Christopher Pearse Cranch Biography

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Biography

Christopher Pearse Cranch (8 March 1813-20 January 1892), known today primarily as a Transcendental poet, was a talented man with little discipline, a dabbler in music, art, and literature, who tried each before he finally became an artist. He was born in Alexandria, Virginia. From Columbian College (now George Washington University) he entered the Harvard Divinity School in 1831 and, after his graduation four years later, became an itinerant preacher in New England. In 1836 Cranch moved to the Ohio Valley, where he contributed to and helped edit the *Western Messenger* , a liberal Unitarian journal associated with the Transcendentalists. Upon his return to Boston in 1839, he furthered his acquaintance with the Transcendentalists, attending Transcendental Club meetings, and, with Ralph Waldo Emerson's assistance, contributed poetry to their journal, the *Dial*. By 1842 he had left the ministry and in October 1843 he married his wealthy cousin, Elizabeth de Windt. Although his *Poems*--which was dedicated to Emerson--was published in 1844, Cranch's interest turned towards painting and he travelled in Europe from 1846 to 1849 to study the masters. After his return to New York, Cranch patterned his work after the Hudson River landscape school. The Cranches journeyed to Europe again in 1853. During the following decade abroad, Cranch painted, wrote children's books, and translated the *Aeneid*. In his later years he continued to write poetry as his interest in painting waned. He died in Cambridge. His best poem, "Correspondences," is an excellent statement of the Transcendentalists' attempt to demonstrate the link between the mind and nature. Cranch was too much of a dilettante to produce works of lasting value and he is best known today for his "New Philosophy Scrapbook,"` a series of caricatures of Emerson and other Transcendentalists, the most famous of which is a long-legged, barefoot, dinner-coated transparent eyeball (based on the passage in Emerson's *Nature*, "I become a transparent eyeball"). Although drawn mostly in the 1830s, they were not published until 1951. Henry James's description of Cranch best sums up his life: "Christopher Pearse Cranch, painter, poet, musician, mild and melancholy humourist, produced pictures that the American traveller sometimes acquired and left verses that the American compiler sometimes includes."