in the heat of a debate. But the members were less enthusiastic about adopting a temperance pledge, and vehemently rejected the following resolution:

Resolved, that the practice of keeping company with young ladies after the usual hour of Retirement and especially on the evening of the Sabbath is pernicious in its tendencies . . . and should be discountenanced by the members of this society."³⁴

It was not only voted down, but blotted—though incompletely—from the records.

A more prevalent type of organization was the lyceum or debating society, which often aspired to support a library for its membership. Such a one was the Rochester Lyceum or Youths Debating Association, which was formed in 1838 by some of the students of the Rochester High School. It was composed of lads ranging from fourteen to twenty-one years of age, and during its two years of recorded history maintained a rather stormy, and at times, uncertain existence. In this comparatively short time no less than seventeen elec-

tions of officers took place, and for a while, indeed, the officers were changed every month. Its high ideals were expressed in the grandiloquent inscription on the fly-leaf of the secretary's book. "Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, the points of perfection possessed in the minds of great and good men, the early objects of those whose after life is marked with deeds of unsullied purity and undeniable justness, the search of the indefatigable and zealous, are those for which we (the band of untiring youth) do seek with minds expanded to the utmost limits for their reception."³⁵

The program of the Rochester Lyceum was at first intended to be "a paper and a debate semi-monthly & alternately," but it soon became exclusively one of debates. The society also maintained a library for a time, but after a controversy over the question of excluding novels, the library was abolished. The topics debated by the society reflect the issues of the day. They ranged from such controversies as that of MacKenzie's rebellion and the advisability of declaring war on Great Britain, to such social questions as whether "novel reading is beneficial," whether "theatres are injurious to the rising generation," or whether "liquor causes more evil than gambling." Current politics also found a place, and on July 26, 1839, the society debated the question, "Resolved that Henry Clay deserves the office of President of the United States of America more than Gen. Scott."

In spite of this interest in current events there is ample indication that the meetings were often considered rather dull. On May 2, 1839, "a motion was made and carried that the society should be resolved into a committee . . . for the purpose of striking upon something, or inventing some new schemes in order that the meetings of the Society might be rendered more interesting and useful to the members." Dissension had appeared in the ranks of the society, and one entry reads, "Our respected president left the chair & resigned his office (on account of some disturbance made by a few unruly members). No persuasion could urge him to retain it."³⁶

A policy of fining unruly members was not very successful, and on one occasion a trial before the bar of the society was resorted to in an effort to make W. Bissel pay up. Both the society and the defendant were represented by counsel and we read, "The first witness was brought forward, M. Ensign, who was cross examined, [and]

who testified that W. Bissel was fined by the President for disorder. C. Jervis was next called to give his testimony which accorded with that of the first. . . . All the witnesses being questioned W. Bissel commenced summing up the evidence in the defence. . . . W. E. Clarke, counsel for the Association, then closed up. The Chairman then charged the members before their decision; which was given against the defendant, 5 voting against 3."³⁷

But in spite of all this, there is no indication that W. Bissel paid, and the general neglect of the membership to pay dues and fines long continued to harass the society.

A novel type of organization, and one which could only have existed in the early days of the city, was the Ever Ready Neptune Bucket Company No. 1, an accredited volunteer fire company composed of youths "about the ages of 14 & 17 years." The city's fire-fighting forces at this time consisted solely of volunteer companies who organized themselves and elected their own officers, but were furnished with their fire-fighting equipment by the city. There was apparently no age limit and these excitement-loving boys were duly admitted as members of the Firemen's Association in January, 1838, and furnished with a hand drawn fire carriage "which had formerly been used by one of the fire companies as a tender for carrying water." This was now repaired to transport Ever Ready's buckets.

There was no lack of fires in that predominantly wooden city and "Old Neptune's" members had plenty of opportunity to distinguish themselves—which they frequently did, to their own satisfaction at least. In their record book we read such items as, "An alarm of Fire occurred on Sunday Evening Dec. 10 about 5 o'clock which proceeded from the Rookeries on the corner of Buffalo & Fitzhugh Streets, but unfortunately Old Neptune as She always is was Immediately on hand and Gave the Buildings no possible Chance of Burning."³⁸ (Whether this regretful note was occasioned by a civic desire to see the ram-shackle buildings demolished or by the loss of an exciting conflagration, is not stated.) On the occasion of another fire, the secretary wrote proudly, "Notwithstanding the great Draft of the Snow the Co. was on Hand before anything else and their efforts saved the building and Gained them a puff in the Democrat Comending our Exertions etc. Which proped our Spirits with an assurance

that Every Step we took Heaped Glory upon Glory and Made us Firmly Resolved that We Will be as We have heretofore been 'Ever Ready.'"³⁹

Fame and glory, however, were not enough to reconcile some members to the arduous physical labor of pulling "Neptune" to the fires—as the proceedings of the special meeting on May 11, 1938, testify. "Messrs. W. D. Kent and T. A. Jennings offered their resignations. Reason, They had no strength to spare in drawing the 'Dam Nuisance' through the streets, when on motion Mr. W. D. Kent's resignation was accepted and Mr. T. A. Jennings was expelled."

This was only the beginning of Ever Ready's troubles and pages of the record book became filled with the proceedings of stormy sessions. To finance their uniforms the company had taken up a public subscription. One of the members resigned without turning in his subscriptions and there were a good many dark suspicions on the part of his erst-while colleagues. Worse yet, the members indulged in individual quarrels to such an extent that Joseph L. Stone felt moved to remark that "he saw no reason why members should resign in consequence of out door altercations." To this, Samuel Haight replied rather huffily that he "supposed that it was not the co.'s business to know why members resigned. They had a perfect right to resign when ever they choose."⁴⁰

Joseph Stone also felt moved to protest against the secretary's facetious record of a fire "on the alley just north of Buffalo Street." "It was extinguished," said the secretary, "with little damage to the house or the bed-bugs, who however were somewhat disturbed by the rustling of the inmates." Mr. Stone contended that the secretary "had no right . . . to make long dissertations on bed-bugs." But the company "decided that he had a right so to do."⁴¹ Joseph's troubles continued, for sometime later he complained "that he had received a counterfeit dollar from the co. which he wished refunded. The Sec'y was ordered to pay Mr. Stone for the amount due."⁴²

Resignations were so numerous that on September 4, 1838, the following resolutions were deemed necessary:

Whereas, For the more permanent establishment of this co. it becomes necessary that some general rules should be adopted . . . and whereas by the adoption of the aforesaid

rules, our members would not so often, and for the most trivial occurrences, offer their resignations, and thereby create much disturbance at our monthly meetings: Therefore . . . be it resolved

That hereafter the resignation of no person . . . shall be accepted until full and satisfactory reasons shall be adduced. . . .

Resolved, That it shall be considered a violation of these rules for a member of the company to make any remarks derogatory to the general character of either of the officers, or of their ability to preside over the Company, and to discharge the several duties devolving on them."⁴³

In March of 1839 the company disbanded and re-organized as the Avenger Company, but trouble continued to rain down upon them. Companies of maturer years refused to give Avenger the respect its members felt due them, and the conduct of the city Chief Engineer on at least one occasion seemed nothing less than reprehensible. Says the record book of a fire on April 16, 1839, "Bucket [Company No. 1] were on hand as usual and after working with untiring Zeal in the performance of their duty as Volunteers the foreman politely asked a dismissal. No answer was received. Thinking it ungentlemanlike in this Disapprobation of his Honour he Started off the ground and was Called back [and] threatened with [a] dressing if he had not been a boy. After Standing unwanted and unmolested they were dismissed. It was agreed to Call a special meeting to debate the Question Whether we disband or be Kiked round by such a man as A. Judson."

Moreover, the Common Council, because of the company's status as minors, refused to allow the members the privilege as firemen of voting for the Chief Engineer, and crowned this insult by refusing to grant Avenger the use of a regular fire engine—even though one was available. All this was too much for the pride of the youthful firemen. They therefore resolved "that we will no longer act in the service of a city which has proven itself so recreant to its own interests, as well as to the interests of a company, which, by untiring assiduity on the part of its members, has rendered itself one of the most prompt and efficient of which our city could boast."⁴⁴ And with this parting shot, printed in the daily papers, Ever Ready, alias Avenger, Bucket Company disbanded forever on June 4, 1839.

No account of the youth of the 30's and 40's could be complete without some mention of the volunteer military companies which did so much to add color and gayety to the social life of the younger generation. These independent companies, of course, were primarily organized as a part, though a largely autonomous part, of the state's military forces, but they also supplied considerable social diversion to the young men—and young women—of the town. Their drills and marches through the streets in their bright uniforms were exciting and picturesque occasions for the citizenry. They also sponsored concerts and balls, which undoubtedly endeared them to the young ladies and made the latter loyal supporters of the military. Polkas, schottisches and cotillons, as taught in Couse's dancing school, featured these affairs which often began at the somewhat startling hour of four o'clock in the afternoon, though the usual time seems to have been six or six-thirty!

The young ladies in return embroidered banners, donated cakes to be auctioned off for the benefit of the company's treasury, and loyally turned out to watch the drills and parades. On June 28, 1839, the Union Grays recorded that the company "marched to the Court House yard under the escort of Capt. Loud's company of regulars and Williams Light Infantry for the purpose of receiving a stand of colors from the Ladies. Graham H. Chapin, Esq. (on behalf of the Ladies) presented the colors with an appropriate speech and was replied to by Col. Wentworth in behalf of the company. The colors were marched into the line, the band playing the appropriate tune—the Star-Spangled Banner."⁴⁵

On another occasion the secretary wrote lyrically of a parade through the town: "Will you ever forget the bright smiles of a little band of Union Grays (for such they must be) robed in white who hailed our coming and . . . threw roses at us in abundance as we passed along saluting them?"⁴⁶

The gay uniforms of these companies must have constituted a welcome relief from the increasingly sober hues of every day dress and, judging from the number of meetings devoted to their careful selection, were an important factor in inducing young men to join. The full dress of Williams Light Infantry we are told by a visiting correspondent of the *Florida Star*, was "very rich and beautiful, being of sky blue with silver ornaments and white stripes on the pantaloons."

This magnificent uniform was for some time a source of envy to the Union Grays who had to be content with a fatigue dress. But at last they too attained the state where, as the secretary said, they were no longer "boys in gray caps, but *men* in cock plumes." This uniform consisted of a gray coat with black and gold stripes, white cross-belts, and a brass mounted cap surmounted with waving green and red cock plumes.

To make military life even more attractive, there were numerous excursions, and we read in the record books of the Union Grays of trips to Ogdensburg, to Ithaca, to Canandaigua, Geneseo and numerous other places—at all of which they were enthusiastically welcomed. On a visit to Avon, a local bard was moved to describe the happy occasion in stirring verse:

"They come! The gallant Grays—
With firm but measured tread,
And their polished arms flash back the rays
By an August morning shed;
And a cry of welcome long and loud,
Breaks from the lips of the gazing crowd."⁴⁷

In the record books of this company are side-lights on some of Rochester's social customs. It was the period when New Year's calls were fast becoming an institution among the fashionable, and in 1841 the Grays determined to make their calls in a body. Starting out at half-past nine in the morning, they first visited the mayor where they noted approvingly that "his table was spread with neatness and abounded with plenty." This was followed by several calls where "champaigne" relieved the coldness of the march, until finally "some of our tall men began to feel a little *forky*" and the perfection of their ranks was somewhat impaired.⁴⁸ Such conduct, we imagine, was frowned upon by the local temperance and reform societies which found plenty of work to be done among the more light-minded and unconverted members of their generation.

Fragmentary and imperfect as the pictures they show may be, these old letters and manuscripts reveal much of the character of this younger generation of long ago. Like all generations, it was composed of diverse elements, some serious, some frivolous, some earnest, some gay. These records show a youth which to a greater or lesser

degree was typical of the American society of the period. In general they strove earnestly to follow the social and moral precepts of the good Christian and the good business man, but they were not a gloomy lot, nor one bowed beneath the weight of responsibility. They took life seriously, but they enjoyed it to the full. The general tone of their age was one of moral uplift and intellectual improvement, but it was also one of optimism, untroubled by doubts of the future. Before these young people stretched economic and material opportunity as limitless as the great West itself, and their faith showed them equally boundless possibilities for a reformed and perfected society. Their earnestness and their seriousness was rooted in optimism, not gloom, for they saw before them the Kingdom of God and only devoted and untiring effort was needed to realize it upon earth.

ELIAS GREEN'S ESSAY ON ROCHESTER

This description of the city was written about 1837 by an Ohio schoolboy, Elias Green, who had formerly lived on a farm near Rochester and found his former home a convenient topic for a school composition. Elias had left Rochester soon after 1833, and consequently he is rather confused as to some of the happenings he describes. Sam Patch, for instance, made his famous leap, not in 1832, but in 1829. It is also not clear whether Elias was using his imagination in his account of the boat sent over the Genesee Falls, or whether he had confused the incident with a possible visit to Niagara to see the *Michigan* go over those falls in 1827, but, so far as we know, there is no evidence of such an event taking place in Rochester. Elias was seventeen when he wrote this composition.⁴⁹ What mark he received on his spelling and punctuation, we do not know!

This fine and Beautiful City is situated on the Genesee River six miles from its mouth. it is a very flourishing place and rapidly increasing in wealth and population owing to the fertility of the soil in the surrounding Country the excellent roads which it possesses and the numerous and valuable water privileges, it being situated at the rappid of the river. The streets of the city are wide, regular, and well paved the dirt and other filth being removed every once or twice a year, and for this reason the streets are always kept clean and neat. this is now in a very flourishing condition, stores, churches, shops and dwelling houses of every discription are yearly seen rising up from every part of it. there are many Splendid edifices allready erected, among them are the court house, it is built of Stone, with extensive pillars in front. the Arcade building is by far the most splendid of all, it being situated near the centre of the city. it was lately erected built of Stone brought from a considerable distance, it has one large room in the centre, I should juge it was about 30 or 40 [feet] in width and 80 or 90 in length. it is lighted from the roof. A large room at lower end is ocupied as the general Post Office. the small rooms in the second and third story are occupied as offices of the county officers. Among the other buildings are St. Pauls church situated on a rising peice of ground and has a vary commanding prospect. the steeple was built in 1830 if I recollect right, the spire was raised to a great hight, and the consequence was that it was blown over [by] the first gale of wind that came. it was then raised not so high.

on the fourth of July 1832 according to my best recollection it [was] announced that there was a vessel to go over the falls. the rappid of the river commences about three miles above the falls and

the water runs extremely rappid and rushes over a perpendicular rock a littel more than 90 feet. then the water continues deep for a little peace and then rushes over the second falls at two bounds to the depth of 80 or 90 feet. accordingly on the [day] I prepared and went. it was a very fine and pleasant morning. I took an early start, and arrived at [the] city a few minutes past 7 A. M. it was [a] continual stream of fireing of cannon, and fire crackers the whole day, about eleven as I was passing down main street, I heard a gun considerable louder than usual. I looked round and round I could not perceive from whence the nois came from, but presently I heard it again and to my great astonishment I saw [an] immense cloud of smoke issueing out from the steeple of the arcade nearly over my head. I looked and ascertained it to be a cannon that had been drawn up by means of tackles.

at five o'clock, [the] time appointed for the boat to go over, I hastened to the falls and took my station on the Island. an immense number of people had collected together, the banks of the river was lined with people as far as the eye could see. presently the boat was seen approaching and went over the dam a few rods above the falls regular and proceeded on to the edge of the falls and stoped with nearly half of the boat hung over. the cannon which had been prepared expressly for the purpose with a tremendous load was tucthed just as the boat stoped and bursted and in the scrape the canister blew up, and injured several persons two of which was fatal. the boat went over the next morning.

in the autumn of the same year notice was given that the famous Sam Patch was to jump over the falls. the day at length approached and sam was on the ground. the hour came and he took the leap and went down as straight as a rod, his patallons fluttering through air. he came out safe and [took] his \$75 the sum to be paid to him. in two weeks he give out word that [he] would jump again from a Scaffold 25 feet higher for \$100. I accordingly prepared to see him jump the seccond time, and not getting there so soon as I ought I was deprived of my former place which was the point of a rock, and all other places being filled I was forced to occupy [At this point the composition ends abruptly and a spelling lesson begins. Perhaps Elias' teacher decided that he needed it!]

NOTES

All manuscripts referred to are the possessions of the Rochester Historical Society and are located in the Local History Division of the Rochester Public Library

1. J. T. Andrews, "Weather Books," MS. February, 1849.
2. Abelard Reynolds to Mortimer Reynolds, August 20, 1835.
3. Robert Fitzhugh to Franklin Whitney, August 7, 1824 (?).
4. Annah B. Yates, "Early Rochester Family Records," *Rochester Post Express*, March 25, 1911.
5. Clarissa Reynolds to Mrs. Abelard Reynolds, September 10, 1841.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Clarissa Reynolds to Abelard Reynolds, March 18, 1842.
8. *History of Oneida County* (Evarts & Farriss, 1878), 321.
9. Clarissa Reynolds to Abelard Reynolds, September 28, 1841.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, January 18, 1842.
12. *Ibid.*, November 4, 1841.
13. *Ibid.*, March 18, 1842.
14. *Ibid.*, November 20, 1841.
15. Mary B. Allen King, *Looking Backward* (New York, 1870), 106, 120.
16. Clidinia Gardner to Frances Briggs, March 31, 1839 (?).
17. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1839.
18. Cyrus F. Paine, "Journal," (typed copy) November 21, 1848.
19. *Ibid.*, April 22, 1850.
20. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1848.
21. *Ibid.*, November 7, 1848.
22. *Ibid.*, November 24, 1848.
23. *Ibid.*, December 13, 1848.
24. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1848, April 20, 1850.
25. *Ibid.*, December 12, 14, 1848.
26. *Ibid.*, April 21, 1850.
27. *Ibid.*, December 17, 1848.
28. *Ibid.*, November 11, 1848.
29. "Old Reub" to Frances Fox, May 18, 1834.
30. *Ibid.*
31. John Ray to Elvira Calhoun, April 28, 1847.
32. H. Silliman to Peter Silliman, April 11, 1843.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Young Men's Moral Reform Society, "Record Book," 1836-37, MS. November 17, 1836.
35. Rochester Lyceum, "Proceedings," 1838-1840, MS. flyleaf.
36. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1839, December 5, 1838.
37. *Ibid.*, December 20, 1839.
38. Ever Ready Neptune Bucket Co. No. 1, "Record Book," 1837-39, MS. "Fires for Month of December, 1838."
39. *Ibid.*, January 16, 1839.
40. *Ibid.*, August 7, 1838.
41. *Ibid.*, September 17, October 1, 1838.
42. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1838.
43. *Ibid.*, September 4, 1838.
44. *Ibid.*, June 4, 1839.
45. Rochester Union Grays, "Record Books," 1838-39, 1840-41, MS. June 28, 1839.
46. *Ibid.*, June 18, 1840.
47. W. H. C. Hosmer, "The Grays at Avon," clipping in Rochester Union Grays' Scrap Book.
48. Rochester Union Grays, "Record Book," January 1, 1841.
49. Elias Green, "Essay on Rochester," MS.