John Sullivan Dwight Biography

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Biography

John Sullivan Dwight (13 May 1813-5 September 1893), editor and music critic, was from his birth in Boston given a gentleman's education; from the Latin School he entered Harvard. After his graduation in 1832, he briefly considered a musical career, but in 1834 he entered the Harvard Divinity School. Soon Dwight met most of those who would become known as Transcendentalists. He graduated in 1836 and two years later edited *Selected Minor Poems ... of Goethe and Schiller* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray) for George Ripley's *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature* series. Dwight was ordained in 1840 and installed at Northampton, Massachusetts. Unhappy in the ministry, Dwight joined the Brook Farm community in 1841. There he became active in associationist or socialist reforms, writing *A Lecture on Association, In Its Connection with Education* (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1844), and in 1845 became a major contributor to the community's periodical, the *Harbinger*. But in 1847, Brook Farm failed, and Dwight returned to Boston, where he was an editor of the *Harbinger* until its collapse in 1849. He contributed to the daily papers until 1851, when he became music editor of both *Sartain's Magazine* and the Boston *Commonwealth*. In that year Dwight also married. The next year Dwight started his own publication. *Dwight's Journal of Music*, which soon had 1,000 subscribers. A European trip in 1860-1861 was marred by the death of his wife at home soon after his departure. Dwight remained active in the Boston musical scene but in 1881 he closed down his journal which had become too sectarian to remain financially successful. He died in Boston. Dwight is remembered more for being, in the pages of his journal, an historian of American music than as a pioneering critic. His aim was to interpret music "through the medium of a poet's mind," and this view did not compare well with the professional music criticism of the late nineteenth century.