

boston ice and letters in the age of jefferson

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The frost covers the windows, the wheels creak, the boys run, winter rules, and \$50,000 worth of ice floats for me upon Fresh Pond.

—Frederic Tudor, “Ice House Diary”

But in this country, avarice and ambition are more nearly identified than in any other.

—William Tudor, “Discourse before Phi Beta Kappa”

Ice is an interesting subject for contemplation. They told me they had some in the ice-house at Fresh Pond five years old which was as good as ever. Why is it that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but frozen remains sweet forever? It is commonly said that this is the difference between the affections and the intellect.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

In the sixteenth chapter of *Walden*, called “The Pond in Winter,” Thoreau transforms the carrying of Walden water to India by the worldwide New England ice trade from a commercial fact into a symbol, in Whitman’s famous phrase, of a “passage to more than India.” In the 1840’s, as Thoreau observes, ice from the winter-frozen ponds of New England—from Fresh Pond at Cambridge, a major source, from Walden Pond, and many others—was being consumed in quantity by “the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta.” Invoking the Hindu scriptures (“In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta . . .”), Thoreau in a transcendent vision sees “the pure Walden water” mingling “with the sacred water of the Ganges,” and then in its mystical voyage being wafted beyond all reckoning, to “ports of which Alexander heard only the names.”¹

This transcendent culmination of the description of Walden Pond in winter contrasts with the dramatic depiction of the rape of the Walden ice right before it. In the winter of 1846-1847, Thoreau says, an ice crew, one hundred men strong, arrived one day at Walden Pond on the Fitchburg Railroad. Efficiently equipped for their work of destruction, commonly

called an “ice harvest,” the men labored for sixteen days, returning to Boston late each afternoon in the cars and coming back promptly in them early each morning. They systematically ravaged Walden Pond’s blue ice, stacked ten thousand tons of ice in cakes on the shore, and covered the great stack with hay and boards, leaving their harvest to be transported to its far-flung destinations. It was a ruthless business operation conducted, Thoreau says he learned, by “a gentleman farmer, who was behind the scenes, wanted to double his money, which as I understood, amounted to half a million already; but in order to cover each one of his dollars with another, he took off the only coat, ay the skin itself, of Walden Pond in the midst of a hard winter.”²

In view of the mercenary actualities of the ice trade, Thoreau’s transformation of the literal voyage to Bombay and Calcutta into an ideal literary voyage may well seem to be a somewhat contrived symbolism. But his conjunction of the economic and literary history of mid-nineteenth-century New England rests in a logic that, if Thoreau was not fully aware of it in historical detail, was part of his integral consciousness of his cultural situation. This situation emerges when his treatment of the ice trade is seen in the light of the relationship of ice and letters in the history of Boston—that is, of the Boston community, including Cambridge and Concord—during the Age of Jefferson, and the years immediately following. Because Philadelphia was the intellectual capital of Jeffersonian America and, in a negative sense, because the Federalist-dominated politics of Boston has not been congenial to our cultural historians, the importance of Boston in the early nineteenth century to the history of the American literary mind has been underestimated. And yet during the first two or three decades of this century, significant preparations were made in the commercial and literary capital of New England for both her actual and her literary voyages in the great mid-century period, the time of Emerson, Thoreau and Hawthorne and of Boston’s strongest national influence on our culture.

Among the many interesting ways to estimate the significance of the Boston of Jeffersonian times is to study the lives and adventures of two largely forgotten brothers of a once prominent Boston family. One of them, Frederic Tudor (1783-1864) was the “gentleman farmer” whose ice crew took the skin off Walden Pond while Thoreau looked out from the window of his hut at the depredation. Thoreau states that Tudor was worth half a million dollars at the time. Likely he was closer to being a millionaire, but his place as the “Ice King,” the leading entrepreneur in the ice industry, had been hard won. For years his chief resource was mostly a desperate confidence in his dream of wealth. Frederic Tudor’s older brother, William, is not mentioned by Thoreau in *Walden* (nor elsewhere, it would seem), but his presence, as will be seen, was also felt at Walden Pond in the winter of 1846-1847—not so much because he was the one who had the idea of the ice trade in the first place as because he

was an inept merchant of literary inclinations. Frederic called William “worthless,” an opinion confirmed over and over again in Frederic’s view by his brother’s literary projects, for example, founding and editing the *North American Review*.

i

In the Age of Jefferson, Boston associated its destiny not primarily with the vast American continental frontier but with the new Republic’s great seafaring frontier. Freed from its long deference to British colonialism, the merchantile imagination of the port city, in spite of the Napoleonic world war and Jefferson’s despised neutral trade policies, prepared the way for a golden seafaring period following the Treaty of Ghent.

As early as 1790, the *Columbia*, captained by Robert Gray, had announced the opening of Boston’s Pacific trade, when she sailed into her home harbor after a three-year voyage loaded with Chinese teas, textiles and porcelain. Her cargo had been purchased in Canton with furs procured in Oregon in exchange for Boston copper, iron and cloth. In 1810, Captain William Sturgis, a twenty-eight-year-old Bostonian, organized the firm of Bryant and Sturgis; for more than thirty years this firm, specializing in the Northwest fur trade, controlled over half of the Pacific trade of the United States. “Next to a beautiful woman and a lovely infant,” Sturgis said, “a prime sea-otter is the finest natural object in the world.” It was more a financial than an aesthetic judgment, and few disagreed. Not Yankee lads from the lonely farms of the interior seeking berths on ships engaged in the fur trade providing they survived the long voyage to Canton and back, they could make five to six hundred dollars in wages, plus an additional sum from the sale of all the Chinese articles they could pack in their sea chests. A New England farm boy might become comparatively well off on his earnings from one or two Pacific voyages. Not the successful investors and ship masters who were certain to make real money. For example, Captain John Suter, a ship master in the best Bible-reading tradition of New England seafaring, sailed for Canton with an investment in cargo and equipment representing not over \$40,000. In spite of difficulties trading with the Indians, the nineteen-year-old captain accumulated enough furs and sandalwood to trade for \$156,743 worth of chinaware, Souchong and Hyson tea, oriental silk and other treasures in Canton. When he returned to Boston in 1810, the net profit from his adventure was \$205,650.47.³

Such enormous profits encouraged the speculative spirit in Boston commerce and lay behind the development of the ice trade, a more venturesome and precarious, if less spectacular, innovation than the China trade.

The historic possibility of the ice trade was created when Frederic Tudor left Boston Latin school at the age of thirteen to become the youngest apprentice to Ducosten and Marshall, a firm on State Street.

This was an act of rebellion. He was about the right age, in his day, to enter Harvard, as his three brothers dutifully did. Frederic refused to be a Harvard man and scornfully denounced Harvard as a place for loafers. "To a man who is to be a gentleman in the world," William Tudor vainly told his errant brother, "nothing can compensate for the want of a college education."⁴

Frederic Tudor, however, had not yet found true independence; in setting himself against Harvard he may have been primarily expressing his resentment of his older brother, who was doing all of the right things. Frederic soon left State Street for the Tudor family home at Rockwood, where he hunted, read a great deal and interested himself in agricultural experiments. He also speculated modestly in Cuban molasses and cigars; and when he was seventeen, in the company of a younger brother on a voyage for his health, he visited Cuba. Eventually Colonel Tudor set Frederic up in the commodity market in Boston. Speculator and man about town, Frederic Tudor at the age of twenty-two seemed to be on the way to becoming merely another State Street operator, when William suggested at a fashionable party that ice from the Tudor's pond in Rockwood would be a profitable commodity in Caribbean ports. The time was the summer of 1805; very likely the Bostonians at the party were enjoying iced drinks and iced confections made with ice taken from nearby ponds and preserved through the hot months in a family ice house. William, it would seem, did not make his suggestion seriously. He was more interested in helping the newly formed Anthology Society edit the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* (1803-1811) and establish its reading room, soon to become the Boston Atheneum, than he was in business. Besides, in 1805 the Tudor family fortunes had never been higher, and William, the eldest son, could afford to practice the cavalier philosophy he had set down in a letter written from Europe to his mother in 1799: "I am afraid I shall be full of plans when I return; but then you know it is not necessary to execute them; and there is a pleasure in talking."⁵

But the notion of trading ice in the West Indies caught Frederic up in a vision of instant fame and fortune. On the leather-bound cover of a journal he started at this point, which he came to call his "Ice House Diary," he boldly printed a motto: "He who gives back at the first repulse and without striking the second blow despairs of success has never been, is not, and never will be a hero in war, love, or business."⁶ These words proved to be a prophecy of a strenuous and hazardous and ultimately highly successful commercial career.

With an impulsive rashness characteristic of his whole career, Frederic Tudor borrowed money, secured a brig—with a name of good omen, the *Favorite*—and took his first cargo of ice into the Caribbean. The citizens of his port of destination, St. Pierre, Martinique, were eager for ice, especially after Tudor showed them how it might be used, but by then it had mostly melted away; and the initial ice venture came up \$3000 to \$4000

short on the \$10,000 put into it. Arrangements for storing Tudor's highly perishable cargo were to have been made by his advance agents, his brother William and a cousin, another young Bostonian, James Savage. Savage was later to become the successful treasurer of the Provident Institution for Savings in Boston, but he was no more provident at this time than the cavalier William Tudor. Consequently, although both agents found the voyage in West Indian waters exotic, they had nothing to prepare for Frederic's arrival with his boat load of New England ice, except to create in Martinique a state of incredulous anticipation.

Next year Frederic Tudor did better, this time shipping to Havana, while he sent William faraway to England and France to secure permission to sell ice in their colonies. In December, 1807, however, came Jefferson's embargo proclamation. Stymied by this, Frederic began what he should have undertaken before, experiments at Rockwood in model ice-houses designed to keep ice in tropical heat. Just as he entered into this period of his novel enterprise, he was suddenly confronted with a major family catastrophe, the substantial loss of the family fortune. This occurred when Colonel William Tudor, the father, a well-known lawyer who had been judge advocate-general in Washington's army, suffered the complete loss of his investment in a Boston land development scheme. Harassed by debtors and threatened with imprisonment, the family head lived the remaining years of his life on his small salary as clerk of the Massachusetts Supreme Court; while Frederic Tudor, more and more resentful of his literary brother, deeming him to be an extra burden rather than a help, imposed upon the almost still-born ice trade not only the hope of his personal financial success but his family's economic salvation.

At the same time money became harder and harder for him to get; thus he could not operate, as some Boston merchants did, in defiance of the Jeffersonian trade restrictions. At length in 1810, even though he lacked passage money, and was "so poor, so discouraged I felt indifferent about life," he made his way to Havana. Once there he managed to raise enough money to set up a storage house, one that would keep ice all through the hottest months from April to September. From the Cuban authorities, moreover, he secured the exclusive privilege of selling ice in Havana for the next six years. At once he decided to cover one risk with a greater one by extending the ice trade to Jamaica. This venture went so poorly he was lucky when his second cargo to Port Royal was lost at sea. He was saved a freight bill. Tudor was not so lucky when a "villainous" agent cheated him out of most of his Havana profits. As debts piled on debts, Tudor was hounded by creditors. When the War of 1812 began, bringing additional vexations, he thought he saw an opportunity in privateering and designed, patented, and built the *Black Swan*, a ship with a new type of hull. On the day she was launched, a sheriff boarded her and took Frederic off to the Cambridge jail for nonpayment of a \$300 note. A few weeks before he had been in the Boston jail, and he would be in

prison again. At the end of the war with England, Tudor raised the bare sum necessary to make another shipment of ice to Havana, where his exclusive right of sale had one year longer to run. "Pursued by sheriffs to the very wharf," he reached Havana, only to find that the support of the ice trade he had won from the Cubans had been undermined by a confidence man who had convinced the Cuban authorities he could manufacture ice.⁷ Tudor re-established faith in his business and at last built what proved to be a genuinely efficient icehouse for the Cuban climate. Although he had to hide from his creditors each time he came back to the United States, his business slowly improved. It was to improve more rapidly when Tudor began to carry ice to Charleston and New Orleans, cities that he learned offered more lucrative markets for ice than ports in the West Indies.

At this juncture in his hectic career what he always needed most, the help of the "ready money race," ironically came to him through the intercession of his useless literary brother William. When William showed up in Frederic's counting room in October, 1820, Frederic thought he had come to borrow money. Instead William had come to offer to obtain a loan for his brother if Frederic would become his patron in the literary project he was then working on, a life of James Otis. In effect William's scheme amounted to using his influence to persuade two or three wealthy Bostonians of literary inclinations to loan Frederic \$3000. The interest on the loan would go to William, rather to Frederic's creditors; thus endowed he could work on his book. The scheme worked; William wrote his biography, and Frederic built an icehouse in New Orleans.

After this Frederic was frequently in financial trouble, but the ice trade grew steadily. Always a risky enterprise, it at length became one of reasonably calculable risks. In 1834, Frederic Tudor achieved his long dreamed of passage to India and set up his Calcutta "plantation," his term for one of his ice houses. The ice trade with Calcutta, according to Samuel Eliot Morison, was the salvation of New England's East India trade and a vital factor in the flowering of New England commerce in the mid-nineteenth century. Although the voyage, which crossed the equator twice, required four months, it sold ice. Between 1836 and 1846, the year he harvested the ice on Walden Pond, Tudor increased his overall sales from 12,000 to 65,000 tons. Ten years later Tudor shipped 146,000 tons of ice from Yankee ponds in 363 cargoes to fifty-three different ports. Besides his domestic markets, he reached markets in the West Indies, the East Indies, China, the Philippines and Australia. Until the manufacture and marketing of ice became common a generation after the Civil War, ice from the ponds of New England remained an important commodity in world trade.

What sustained Frederic Tudor in his lengthy and lonely struggle for success in the ice trade? The fundamental answer: his conviction, at first simply entertained but rapidly developed into an absolute in his mind,

that money is worth everything. How this conviction motivated Tudor can be studied in his diaries and letters—especially in Tudor’s “Ice House Diary.” Among the unusual documents in the annals of American business, Tudor’s diary and other writings reveal the inner as well as the outer history of how the Ice King won his crown in Boston’s economy of speculation.

Here is Tudor on March 4, 1812 “locked-up as a debtor in Boston jail” for the first time: “On this memorable day in my little annals March 9th 1812 I am 28 years 6 months and 5 days old. It is an event which I think I could not have avoided; but it is a climax which I did hope to have escaped, as my affairs are looking well at last after a fearful struggle with adverse circumstances for seven years—but it has taken place and I have endeavoured to meet it as I would the tempest of heaven which should serve to strengthen rather than reduce the spirit of a true man.”⁸ Here is Tudor about two years later, his head bloodier but still unbowed, talking about a creditor. He “has driven me to immense sacrifices and great exertions,” Tudor says, “and when neither could obtain I have given him the body.” He continues:

One instance of getting the amount of the bond and the pound of the flesh also I must forever remember. He had obtained judgement and ex[ecution] on me and my Father. On the day before the return day I went into the limits. In the evening and without previous notice my Father was arrested also, and was about giving bonds for limits also when . . . [his] attorney offered to release my Father provided I would give up my watch, a very favorite one, and agree to have it sold at auction unless redeemed in 60 days. This I did, handing my watch warm from my pocket to the sheriff and remaining myself imprisoned. I did it, I thank God, with indignation!⁹

And here is Tudor in seven more years:

January 7th 1821. The commencement of a new year, as all new years have for the last 15, finds me How I need not say—this book [his diary] will tell. Look back, Mr. Frederic, and wonder how so sick and weakly constituted a man as you could have sustained what is written down. In the very onset, the result of the first year, you were ruined; the silver spoon with which you were born was torn from your mouth; and you were at once put upon your sole and unaided ability to fight your way through the world. You have fought, but are yet in the midst of the war. You have been rather of the complaining sort, if this book records your feelings; but I must admit that you have had difficulty; and although you have seen hardship and have sorrowed in the midst of it, I will admit you have manfully followed up your early determination. Well, heaven will prosper you at last; but you have yet to see much of difficulty. More than you have, you cannot; your *gray locks* forbid. I pray for you. Last night in a state of hallucination I asked of God his

kindness. I solicited some relief from this continuation of excessive anxieties which harass your very soul. Exert yourself a little longer, cherish hope, and spare no cost of care or time or thought, and the victory shall be yours.¹⁰

In 1822, it is not surprising to learn, Tudor had a nervous collapse. He soon recovered; with the success of his trade in New Orleans, he was beginning to smell the “delicious essence” of victory and wealth. The pattern of all his striving was to be fulfilled: he was to be “inevitably and unavoidably rich.”

Eventually Tudor had a town house on Beacon Street and an estate at Nahant. He indulged himself in benevolences, such as building tree-shaded roads and draining marshes; on Sundays he went to church in a blue frock coat, and everybody looked at him. When he died at the age of eighty, his life was already a legend of the “rugged individualist.” In truth he had lived the legend. Ruthless, irresponsible, grasping, and self-righteous, he regarded a competitor as the enemy who must be eliminated. “All opposition,” he exults in one entry in his diary “has been met and overthrown—the field is won and now very little more than the shew of weapons and readiness for defense, I trust will be necessary. It has cost some wear and tear of muscle and nerves besides . . . \$12,000 in money. A dear victory: but probably thorough. If there are any unslain enemies, let them come out. . . .”¹¹ Tudor subscribed wholly to the profit motive. A commodity he traded in might bring advantage to someone besides the money it brought to him—a chunk of New England ice might relieve a fevered throat in Calcutta—but this incidental benefit had nothing to do with his intention in selling ice. Except out of economic necessity, Tudor took no interest in scientific improvements in the techniques of cutting and storing ice. And he showed little concern for the incipient science of refrigeration. When he learned from experiments that oranges could be kept in ice, he hastily packed a shipment of fruit in ice and hay and sent it to the United States. But in his desire for a quick profit, he had failed to confirm by experiment his method of packing fruit for shipment, and the cargo was destroyed when the hay caught fire. “When will you learn to lay the foundations before raising the roof?” his cousin James Savage asked him.¹² Indignant when he was called by someone “a wild projector without stability of calculation or correctness of judgment,” Tudor’s resentment was hardly justified.¹³ An incarnation of the nineteenth-century speculative spirit, he lived far outside the world of the proverbially shrewd and cautious Yankee. Once he accepted a bet that he could not sell warming pans in the Caribbean and won it by filling the pans with ice and selling them as “cooling pans.”

Tudor developed unshakeable arrogance of will. Whatever he did was right. “Success,” he said, “is virtue.” Whatever he did, furthermore, became his idea, even if, as in the case of the ice trade, it had not been. He broke off completely with the R. H. Gardiners, his sister and brother-in-

law, after Emma Gardiner mentioned—and this in the privacy of a family correspondence—that William Tudor had first proposed the ice trade. Gardiner, who had been Tudor's close friend and financial angel for over thirty years, told the Ice King that the execution of the idea, not the idea itself, had counted. This was to no avail. A forbidden subject had been brought up; Tudor could not forgive the threat, slight although it was, to his crown. Years later when Edward Everett observed in a public address that William Tudor "was one of the first who went largely into this (the Ice) business," Frederic replied that "the Ice trade was originated by and solely by me" and that Everett "spoils the whole thing."¹⁴ This statement is found in Tudor's own handwriting on the copy of his pamphlet entitled *Frederic Tudor's Letter on the Ice Trade and Payment of Great Losses* (1849) in the library of the Massachusetts Historical Society. The letter is also printed in the *Proceedings* of the Society, which elected Frederic Tudor to membership in January, 1858, when he was seventy-four years old. Thereupon Tudor promptly invited the Society to hold a meeting at his home in Nahant, where a group photograph was taken and his colleagues were shown the wonders of his estate.

Forty-two years before, in 1816, his brother William had been elected to membership. In the sense in which the term "literary" was still understood, the Massachusetts Historical Society was a literary society and one of its meetings a literary occasion. Like his brother William, Frederic Tudor now played the double role of man of commerce and man of letters. Unlike William, he had waited until he could afford to. If William had waited, the literary history of New England and that of the nation might be different.

ii

In his *History of the Boston Athenaeum*, Josiah Quincy characterizes the career of William Tudor as one in which "the qualities of the gentleman and the man of business, of the scholar and the man of the world, were . . . manifestly and happily blended. . . ."¹⁵ This is not a lie. It is a genteel misstatement of fact. Tudor failed to achieve the image of himself he obviously attempted to realize—that of the eighteenth-century "commercial cosmopolite," the "trafficker in trade and letters," whose supreme American example is Benjamin Franklin and whose most successful representative in Tudor's day was Joel Barlow. (In general, one can easily see, Tudor's career resembles Barlow's: he combined business speculation, politics, diplomacy and letters; he traveled widely and died in a foreign land on a mission for his government; a citizen of the cosmopolitan literary world, he endeavored to promote the interests of literature in his own country.¹⁶) Following a period of early schooling at Philip's Academy at Andover, William Tudor went to Harvard, where he was graduated in 1796. Destined for a merchantile career by his father, he entered the counting room of John Codman, who sent him to Paris as his

confidential agent. He was not especially successful in his post, but he made a firsthand acquaintance with the world of European art and letters. When he returned to Boston, Colonel Tudor furnished him the capital to undertake a trading adventure in Europe. He sailed to Leghorn and thereafter made the Grand Tour, once again paying more attention to letters than to commerce. This continued to be the pattern he followed. Although, as has been made clear, he rather than Frederic conceived the ice trade, this failed to divert him from the projects then uppermost in his mind, the conduct of the always insolvent *Monthly Anthology* and the founding—with only minimum financial support—of the Boston Athenaeum. These interests he combined to some extent with politics, winning a term in the legislature of Massachusetts. In 1809 he was invited to deliver the annual Fourth of July oration in the Old South Church. Before a distinguished audience, including John Quincy Adams, he was so successful that his oration was printed and reprinted. On at least three other occasions Tudor was chosen to deliver public orations: twice, in 1810 and 1815, before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard, and once, in 1817, before the Massachusetts Humane Society. The first Phi Beta Kappa oration reached its audience only in print, for Tudor sailed for England before the yearly Phi Beta Kappa festival as an agent for the wealthy Boston merchant, Stephen Higginson, who was trying to ship products manufactured in England into France under the nose of Napoleon. When Tudor was unsuccessful, he made an effort to salvage his fortunes by entering into an arrangement with some other Americans in London to set up a nail factory in Birmingham. This enterprise failed. Back in Boston, Tudor was confronted with the news of his father's financial disaster. He apparently kept out of debtor's prison by practicing law and serving as clerk of the Suffolk County Court. Throughout his hapless business career his love of letters remained the one constant inspiration of his life. This is why in 1815, virtually as alone as Frederic was in his commercial ventures, William Tudor began a new literary venture, the *North American Review*. Somehow he managed to issue it once every two months (writing most of the contents of early numbers himself) until 1818, when it was acquired by a group of Bostonians and made into a quarterly.

During the year 1818 William Tudor wrote the valuable *Letters from the Eastern States*, a book of essays on varied aspects of New England life during the first years of the last century presented in epistolary form. This book was published in 1819 and reached a second edition in 1821. In 1821 he published his *Miscellanies*, a book of selections drawn mostly from the *Monthly Anthology* and the *North American Review*. Turning to the field of American biography he wrote his *Life of James Otis*, which came out in 1823, his best book. While he was working on the biography of Otis, Tudor formed the plan of erecting a monument on Bunker Hill to the memory of the Revolutionary heroes and inaugurated a drive to

secure support for the project. Before much had been accomplished, he was appointed by President Monroe, upon the recommendation of John Quincy Adams, to be consul of the United States for Lima and other ports of Peru and left Boston for the last time.

President Adams made him Charge d'Affaires of the United States at Rio de Janeiro in 1827, and the Jackson administration continued him in this position. His services in settling American financial claims against Brazil were gratifying to Adams, not an easy man to please. Having become engrossed in matters of foreign policy and international politics, Tudor spent a part of his time at Rio de Janeiro writing an allegorical poem dealing with the United States and the European powers. This work, called *Gebel Teir*, was published anonymously in 1829. One year after the publication of *Gebel Teir*, William Tudor contracted a fever and died from its effects at the age of fifty-one.

William Tudor left no literary diary comparable to his brother's business diary, but the motives that sustained his literary career are manifest in the pages of the *Monthly Anthology* and other documents of Federalist Boston. Generally speaking, these express the struggle of William Tudor and his friends for literary values in two ways: through direct attacks on the obsession with money; and in a search to bring the patronage of wealth to the cause of letters.

In their attacks on the love of money the writers for the *Anthology* were severe. James Savage, himself a youthful speculator, comments on the character of American merchants: "The English have been contemptuously denominated by their old enemies a nation of shopkeepers; and, as we are descended from them, and are thought to have degenerated the French will soon call us a community of hucksters. The notion often entertained of us is, that, when incited by prospect of gain, nothing is too dangerous for us to attempt, nothing too infamous for us to perform."¹⁷ The passion for money, like the passion for democracy, the Federalist literati argued, was creating a cultural waste land. One poet in the *Anthology* says of Boston's huckstery:

'Tis Merchant land! Here genius never sprung,
Nor flourish'd friendship, nor the sons of song;
For such *vile* weeds, why turn the wealthy soil?
When *golden apples* grow with half the toil.¹⁸

Reviewing Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, Alexander H. Everett calls his country a "land of cent, per cent."¹⁹ Another Anthologist, Winthrop Sargent, playing the role of a wanderer from the mythical land of Languin in the East, remarks that the Americans "have a national maxim which the infant is taught to lisp in its nurse's arms; it is very long, and I do not recollect it; but I know it is equivalent to 'get money;' and I believe this useful lesson is never taught in vain." He observes, "In such a country, genius is like the mistletoe on the rock; it seems to exist upon the barren and unyielding surface only by its own

resources, and the nourishment it receives from the dewes of heaven. The progress of literature has therefore been very slow. . . .”²⁰ Still another Anthologist, Arthur Maynard Walter, sketches a picture of the literary waste land:

We may say, that we have spice ships at the Phillipines, and that our cannon has echoed among ice islands, at either pole. This is honourable and tells our enterprise; but here the story ends, nor will I busily ask, if there are no spots and stains on our flag, which the waters of the oceans we traverse, could not efface. For myself, I think we ought to have produced a few scholars; in this opinion, however, all are not unanimous, but if they agree that poetry is natural to any country, we must be ashamed of our own. We boast of no epick, tragedy, comedy, elegies, poems, pastoral or amatory . . . [*sic*] but this field is all desert, a wide African sand garden, showing brambles, and rushes, and reeds.²¹

The compulsion to avarice in America, William Tudor asserts, is a consequence of the leveling of society. The increasing importance of wealth, he points out, has been evident in the modern histories of all nations.

Wealth is a power. Do not let me be misunderstood. I am not degrading my country. Mere wealth has a very powerful influence. But the absence of all political distinction, of all privileged orders gives wealth, in the hands of talent, accumulated weight. Hence the desire of distinction, in many minds capable of feeling it, is enticed into this as a primary pursuit, and commonly persisted in, till the taste or the capacity for other employments is weakened or extinguished.²²

As a result of this situation, John Sylvester John Gardiner, the president of the Anthology Society, says: “Everything smells of the shop. . . . We seldom meet here with an accomplished character, a young man of fine genius and very general knowledge, the scholar and the gentleman united.”²³

The Boston literati continued to hold to the ideal of the gentleman-scholar—one who would maintain “that the little volume of Collin’s poetry is worth all the ‘negotiations of Walshingham’”—but they felt the suspicion of the ideal in their society.²⁴ The attitude John Quincy Adams, the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, took toward the necessity of protecting his anonymity as a contributor to Joseph Dennie’s *Port Folio* is illuminating. He is not, he observes, “ashamed of the occupation.” Yet he says that “there is no small number of very worthy citizens among us irrevocably convinced that it is impossible to be at once a man of business and man of rhyme, and who, if they knew me for instance to be the author of the two pieces inclosed would need no other proof that I ought immediately to be *impeached* for incapacity as a public servant.” Significantly, Adams granted the worthy

citizens their prejudice toward the literary vocation. If it exhibited "some Cherokee contempt of literature, some envious malignity toward mental accomplishments," it nevertheless had "much foundation . . . from experience."²⁵

Adams' uncertain compromise between money and letters seems to document more ominously than the uninhibited strictures of Sargent, Walter, and other youthful literati, the precarious hold the life of letters had on Bostonians in the early nineteenth century. Business, Adams says in effect, is first.

There was, however, another, more positive and more important, side to the struggle by the Bostonians to assert literary values. Regardless of what they said in protest against commerce from time to time, they were not alienated from it. In their imagination the waste land was the corruption of an ideal commercial civilization, which they loudly proclaimed in the midst of the Age of Jefferson and John Taylor of Caroline. Thus James Savage who condemned the huckstery of American merchants also saw foreign trade as the best hope of his country. Commerce is the world's great civilizing agency, greater than the printing press. "To the invention of printing has often been ascribed the transformation of society, but to another art we think may be attributed most of the change in the moral habitudes of man. . . . The experience and reflection of all preceding ages had never supplied such improvement to political science, as it gained in the fifteenth century from the enterprises of commerce. With implied opposition to Jeffersonian agrarian insularity, Savage contends that America's mixing with the world is decreed by nature. To thwart this decree would directly result in her cultural decline.

Some have seriously regretted that America has interfered in foreign trade, but we believe that nature intended the inhabitants of our sea coast for the merchants of the world; and that every navigable river, every bay, and every indentation in our shore, confirms her intention. In a country fertile as ours, only one third of the population need be employed in agriculture to raise sufficient for the sustenance of the whole. If foreign commerce were interdicted, we should have an immense surplus of useless commodities, and most of the incitements of industry would be lost. The whole time of half our citizens might then be wasted in the indolence of independence, or all of them might waste half of it. But if all are constrained to daily labour with their hands, there can be no cultivation of mind: and without intelligence there will be few delights of society and little interchange of benevolence. *Man in such a state ceases to be sociable, and becomes only gregarious. So that from gradual degeneration to barbarism we shall best be preserved by commerce.*²⁶

Commerce is the gateway to a rich and polished civilization comparable to that of Athens. Savage calls on the authority of the ancients: "Cicero informs us, it was a maxim of Themistocles, one the most pro-

found statesman of antiquity, that the nation, which possesses the sea, must enjoy everything." Lest anyone fear that the enjoyment brought by commerce needs be evil, Joseph Stevens Buckminster, brilliant young minister of the Brattle Street Church in Boston and a leading Anthologist, was concerned to show how Christianity had refined trade: "Tell me not of Tyre, and Sidon, and Corinth, and Carthage. I know they were commercial and corrupt. But let it be remembered that they flourished long before the true principles of honorable trade were understood, before the introduction of Christianity had given any stability to those virtues of conscientious integrity, and strict fidelity in trusts, which are not indispensable to commercial prosperity."²⁷ A commercial economy, Buckminster contends, will steadily increase virtue. Quite illogically, in view of the desperate fear of the spread of Jacobin philosophy in Boston, he argues that the "state of a people cannot be unfavorable to virtue, which provides such facilities of intellectual communication between remotest regions, so that not a bright idea can spring up in the brain of a foreign philosopher, but it darts like lightning across the Atlantic. . . ."²⁸ The Boston men of letters held to the faith that commerce makes mankind an intellectual and spiritual community. This was a powerful ideal in Western civilization, the fundamental basis of all the coming American literary voyages to India.

Seeking to realize their vision of a unity of commerce and letters, William Tudor and his friends explored the possibilities in their world of the patronage of letters. Some of the Boston literati were skeptical that the possibilities existed. Though none of them seems to have felt as bitterly despondent over the lack of patronage in America as Joseph Dennie, most of the Anthologists would have sympathized with him when he complained to his mother: "In my Editorial capacity, I am obliged to the nauseous task of flattering republicans; but, at bottom, I am a malcontent, and consider it a serious evil to have been born among the Indians and Yankees of New England. Had it not been for the *selfish* patriotism of that hoary traitor, Adams, [Samuel Adams] and the bellowing of Molineux . . . I might now, perhaps, in a Literary Diplomatic, or lucrative Situation [have] been in the service of my rightful King and instead of shivering in the bleakness of the United States, felt the genial sunshine of a Court."²⁹ Even William Tudor, less narrow in his political and social instincts than some of his friends, qualified his hope for the effective patronage of literature in a country which, following the lead of Jeffersonian liberalism, had done away with the right of primogeniture:

The equal division of property among children is a considerable disadvantage [to the progress of letters], though of a negative kind. Whatever value it may possess in perpetuating republican forms of government, or claim upon the feelings as doing justice towards offspring, for whom equal affection is felt, it has doubtless a pernicious effect in regard to literature and the arts. . . . It is seldom that any family

retains affluence through four generations. No family is perpetuated, no man comes into life free from the solicitude attending the acquisition of property. No one inherits independence in this respect, and with it, that species of fame, of taste, and inclination, for which many families in Europe have been celebrated age after age. A splendid gallery of paintings, a magnificent library, descend to the inheritor; with virtual obligation to cheer genius, to support science, to protect art. The lot is enviable to an elevated mind, but obnoxious to our institutions; yet, looking at the succession of ages, such establishments are the property of the publick, of which the apparent possessor, is only the hereditary keeper.³⁰

In some remarks on patronage by the Boston literati we encounter an unsentimental approach to the problem. Sidney Willard, who seems to have had a penchant for pricking myths, was of the opinion that altogether too much was being made of the lack of patronage of genius in America. The universal complaint that genius in this country has been killed by "the coldness of neglect," he observes, is disgraceful if true. "But," he continues, "admitting it to be well supported, it is still a question, whether neglect has that deleterious [*sic*] influence on the progress of genius, which it has been so fashionable to believe." First genius must actually appear if it is to be patronized. "Without Virgil and Horace what occasion for Maecenas?" Willard argues that genius will make its way against all obstacles, converting "indifference into favor, and opposition into patronage." No amount of encouragement, on the contrary, can make a mediocre man into a genius. True genius, he contends, will sooner or later "discover itself, without being drawn into light by the force of patronage." "Genius is independent, and active, and persevering; neither perishing with indigence, not decaying by neglect, not yielding to opposition."³¹ According to the implications of Willard's concept, the literary genius in America would force his way into prominence with the indomitable perseverance of a Frederic Tudor. This was a refreshing, if naive, idea in the welter of pessimism about patronage.

Yet it was an extreme view and served no direct purpose in finding the answer to the genuine problem of how to divert a portion of the increasing wealth of the country to literary ends. What could be done to create in the rich the desire to participate in cultural improvements? We find in the *Anthology* and elsewhere evidence that a strategy of securing patronage was being worked out in the Boston community.

The central tactic was the appeal to social pride. This argument could be stated in many ways, so that it would play upon more than the simple emotion of pride alone. The encouragement of letters and the arts, one writer in the *Anthology* argues, is essential to the protection of the wealthy class from barbarity. This is only one aspect of his argument. More important, he contends, is the necessity of cultivating taste and fostering genius as a means of maintaining social order. If the affluent

would do this, “they would be looked up to with that veneration, which is due to accomplished minds, superior talents, and legitimate grandeur: the genial rays of polished life would be reflected and diffused through every subordinate class of society; the mechanick, the labourer, the hind that clears the forest and first opens the bosom of the earth, would catch the softening gleam of humanity, and when the hours of toil were over, would learn to be satisfied with innocent recreations, rather than seek the inebriety of taverns, or the tumultuous discord of popular meetings.”³²

Variations of this general argument are numerous. One instance of its employment in a specific cause should be cited, this in the promotion of the Boston Athenaeum, the largest cultural project begun in the Boston community during the Federalist era. In part the plea is to pride, social and intellectual:

The history of learned libraries is the history of power consecrated to learning. It celebrates the patronage of monarchs, the munificence of a splendid nobility, the support of a lettered clergy, and the liberality of cultivated gentlemen. The generous aid of rank, opulence, and influence, proceeds from the intrinsic excellence of the subject. Whatever is intellectual is a portion of the supreme reason, and proportionally as it is free from corruption, approaches nearer to the fountain. The operations of this principle are recorded in volumes. The earliest of these is almost coeval with the primary institutions of society, and from that period to the present the mass of human knowledge, notwithstanding the diminutions it has suffered, and the obstructions it has encountered, has accumulated from age to age, and has descended from generation to generation, till its present possessors are captivated in admiring the variety of its parts, the beauty of its materials, or are lost in contemplating its extensive magnitude, its diversified splendour, and its irresistible power.³³

Thus when a patron handed over to the Athenaeum a sum of sound Boston money, he was by this simple act making himself both intellectual and immortal. At the same time, however, he was protecting his fortune by helping to insure social order. The argument goes on: “In proportion as we increase in wealth, our obligations increase to guard against the pernicious effects of luxury, by stimulating to a taste for intellectual enjoyment; the more we ought to perceive and urge the importance of maintaining the laws by manners, manners by opinion, and opinion by works, in which genius and taste unite to embellish the truth.”

In sum, whether they condemned the money economy or sought to woo its resources for literary uses, Boston men of letters like William Tudor, uncertain and confused as they often were, brought the literary resources of their community into action against the raw economics of a Frederic Tudor.

Underlying this anti-mercenary impulse was nothing less than what Emerson termed “the interior and spiritual history of New England”—the formidable culture of Puritan unworldliness. The transformation of this historical culture into the primary literary resource of nineteenth-century New England was, however, not an axiomatic process. It was a process shaped by the conflict in values which has been described.

The result was the development of a literary situation of critical importance in American cultural history: the representation of the literary life became more definite and more coherent in Boston than in any other American community. It was as though Frederic Tudor had deliberately dedicated himself to creating in the Boston of Jeffersonian America an economy of speculation, while William Tudor had given himself to creating a counter economy of profitless literary pursuits. By the end of the Jeffersonian age, an economy of money and a humanistic economy of letters were separate and distinct powers in the Boston community. This distinction hardly obtained elsewhere in America. Not in Philadelphia, declining in its role as a literary center, and certainly not in New York. There a rising literary market tended more strongly than in Boston to make literature a commodity in a trade, bustling and inhumane, like business in Wall Street, or on the Boston Exchange. In Boston there was effected a kind of balance of power—a conciliation partly owing to the strategy of patronage—between the community’s dynamic commercial ambitions and its literary aspirations. This conciliation, to be sure, did not provide a sure flow of “ready money” in the form of patronage from the money to the literary economy. The most original literary ideas—those comparable in audacity to the China trade or the ice trade—repelled rather than attracted patronage. When William Tudor’s wealthy friends made a deal to loan Frederic Tudor money if he would pay the interest on the principal to William in support of a literary project, they were subsidizing a thoroughly “respectable” venture, a biography of James Otis, not a *Walden*. Boston wealth paid tribute to letters as an institution of social order. The Boston conciliation between money and letters, nonetheless, was broad and deep enough to provide a world in which the literary vocation, even in its singularities, enjoyed a patronage of respect. William Dean Howells, having transferred his own literary life from Boston to that “great mart” New York City, doubted if there was ever in the world “so much taste and feeling for literature” as in the Boston he had left. In the New England capital the circulation of books and magazines and the interplay of ideas assumed a marked degree of independence from money negotiations. The Boston-Cambridge-Concord community—and the union of pastoral and city life in the Boston community must be emphasized in any accounting of its literary character—had a literary economy in which a writer could claim an exemption from incessant com-

mercial busyness and, what is more important, from the equation of book sales and "success."

He could speculate in the Emersonian realm of "the leisures of the spirit." Of the mid-nineteenth-century Boston community, T. S. Eliot said: "One distinguishing mark of this distinguished world was very certainly leisure; and importantly not in all cases a leisure given by money, but insisted upon. There seems to be no reason why Emerson or Thoreau or Hawthorne should have been men of leisure; it seems odd that the New England conscience should have allowed them leisure; yet they *would* have it sooner or later."³⁴ Literary leisure, Eliot failed to realize, imposed itself with the authority of a duty upon New Englanders who felt a vocation to letters. Thoreau going to Walden Pond to conduct his experiment in living—"to front only the essential facts of life"—seized on his obligation to leisure in a more stringent manner than most of his contemporaries. No doubt he acted in a way that would have been regarded as socially irresponsible by William Tudor, or any of the Anthology circle, who would likely have agreed with James Russell Lowell's charge of misanthropy against Thoreau. But according to the logic of New England's literary history, Thoreau fulfilled the ideal of literary leisure the generation before him had established in the Boston community in their opposition to the goal of sheer money making. The economy Thoreau had set up in the Walden woods when Frederic Tudor's ice crew intruded upon it represented a romantic extension of the Boston economy of letters, which may more aptly be called an economy of leisure. Thoreau's economy, in other words, was a radical version of an existing economy.

Thoreau was far bolder in adventuring in the possibilities of literary leisure than William Tudor; indeed in the ruthless emphasis he placed on individualism more like Frederic Tudor. In fulfilling their "passages to India," both may be said to have been heroic voyagers, one exemplifying the heroic in letters and the other heroic in commerce. It is a fine historical irony that Frederic Tudor's voyage to India is now remembered mostly because Thoreau made it into a symbol of a great voyage of the literary imagination—Thoreau who capitalized transcendently upon what Frederic Tudor regarded as the literary improvidence of his "worthless" brother William.

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footnotes

1. *The Variorum Walden*, ed. Walter Harding (New York, 1963), p. 225.

2. *Ibid.*, 222-223.

3. Sturgis is quoted in *Boston Looks Seaward: The Story of the Port, 1630-1940*, comp. Writer's Program of Works Progress Administration (Boston, 1941), p. 84. Also, see *Voyages of the Columbia*, ed. Frederic W. Howay, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, LXXXIX, xxv-xxvii, 145-149; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1730-1860* (Boston, 1921), p. 71; Robert A. East, "Economic Development and New England Federalism," *New England Quarterly*, X (September, 1937), 430-446.

4. Henry G. Pearson, "Frederic Tudor, Ice King," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, LXV (November, 1933), 172. Although he is an important figure in the history

of American and world commerce, Frederic Tudor has had no adequate biography. Pearson's essay, which is strong in quotations from the basic documents, especially Tudor's diary, is the only comprehensive source of information about Tudor. Recently Daniel J. Boorstin has studied Tudor's career briefly in *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), pp. 10-16. Also, see Stewart Holbrook, *Lost Men of American History* (New York, 1946), 114-123.

5. Pearson, "Frederic Tudor," 173.

6. *Ibid.*, 175.

7. *Ibid.*, 182.

8. *Ibid.*, 180.

9. *Ibid.*, 181.

10. *Ibid.*, 194.

11. *Ibid.*, 199.

12. *Ibid.*, 176.

13. *Ibid.*, 185.

14. *Ibid.*, 212n.

15. Quincy, *History of the Boston Athenaeum, with Biographical Notices of Its Deceased Founders* (Cambridge, Mass., 1851), p. 63. As is the case with his brother Frederic, there is no adequate biography of William Tudor. In addition to Quincy, see Pearson's essay on Frederic Tudor. Other useful sources are: E. A. and G. L. Duychinck, *Cyclopaedia of American Literature* (New York, 1855), II, 268-271; *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), VIII, 223-224, 430-431, and *passim*; *The Federalist Literary Mind: Selections from the Monthly Anthology and Boston Review, 1803-1811, Including Documents Relating to the Boston Athenaeum*, ed. Lewis P. Simpson (Baton Rouge, La., 1962), *passim*. William Tudor was born in 1779 and died in 1830.

16. See Joseph Dorfman, "Joel Barlow: Trafficker in Trade and Letters," *Political Science Quarterly*, LIX (March, 1944), 83-100.

17. "Silva, No. 22," *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*, III (December, 1806), 629. Many of the authors of pieces in this magazine are identified in *Journal of the Proceedings of the Society Which Conducts the Monthly Anthology & Boston Review*, ed. M. A. DeWolfe Howe (Boston, 1910), pp. 317-328.

18. Lucius Manlius Sargent, "To W..... C....., Jun., Newport," *ibid.*, III (November, 1806), 587.

19. *Ibid.*, V (September, 1808), 498.

20. "Letters to Leinwha," *ibid.*, II (January, 1805), 15-16.

21. "Silva, No. 21," *ibid.*, III (November, 1806), 579.

22. "A Discourse, Intended to Have Been Delivered before the Society of Phi Beta Kappa on Their Anniversary, the Day after Commencement at Cambridge," *ibid.*, IX (September, 1810), 157.

23. "Silva, No. 11," *ibid.*, III (January, 1806), 18.

24. Introductory note to "Ode to Spring," *Literary Miscellany*, II, 404. This magazine, published in Cambridge, is not dated.

25. John Quincy Adams to Thomas Boylston Adams, March 21, 1801, *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, ed. Worthington Chauncy Ford (New York, 1913-1917), II, 523.

26. "The Remarker, No. 27," *Monthly Anthology*, IV (November, 1807), 576-577.

27. *The Works of Joseph S. Buckminster, with Memoirs of His Life*, ed. Henry Ware, Jr. (Boston, 1839), II, 382.

28. *Ibid.*, I (June, 1804), 383.

29. Joseph Dennie to Mary Dennie, April 26, 1797, *Letters of Joseph Dennie, 1768-1812*, ed. Laura Green Pedder (Orono, Maine, 1936), p. 159.

30. "Discourse . . . before Phi Beta Kappa," *Monthly Anthology*, IX (September, 1810), 157-158.

31. "Patronage of Genius," *Literary Miscellany*, I, 262.

32. Robert Field, "An Essay on the Liberal Arts," *Monthly Anthology*, III (June, 1806), 300.

33. "Boston Athenaeum," *ibid.*, IV (November, 1807), 600. Author unidentified, probably William Smith Shaw.

34. "Henry James," *The Shock of Recognition: The Development of Literature in the United States Recorded by the Men Who Made It*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York, 1943), 859. Originally in *The Little Review*, August, 1918. Misleading statements about the economic status of New England men of letters are unfortunately rather common. A flagrant one occurs in Martin Green, *The Problem of Boston: Some Readings in Cultural History* (New York, 1966), p. 56: "William Tudor founded *The North American Review* after making a fortune selling ice." This not only confuses William Tudor with his brother but gives a thoroughly false impression of the literary economy of the Boston community.