Midwifery and Medicine in Boston

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Launching a Career, 1811–1822

His [Channing's] own talents & industry, aided by powerful friends, must ensure him success.

—George C. Shattuck to Jacob Bigelow, 1810

According to family legend, Aunt Polly was the only person who sought Channing's recently acquired medical skills when he returned to Boston in the summer of 1811, but when he added "Just Returned from Europe" to the sign outside his door patients began to flock to his waiting room.1 Thereafter he had more than enough business to keep him fully engaged. Eventually, he paid off the debts that plagued his conscience and strongly affected his outlook on the necessity for hard work. By old age he had become moderately prosperous and took satisfaction from the fact that he was the only Channing to have done so independently of a rich wife.2

Legend and family pride aside, it was not so easy to enter the medical profession in Boston. The 1810 Boston Directory listed forty-five physicians and surgeons, thirty-nine of whom had been licensed by the Massachusetts Medical Society, serving a population slightly in excess of 33,000.3 Several of Channing's contemporaries, including equally promising men such as George C. Shattuck and Jacob Bigelow, hesitated to begin their careers in the crowded Boston medical community, where competition was strenuous, internecine strife prevalent, and the cost of living higher than in the smaller towns nearby.4 Additionally, the local economy was burdened by restrictions on overseas trade.

Channing had three distinctions that propelled his career forward. First, he possessed up-to-date knowledge of British medical teaching and Bostonians
were strongly Anglophile in their intellectual and scientific preferences. Second, he had given most of his time abroad to the acquisition of obstetrical knowledge and skill, whereas the other Bostonians who could boast of European training had not concentrated in that part of medicine. There was need for a man with his expertise, though he could never rely exclusively on obstetrics to make a living and would always have an active general practice.

Finally, despite his previous disappointment and fear of rejection, he was already well connected. He had been a Bostonian for eight years, spent two of those years at Harvard among the sons of Boston’s finest families, and was well known in society. The increasing favor that his brother William’s ministry was receiving, the esteem in which various other Channings, Ellerys, and Danas were held, and his personal familiarity with prominent men like Francis Cabot Lowell gave him a preferred place among the other young men seeking advancement in medicine. He had already been licensed by the medical society and accepted as a member of the Boston Medical Association.3

There were several direct ways of attracting patients. Easiest was to rely on family networks far beyond Aunt Polly, whoever she may have been. For some relatives he merely dispensed free advice that they could take or not as they pleased, for despite their medical knowledge it was not uncommon for physicians to be greeted with skepticism. Many people continued to diagnose for themselves and to prefer home remedies. Women were especially prone to rely on experience and to prescribe for their children’s ailments. Francis Channing’s widow, Susan Higginson Channing, “was often more afraid of the Dr. than the disease as they are very apt to give calomel when something without any of its bad effects might do quite as well.” Susan so relied on a recipe for tincture of cinnamon once given her by Dr. Danforth that the apothecary refilled it at her request regardless of need or appropriateness.6 However, when one of Susan’s daughters was very ill, she instinctively turned to Walter. “I attribute her restoration in a great measure to the skill, and still more to the good nursing of Walter. . . . he was here 5 days when she was most ill and sat up with me 4 nights successively. During one of those nights it seemed to me impossible she could have survived many hours, but for the unwearied attentions and applications he made.”7

Channing attended Uncle Walter and his family daily whenever the children or their parents were unwell, charging a dollar and a half per visit, plus an additional fifty cents if he dispensed medicine.8 For Tom Searle, a distant kinsman via the Higginson connection, Channing prescribed “as little exercise as possible” and an “application to the feet which raises little blisters.” Poor Tom was probably suffering from rheumatic fever, commonly called rheumatism. His sisters attributed his ailment to his having neglected to wear flannel
underwear before the cold weather set in. Many other members of Channing's family called on him for advice or active doctoring, including the childbearing sisters, sisters-in-law, and female cousins for whom he cared in miscarriages, stillbirths, and the delivery of healthy babies. Successful treatment of these close relations helped spread word of his ability as well as his character, which was described by one admirer as "so industrious, patient & polite that unless Apollo himself is against him . . . he will get along."

Another way to advertise his skills was to attend at the Almshouse, where the steady numbers of paupers always included a few pregnant women. Channing was not a regularly appointed Almshouse physician but, since childbirth cases could be tedious and even uninteresting, the Almshouse physician and the Harvard professors who had access to Almshouse patients for clinical teaching were often ready to yield their places at the bedside to another man. He had had one such experience during his year with James Jackson. Now, as a more frequent attendant, Channing had the opportunity to make himself better known among physicians who might one day ask him to consult in a complicated private case. He began to keep a list of his midwifery cases in August 1811, just a month after his return. Nearly all the initial cases were at the Almshouse. It was a rude introduction: six of the first seventeen babies died at birth or shortly afterward; one woman died of convulsions following a self-inflicted abortion.

Channing was entering the Boston medical scene at a particularly turbulent time. The original Harvard medical triumvirate, John Warren, Benjamin Waterhouse, and Aaron Dexter, had always had their differences, with Waterhouse consistently the odd man out. His abrasive personality and quarrelsome nature, stimulated by the suspicion (and in some cases the hostility) he encountered when he first arrived in Boston, were as much a cause of his difficulties as were the objective aspects of his life. Waterhouse, a Rhode Island Quaker, had spent the Revolutionary War years abroad studying medicine. This made him less than compatible with Warren, whose religious heritage was Puritan and Congregational, whose brother had died at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and who had himself ably served the patriot cause. Waterhouse's superior medical education, acquired during those years in London, Edinburgh, and Leiden, also set him apart. He was prone to flaunt his cosmopolitan connections in front of the other two, who had trained locally and were doubtless resentful and jealous. Whereas both Dexter and Warren became staunch Federalists during the postwar era, Waterhouse was an increasingly ardent Jeffersonian, eventually espousing democratic ideas that seemed quite radical to his more conservative colleagues. It was a nasty situation.

By 1810 the faculty had increased to six with the appointment of three
young men whose European training, enterprise, and connections would make them leaders of the next generation of Boston physicians. Each was inherently unsympathetic to Waterhouse. John Collins Warren, who joined the faculty in 1809 as Adjunct Professor in Anatomy and Surgery, naturally shared his father's animosity toward Waterhouse. John Gorham, Adjunct Professor of Chemistry and Materia Medica, had studied medicine with John Warren prior to study in Europe and had married his daughter. When James Jackson was named to the newly created Professorship of Clinical Medicine in 1810, another anti-Waterhouse voice was added to the faculty.

Jackson had hurried home from London expecting to introduce vaccination to Boston, only to find that Waterhouse had already received cowpox lymph from England and was busily administering it. Two years later Waterhouse succeeded in persuading the Board of Health to conduct one of the earliest clinical trials in medical records. Nineteen boys were vaccinated with cowpox lymph. After an interval of several months, they were inoculated with smallpox material and exposed to contagion at a smallpox hospital on Noddles Island along with two boys who were unvaccinated. None of the vaccinated children developed the disease but the two without immunity became ill. Two of the vaccinated boys were sons of members of the Board of Health. Waterhouse's success added to Jackson's exasperation. His own proposal for a similar experiment had been refused permission.

With the exception of Waterhouse, the medical faculty lived in Boston. The journey across the Charles River to deliver their lectures in Cambridge was time-consuming and tedious, when not made additionally uncomfortable and difficult by wet or wintery weather. At first, Warren and Dexter had to cross the river on the Charlestown ferry and make their way several miles upriver by carriage or on horseback. Later, a series of newly constructed bridges shortened the distance, but since the term lasted from November to March, they continued to be exposed to the elements.

Cambridge was still a village with little to interest medical students, whereas Boston, with its numerous physicians, larger patient population, and intellectual and cultural attractions, offered a more active milieu. If the medical institution associated with Harvard was to grow and prosper, Cambridge was not the best place for it to be. Accordingly, in 1810 the Corporation acceded to a request from the faculty, Waterhouse dissenting, and voted to move the medical school to the Boston side of the river. For the next six years, lectures were held in rooms above an apothecary shop at 49 Marlborough Street (present-day Washington Street), where the younger Warren and John Gorham were already giving private instruction. Now it was Waterhouse who had to come to Boston to deliver his lectures.
The Massachusetts Medical Society, which was quartered in the same location, reflected the same rivalries. Initially the medical society and Harvard had feuded over their respective roles in medical licensure but were eventually reconciled when a Harvard degree and examination by the society were made equally valid. John Warren, with one foot firmly planted in the medical school, was elected president of the medical society in 1804, and he held that position until his death in 1815. His son served as recording secretary from 1805 to 1814, and James Jackson was treasurer from 1807 to 1811. The two younger men poured their personal ambition and their professional goals into the medical society. Together they prepared and published a much needed *Pharmacopoeia* that revised and standardized the nomenclature and preparation of medicinal drugs and brought much credit to themselves and the society. Also under their direction, several volumes of the *Medical Communications* of the society were published after a hiatus of sixteen years.

The growing importance of the medical school and the rejuvenation of the medical society aroused the antipathy of many well-respected physicians who resented the clique whose increasing control seemed exclusionary. In February 1811, while Channing was still abroad, they attempted to create a rival medical society to be known as the Massachusetts College of Physicians. It would have the same “powers, privileges and immunities as other medical associations of the like nature and views enjoy.” By implication the new society could start a rival medical school. Among those whose names were signatory to the plan was Benjamin Waterhouse, “always happiest when in the opposition.”

Legislative hearings for grant of a charter were held in February 1812. Harvard sent President John Thornton Kirkland and John Lowell, one of the Fellows, to protest. The medical society, represented by John Warren and Aaron Dexter, presented its arguments against the proposal. James Jackson spoke on behalf of the medical school. Political differences played an important part in the controversy. The Federalists, party of the status quo, opposed the new society, whereas the Jefferson Republicans, representing the less well established elements of society, favored it. For a while it looked as if the dissidents would receive legislative endorsement, but in the end, after bitter conflict in the State House as well as in the press, on the streets, and in the parlors of Boston and its neighboring towns, the charter was denied. Many years would pass before anyone dared attempt to set up a second medical school in Boston.

Benjamin Waterhouse was soon dismissed as Professor of the Theory and Practice of Physic. The Corporation, long aware of the “lack of harmony” between him and the other professors, was greatly displeased by his support for the College of Physicians and the threat it posed to their institution. The faculty voiced their grievances against him, including his “false, scandalous and
malicious libels against the Professor and Adjunct Professor of Anatomy and Surgery."^{27}

Waterhouse had anonymously published a sarcastic broadside aimed at "Captain Squirt," who opposed popular desire for a new fire engine. "Captain Squirt" claimed that a new engine would reduce the efficiency of the present engine and that even if he was too old to run to fires, his son, "young Squirt," would do so. On the morning the piece was printed, Waterhouse appeared on the steps of Warren's house, waving it before his nemesis. For this he was roundly cursed by "Captain Squirt." The flagrant hostility between the Warrens and Waterhouse intensified public interest in the affair and added to the uproar.\(^{28}\) After several lengthy hearings before the Corporation and much perturbation among Waterhouse admirers and opponents, he was officially removed from his chair on May 20, 1812. In September, James Jackson was elected Hersey Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine.\(^{29}\)

CHANNING'S return to Boston could not have been better timed. With so many charges swirling about, and so many changes occurring, he was quickly accepted into the inner circle. His political views, his ties to Boston society, and his personal goals coincided with those of the ruling clique. The problem of a Harvard degree was remedied in the summer of 1812, when Harvard granted him an M.D. degree \textit{ad eundem}, thereby acknowledging that his degree from the University of Pennsylvania entitled him to a similar honor at home.\(^{30}\)

The irony of paying a five-dollar fee for a Harvard degree was not lost on him.

Jackson and John Collins Warren had committed themselves to "inform each other of any causes of discontent" and to work together for "improvement in medicine and other intellectual pursuits."\(^{31}\) Among those improvements was a medical journal. Theretofore, New England physicians wishing to publish their medical observations or to read case reports of their colleagues had to rely on journals from Philadelphia and New York.\(^{32}\) Warren and Jackson recognized that a regional periodical would abet the development of the medical profession and, at the same time, promote the interests of the medical school. Channing was invited to be one of the founding editors, along with Gorham and Bigelow. Each brought a special area of expertise as well as his general medical knowledge to the task. Each journal issue was assigned to one of them for general supervision. The editors met monthly to read and critique papers, after "a light supper to aid them in their deliberations."\(^{33}\)

The \textit{New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery and the Collateral Branches of Science} first appeared in January 1812 and quarterly thereafter. The title page attributed editorship to "a number of physicians" but there was no doubt about their identity. A motto from Francis Bacon proclaimed their
scientific intentions: “Homo naturæ minister et interpres tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturæ ordine, re vel mente, observaverit; nee amplius scit aut potest.” The first issue, intended to attract subscribers by the distinction of its authors and the importance of its contents, contained contributions by John Warren, “Remarks on Angina Pectoris”; James Jackson, “Remarks on the Morbid Effects of Dentition”; John C. Warren, “Cases of Apoplexy with Dissections”; Jacob Bigelow, “Treatment of Injuries Occasioned by Fire”; and Walter Channing, “Remarks on Diseases Resembling Syphilis, with Observations on the Action of those Causes which Produce them.” There was also a note reprinted from the New York Repository about the first use of spurred rye or ergot in midwifery.

Channing’s paper appeared in four parts. His thesis was that many cases assumed to be syphilis and treated aggressively with mercury compounds were “pseudo syphilitic” ulcers that did not require such harsh remedies. “Prudent delay” would enable the physician to determine the true nature of the symptoms and prescribe accordingly. Channing was urging physicians to question their assumptions when diagnosing venereal disease and to “search for new causes” that might lead to better treatment. He justified this cautious approach by citing several British medical authorities whose writings on the subject might not be familiar to his readers.

In subsequent volumes, Channing wrote more frequently on topics that derived from his obstetrical practice. He also reviewed several midwifery texts that had been published in England and France and commented on articles on midwifery submitted by other physicians, several of whom had written directly to him. There were also additional non-obstetrical contributions. “Cases of Delirium Tremens,” describing seven cases from his practice, appeared in 1819. It was the earliest significant discussion of the subject in America. Channing’s paper acknowledged the work of Thomas Sutton, whose Tracts on Delirium Tremens, published in London in 1813, had first described alcoholic delirium tremens.

Channing’s next steps toward advancement were made at the medical school. For several years following his return from Britain, he offered lectures at 49 Marlborough Street on the theory and practice of midwifery to private students. Students already enrolled in the medical school, medical apprentices not attending the medical school, and practicing physicians who wanted to avail themselves of the latest obstetrical knowledge took advantage of Channing’s training and experience, while he added to his income and his reputation. He was filling an important vacuum, since many Boston physicians had childbirth cases in their general practice.

Midwifery continued to receive scant attention in the regular academic
curriculum at Harvard, where, as in Philadelphia, it was incorporated into the anatomy and surgery lectures. However, in 1815, in a reorganization similar to that which occurred in Philadelphia, Harvard created a lectureship in midwifery. The change was driven by John Collins Warren, who wanted to divest himself of responsibility for the midwifery lectures when he assumed his father's chair in anatomy and surgery.

The incumbent professors recommended their friend Walter Channing and the Corporation acceded to their wishes. On May 15, 1815, at the age of twenty-nine, he was appointed Lecturer on Midwifery, with "a claim to such compensation only as he might derive from the fees paid by persons attending his lectures." At the same time, Aaron Dexter was relieved of some of his responsibilities by the creation of a lectureship on materia medica and botany that went to Jacob Bigelow. Both appointments were publicly announced on November 1, 1815, during the ceremonies installing Warren as Hersey Professor of Anatomy and Surgery. Channing and Bigelow declined inaugural ceremonies for their appointments, not wishing to deliver the formal lectures that were expected at such events.

Three years later, they were promoted. Channing was named Professor of Midwifery and Medical Jurisprudence and Bigelow became Professor of Materia Medica. The inclusion of medical jurisprudence reflected the growing sense that a well-educated physician should understand the interaction of the law with medicine, for forensic purposes and for development of public health measures. In Philadelphia, Channing had attended lectures by Benjamin Rush, one of the earliest Americans to advocate the teaching of medical jurisprudence, and this may have influenced the decision to give him those additional responsibilities. An equally plausible explanation is the traditional association of midwifery with legal issues such as bastardy, infanticide, paternity, and rape. In Europe female midwives had long been called as witnesses in such cases.

Channing exalted in his good fortune. Writing to thank his friend Edward Everett, who had used his personal influence on Channing's behalf, he pledged "to make my public life respectable & useful." Perhaps seeing his academic career on an upward trajectory, he also referred to the possibility of a national university where he might someday "make one of its faculty of medicine." The idea of a national university, a favorite idea of John Quincy Adams and other visionaries, would never materialize.

The professorship was more than a personal triumph. It was also proof that a good medical education had to include adequate instruction in midwifery. Channing made sure his course was fully recognized. In 1816 he protested to the Harvard Corporation that the newly revised statutes governing
requirements for graduation from the medical school did not include a public examination in midwifery, though materia medica and the traditional subjects were specifically mentioned. The Corporation replied that it had not intended to slight midwifery and agreed that an examination should be required. The exact mode of instruction for that examination was left to the faculty, but Channing was reminded that, since increased numbers of students would benefit the professors, "all necessary instruction" should be provided. The midwifery books, plates, and instruments, as well as an "apparatus for demonstrating labor" that John Warren had used in his lectures, were now added to Channing's own collection of teaching materials.

The medical faculty set its own fee schedule. Students enrolled in Channing's and Bigelow's courses paid ten dollars to each professor. For Gorham and for Jackson the fee was fifteen dollars; for Warren, twenty dollars. The additional time required for the preparations and dissection in anatomy justified Warren's higher fees. When Aaron Dexter resigned in 1816, John Gorham was named Erving Professor of Chemistry and Mineralogy.

Within a few years of the move from Cambridge to Boston, the school outgrew the accommodations on Marlborough Street. Again Warren and Jackson took the lead in a campaign to persuade the Harvard Corporation and the state legislature that public support was necessary and appropriate for the construction of a new building. They made sure to point out that several other states, recognizing the public good that derived from the education of physicians, had seen fit to fund construction of medical school buildings. It helped that Bowdoin and Williams Colleges were also seeking financial assistance from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In 1814 the legislature agreed to appropriate to the three institutions for ten years the revenues from a tax on banks. Harvard's share was $10,000 per year, for a total of $100,000. Of this amount, $20,000 was allotted by the Corporation for purchase of land and for construction and maintenance of a new medical school building on Mason Street, close to the Boston Common and to the residences of the professors. In recognition of the assistance granted by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for many years thereafter the school was referred to as the Massachusetts Medical College.

For the next decade the five professors, Warren, Jackson, Gorham, Bigelow, and Channing, were the medical school, setting standards, schedules, and course content, with little or no interference from the administrators in Cambridge. Monthly meetings of the medical faculty were held at the professors' homes, sometimes with a convivial dinner afterward. Channing assumed the duties of dean at the beginning of the 1819 term. He filled that post, except for a few scattered occasions, for the next twenty-eight years.
As dean of the medical faculty, his obligations in no way compared with those of a modern dean who must devote a major amount of his time to fund-raising and to relations with government officials and agencies. Channing was expected to keep the minutes of faculty meetings and correspond with the Corporation and Overseers on general subjects, including examination times and recommendations for degrees. About the only thing he shared with latter-day deans was that his portrait would one day be conspicuously hung in the administration building of Harvard Medical School. As Warren's biographer declared, "Probably there can nowhere be found in medical biography an instance of greater unity and good feeling, than prevailed among these gentlemen for the whole period of their connection with the College; until, in fact, increasing years, and the claims of extensive practice, caused them, one by one, to retire from the labors of the chair." The acrimony that had characterized the previous generation disappeared as like-minded men were recruited into the oligarchy that dominated all aspects of the profession.

ACCEPTANCE by the Massachusetts Medical Society was another indication of Channing's assimilation in Boston's medical circles. He had become a licentiate in 1810, just before his departure for Britain. Licentiates customarily
advanced to fellows after three years of medical practice, but since Channing was abroad and did not practice the year following his initial election, he had to wait until 1814 to be named a Fellow of the society. His participation in society governance was limited. Channing was less politically ambitious than Warren, less likely to receive general acclaim than Jackson, and, as an obstetrician, less likely to be as widely esteemed as some of his other colleagues. He never attained leadership of the medical society as they did, but he did serve over the years as one of the Censors, its librarian, and its treasurer.53 The last office was time-consuming and tedious, for he was required to notify members when their dues were in arrears and to keep society finances in order. In 1820, along with John Collins Warren and James Thacher, he was elected an Honorary Member of the Rhode Island Medical Society.54

The intellectual ferment epitomized by the new generation of physicians spilled over in many directions. Channing shared with them an enthusiasm for natural science that flowed from his medical interests as well as from his inherent curiosity. Both botany and mineralogy had their practical uses as the
basis for materia medica. Every physician prescribed drugs for his patients and had to be familiar with the origins of herbal and mineral medicinals. But there was also the pleasure of investigation, identification, and collection of specimens found in their natural environment. Channing's interest in mineralogy had been stimulated by his earlier studies in Cambridge and Philadelphia. His delight in plants received a boost from his preceptor, Benjamin Smith Barton, who was an outstanding botanist, and from the natural history society he joined in Philadelphia. Back in Massachusetts, his favorite pastimes included mineralogical and botanizing excursions to surrounding hills or ponds, which yielded specimens he could add to his own carefully chosen collection.  

When Jacob Bigelow organized a local Linnaean Society in 1814, Channing was among the original coterie who shared these enjoyments. Bigelow had already evidenced an unusual talent for botany, giving public lectures on the subject and publishing his *Florula Bostoniensis*. The members of the Linnaean Society, who included many nonphysician amateurs of natural science, collected and exhibited animal, vegetable, and mineral specimens from all parts of the world, especially items peculiar to the American continent.

One of their more bizarre activities was an investigation of reports of a sea serpent spotted offshore north of Boston. The news had captured the imagination of the public and interest was intense. Descriptions of the strange creature varied widely, some reporting three white rings around its neck, some reporting that it moved horizontally, others reporting it moved vertically, but everyone attesting to its immense size and rapid motion. The investigating committee took depositions from observers but could reach no conclusions until a three-foot-long serpent killed inland was brought to Boston for further inquiry. Perhaps it was a progeny of the great serpent. The Linnaean committee examined it meticulously but finally, concluding that it was fairly non-descript, they named it *scoliophis Atlanticus*.

The Linnaean Society soon found that it lacked adequate financial support to maintain and exhibit its collections. A committee composed of Channing, Bigelow, and F. C. Gray offered to give the collection first to the Boston Athenæum, then to Harvard. In both cases they were rejected and the specimens were dispersed. The Linnaean Society expired in 1822, but it would be later resurrected under the leadership of John Collins Warren as the Boston Society for Natural History.

Channing was also elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, another indication of recognition by the elite. The academy, which had included physicians from its foundation in 1780, was closely allied with Harvard and with the clergy and merchants who dominated Boston society. Dedicated to "promote most branches of knowledge advantageous to a
community," it provided another venue for presentation of papers on scientific topics. These papers reflected little experimental science and did not contribute much to basic science but, by its connections with European learned societies, the academy did help disseminate new knowledge in the still-young nation and encouraged close observation and description of natural phenomena.61 The academy was a stimulating venue for Channing's interests.

Just as medicine and science received impetus from the younger generation of educated men, the literary scene in Boston was also enlivened by emerging scholars and authors. Some in this group, Edward Everett, George Ticknor, George Bancroft, and Jared Sparks, for example, had studied abroad and returned home full of enthusiasm for the new ideas they had encountered. They were determined to rescue Boston and Cambridge from the intellectual doldrums that they found.62 The Friday Club was representative of this group. It met at the homes of its members for wide-ranging discussions of essays composed and presented by writers, clergymen, and junior faculty at Harvard. Channing attended regularly, occasionally reading a recent paper.63 The topics remain unknown, but it is entirely possible that some found their way to publication in the North American Review.

This journal, intended to elevate literary and artistic criticism in America, was patterned after the Westminster Review and the Edinburgh Review, although the editors and contributors intended to promote a vibrant American culture.64 Edward Tyrrel Channing was involved from the beginning and served as editor for a few years before his appointment in 1819 as Harvard's Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory.65 Many members of the Friday Club were part of the enterprise. Walter was a frequent contributor. His essays echoed the call for literary and artistic independence and vitality that was a hallmark of the journal. Since he had spent a year abroad, he felt qualified to compare the American scene with Great Britain's and to exhort his countrymen to break free from cultural dependence on the former mother country.

He also wrote on topics more directly related to medicine. In a eulogy of Caspar Wistar, one of his professors in Philadelphia, he described the characteristics of a physician that, by implication, he considered most worthy: "simplicity of character . . . purity of intention . . . unabated zeal in the cause of science and humanity." The piece gave Channing a chance to praise the University of Pennsylvania, "the most celebrated medical school in our country." The freedom with which he paid tribute to the University of Pennsylvania was further indication that he no longer thought of himself as an outsider.66

In a review of a history of ancient medicine originally written by the German historian Kurt Sprengel and since published in a French edition, Channing demonstrated a surprisingly modern understanding of the importance of
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medical history. The medical historian, he wrote, “should give us the art [of medicine] as it has been, not as it should be.” Medical practice, he pointed out, is but a reflection of the particular beliefs of a people at a particular time. Though the medical beliefs described by Sprengle included much superstition and religion, Channing detected the beginnings of “a profession devoted to the study of nature and founding its science on a patient observance and study of intellectual and physical health and disease.”

Combining his knowledge of literary personalities with his ideas about health, he also penned an article titled “On the Health of Literary Men.” There he criticized the “intellectual forcing” that emphasized excessive study and the acquisition of vast amounts of knowledge by young people at the expense of their physical development. Deploiring “premature intellectualism,” he argued for more outdoor exercise, recreational activities, and appropriate diet. Channing was taking a position about education and child development that he would repeat on later occasions.

DESPITE creation of a medical journal, reinvigoration of the medical society, an enlarged faculty and better facilities at the medical school, one more institution was needed if the profession was to flourish in Boston—a general hospital. Philadelphia and New York had long had hospitals for inhabitants whose circumstances were such that they could not be cared for at home, though that was eminently preferable. In Boston, the Almshouse had provided minimal medical care for more than a hundred years, but by 1810 large numbers of lunatics and paupers were crowding out the “worthy poor,” and it was no longer adequate to meet the needs of the sick, if ever it had been. Biblical commandments to succor the poor and homeless, as well as ordinary sentiments of compassion and civic pride, should have been effective reasons for Bostonians to assist people too ill and too destitute to care for themselves.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century it was equally apparent that hospitals were essential to the progress of medical education and medical science. Physicians and students needed large patient populations for the observation of disease in its many manifestations. The future of the transplanted medical school depended on adequate clinical instruction, one reason for the move from Cambridge. There was ongoing concern that Boston’s most promising medical students might prefer to go elsewhere for their training, as Shattuck, Channing, and Bigelow had done. The arrangement whereby members of the medical faculty were permitted to bring students to the Almshouse was not an adequate solution. Nor was the Boston Dispensary, which served the poor on an outpatient basis or sent physicians, not medical students, to their homes.
Lack of support for a hospital was due less to hard-heartedness or civic neglect than to a faltering economy and slow growth in the years after the Revolutionary War. In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, Boston's prosperity and population increased with newly established manufacturing enterprises, improved trade and commerce, and the expansion of banks and insurance companies. Prospects for further economic growth bred a greater awareness of civic responsibility and, for some newly rich men, a desire for respectability and the social standing that contributions to a hospital or membership among its trustees and incorporators could provide.\(^69\)

A circular letter dated August 20, 1810, signed by those inveterate activists John Collins Warren and James Jackson, asked influential Bostonians to support plans for a hospital.\(^70\) They reminded the wealthy of their Christian duty and described the hardships endured by the industrious poor when faced with protracted illness. They made special mention of insanity, an illness that affected all classes and required separation of the afflicted from society. They also emphasized the increased prestige that Boston would receive if it had a first-rate medical school with a suitable hospital for clinical instruction. Their words were well received by men who could make things happen in Boston.

The Massachusetts General Hospital was incorporated the following year by act of the legislature.\(^71\) The governor, lieutenant governor, Speaker of the House, president of the Senate, and chaplains of both legislative houses were named a Board of Visitors with power to appoint four of twelve members of the Board of Trustees. Federalist control of the State House assured a tightly knit board composed of merchants, bankers, and lawyers who shared a strong sense of noblesse oblige.\(^72\)

The Commonwealth committed to sell the Province House, once the residence of the colonial governor, and to contribute the proceeds to the hospital if an additional $100,000 were subscribed privately. Economic and political vicissitudes, including the embargo and the War of 1812, caused some delay, but by July 4, 1818, a site had been selected and enough money received to begin construction.\(^73\) Charles Bulfinch, who had designed the State House, University Hall in Cambridge, and the homes of many wealthy Bostonians, was sent on a tour of hospitals in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.\(^74\) The impressive Greek Revival building he designed was intended to recall the grandeur of ancient republics and remind Bostonians of their civic responsibilities. Its location, on the back side of Beacon Hill and close to the banks of the Charles River, made the hospital easily accessible by boat and by foot. The cleansing breezes from the river promised salutary air.

There was general approval of the hospital despite some concern that it would lead to increased dependency of the poor on the charity of the rich. On
the other hand, there was an equal concern that the poor might be unwilling to avail themselves of its facilities. Horror stories about experimentation on the helplessly ill and the use of cadavers by medical students might frighten the very people for whom the new institution was intended. Nonetheless, common sense prevailed. More than a thousand people subscribed to the fund. Boston’s leading men, notably William Phillips, David Sears, James Perkins, and Thomas Handasyd Perkins, made generous donations. The physicians gave lesser amounts, as fitted their means. Warren contributed $400, Jackson $420, Channing and Dexter $100 each.

The trustees appointed eight consulting physicians from among the leading nonacademic members of the medical community. James Jackson was designated to be the acting physician, and John Collins Warren the acting surgeon. They would be permitted to bring their students to the hospital. In turn, Jackson nominated Channing to be the assistant physician, not because he expected to be overburdened by the patient load but in case he was ill or otherwise prevented from attendance. To enhance the importance of the position, Jackson intended to give Channing complete responsibility during the summer months, when he would be out of town. Channing was deeply gratified. For the rest of his life, he treasured the recollection of “the morning he called on me and offered me the place of assistant physician to that noble charity in the foundation of which he had exerted so important an agency.”

It was another example of the close relationship between him and Jackson as well as the symbiosis of the hospital and the medical school. Neither the physicians nor their assistants received a salary from the hospital and the time they devoted to hospital duties could not be given to paying patients. However, they would be bringing their students to the wards, and that promised a greater number of students enrolled at the medical school and increased fees for the professors. This arrangement could not directly benefit Channing’s teaching, for the hospital was not meant to serve pregnant women and there could be no teaching opportunities in midwifery. However, the prosperity of the medical school was very much in his interest, since his fees depended on enrollment. Moreover, his appointment as assistant physician gave him increased exposure in general medicine, while his close relationship with Jackson, reinforced by his new appointment, assured Bostonians that he was a physician to be trusted.

Thus, in every aspect of the medical profession—patient care, faculty status, Fellow and officer of the medical society, editor of the journal, and assistant physician at the new hospital—Channing had fulfilled Shattuck’s prediction for his success. He was part of the small but powerful group that had transformed Boston medicine and would provide leadership for the next four
decades. The torch had been passed from physicians whose careers had embraced colonial government, revolutionary war, and the establishment of a new nation to men who shared confidence in the future of their nation and their profession. They were better trained than their predecessors had been and were willing to embrace future change. They were energetic and ambitious, involved in a multitude of intellectual and scientific activities, and already well known by colleagues abroad and in other American cities.

Channing never achieved the prominence attained by Warren, Jackson, and Bigelow. This was attributable partly to his personality, which shunned self-aggrandizement, partly to his preference for solitude and quiet pursuits, and partly to the personal tragedies that persisted throughout his life. It was attributable also to his status as professor of midwifery and as a practicing obstetrician. Though there was a compelling need for good obstetrical teaching and practice, the field remained slightly less estimable, perhaps because the patients were women, perhaps because there was a suggestion of uncleanliness or even of prurience about it. Midwifery had long been women's work and in some quarters it still was deemed less "manly" than surgery and medicine. There would always be people who thought it improper for a man to give medical care to women in such intimate circumstances. Channing was admired as the outstanding obstetrician in the Boston community, but that was not enough to push him to the top of the ladder.

Warren, hardworking and determined, endowed with the right name and great ability, was considered "the most eminent surgeon in New England if not in America." James Jackson, a much beloved practitioner, equally involved in every aspect of the advancement of the medical profession, shared first place with him. As for Bigelow, shortly after his return from Philadelphia in 1810 Jackson had invited him to join in his practice, thereby practically guaranteeing his success, though his scientific and intellectual abilities would have marked him for renown without Jackson's patronage.

An indication of the differences among these four can be seen in an estimate of their annual incomes, made by one of their colleagues around 1817. "James Jackson, great and profitable practice [$]10–15,000 . . . J.C. Warren, same as Jackson beside Surgery [$]10–15,000 . . . Jacob Bigelow [$]800 . . . Walter Channing [$]1000–1500." John Gorham, the fifth member of the medical faculty, was reputed to be earning $2,000, "a respectable business." CHANNING'S marriage to Barbara Higginson Perkins was the capstone of his early success. Even before returning to Boston, he had confided to George C. Shattuck, "We must be married for the women are everything in our calling." Were they clerks or fishmongers, men their age would have been think-
ing of marriage, but there is no doubt that marriage to the right woman could further a physician's career by assuring the public of his probity. For a physician whose primary clientele were women, a respectable marriage was especially important. A wife with the right family connections brought additional benefits, while a wife whose family was wealthy was even more of a prize for a man who might not become very rich himself.82

Channing did not need to wander far or search long to find himself a wife. Barbara Higginson Perkins, more than nine years his junior, was one of the limited set of eligible women with whom he would naturally be acquainted. "Walter Channing with whom we have made acquaintance & who is a charming young man has lent Mamma a Volume of the lectures of Dr. Rush," she confided to her dearest friend less than six months after his return from England.83 We do not know if his future mother-in-law enjoyed reading Rush's lectures, or if she read them at all. It may well have been a ploy to impress her daughter, for within three more months Barbara had begun to transcribe Walter's European journal into her own leather-bound journal. Soon they were being thought of as a couple, and by the winter of 1814 they were officially engaged.84

A virtual spider's web of relatives and friends connected the two. Barbara's aunt, Susan Higginson Channing, widow of Francis, would also be her sister-in-law. Her maternal grandfather, Stephen Higginson, and his family were members of the Federal Street Church and William Ellery Channing had briefly lived in their Brookline summer home. James Jackson was a good friend of her father.85 Even without so many direct connections it was inevitable that the two should know one another, given the relatively small circle of socially acceptable families in Boston, where everyone knew everyone else and most found marriage partners within that group.

Barbara was the eldest of six children. Her parents, Samuel G. Perkins and Barbara Higginson Perkins, were each of impeccable lineage. Samuel Perkins was the younger brother of Thomas Handasyd Perkins and James Perkins, who made great fortunes trading opium, slaves, rum, otter skins, and just about anything else that could be bought and sold. The China trade, on which much of Boston's prosperity depended, had been especially profitable for them, providing the wealth for their philanthropy and civic leadership. Samuel Perkins was less fortunate in his business enterprises, but he was by no means unsuccessful and, when not engaged in trade, insurance, or other forms of money-making, he devoted his time to horticulture. It became a serious hobby. In 1803 he purchased a small estate in Brookline where he created "an earthly paradise of trees in blossom, bubbling brooks, green verdure and caroling birds."86
Barbara Higginson Perkins, the older sister of Susan Higginson Channing and mother of Walter's future wife, was known as one of Boston's great beauties. An admirer recorded that "she looked the queen more than any woman I ever saw. Her throat, neck & bust were beautiful even when past forty years of age . . . she made one feel as if her approbation was of more consequence than that of any one else in society." Talleyrand was reported to have expressed his desire to meet her when he was in Boston. She presided over one of Boston's most fashionable salons, where her brilliant conversation was the equal of her guests' who included many Boston intellectuals and literati. Her father, Stephen Higginson, another of the powerful Federalist merchants, was reputed to be worth more than half a million dollars before he suffered reverses in the latter part of his life.

There are no known portraits of the younger Barbara Higginson Perkins. Friends described her as "pretty." Others thought she was "very lady-like & accomplished in music," and that she "combined cultivation & great excellence of character [and was] among the very few people you would like to have for [a] constant companion." One of her cousins was less flattering, calling that Barbara and her sister "never had any life in them." The books she chose, sermons of worthy divines, Condillac's Logic, and Lord Kamer's Elements of Criticism, suggest a serious nature.

Her friends also knew her as frail and sickly. In 1812, when she was "quite unwell and much depressed," her mother took her to Worcester to consult a physician in whom she had confidence. The following summer, when again Barbara was unwell, the family went north to Vermont for the supposed benefit of its clear air. These minimally described episodes suggest the respiratory weakness that became more serious following her marriage.

Walter Channing and Barbara Perkins were married March 21, 1815, by the Reverend Samuel Thacher, minister of New South Church, at the home of the bride's parents. A month before, Boston had received news of peace between the United States and Great Britain, which occasioned great rejoicing and celebration amid hope for a revived economy. With warships no longer inhibiting transatlantic crossings, Samuel and Barbara Perkins soon departed on an extensive European tour, leaving Walter and Barbara to live in their home and supervise the younger Perkins children. Walter rejoiced in his newly acquired marital state, "such a merry breakfast table, such good appetites and spirits at dinner, and playfulness at tea."

Walter was enormously proud of his wife and that same summer, during a rare "moment of professional leisure," he took her to Newport to meet Grandfather Ellery. She was already pregnant. In November she was extremely ill, with symptoms diagnosed by her husband as influenza. A severe...
cough, lasting more than two weeks, kept her from sleeping. Walter insisted
that she remain secluded to prevent her from trying to talk and he treated her
with laudanum and a blister. Barbara’s illness did not dampen her husband’s
ardor. Commenting on events of the year in a letter to his sister Lucy, he
exalted, “I have relinquished the charms of single blessedness & taken to my-
self a wife and I almost wish you knew less of my wife, for then I might tell
you all I think of her, and something I feel for her. . . . I hope I have not been
entirely unworthy of the high and new responsibilities with which it [the past
year] has invested me.” It is not clear whether the high and new responsibili-
ties refer to his marriage or his appointment at Harvard, for it had indeed been
a year with multiple new responsibilities.

The birth of their first child, Barbara Higginson Channing, was duly en-
tered in Channing’s List of Midwifery Cases for 1816—“March 13th, Mrs. B. H.
Channing, girl, case #84.” A professional note was appended, “In Mrs. C.’s
case rigidity of the membranes existed.” Despite a troublesome pregnancy
complicated by general debility, motherhood suited her well. “She makes a
sweet little mother and if ever a woman can look and feel happy it is in her
present situation,” her sister-in-law and aunt Susan commented. Walter was
not nearly so serene. All his professional calm was lost where his wife and
child were concerned. Only Barbara’s ability to make him laugh relieved his
excessive anxiety.

That summer found Walter unwell with an intestinal disorder followed by
emotional depression. A similar low had occurred shortly after his return from
England, when Edward described his brother “overcast with shadow . . . his
sorrows of a very peculiar nature,” and Susan received a letter “written in a
very gloomy state of mind.” The earlier melancholy may have been caused
by his uncertain future. Now it could well have been triggered by the responsi-

bilities he had assumed and his continued lack of self-confidence. In any case,
it was a mood that would return in later years.

Despite pleas from the family, he refused to take a vacation until his in-
laws returned, insisting that he must personally relinquish responsibility for
their children. But as soon as the Perkineses were back and had gone to Brook-
line, where his wife and child could join them, Walter was off to New York.
There he found relief in the companionship of his sister Lucy, now married to
William Russel; it was Lucy to whom he could always confide his innermost
concerns.

The journey restored his health, and once he was back in Boston with “his
little household,” he was ready for “as happy and smooth a voyage through
this great ocean of life as man could wish, or at least look for.” His fears for
the future had been allayed. “In due time,” he told Lucy, “I hope to be as well
off as my best friends could wish.”

Boston still presented a bucolic scene, with orchards and flower gardens surrounding many homes, grassy fields throughout the town, and a pond nearby the house Channing and his family occupied.

“Case #104, Mrs. B. H. Channing,” was a boy born November 29, 1817, and named William Ellery Channing to honor his paternal grandfather and great-grandfather. He would be known as Ellery. It had been another difficult pregnancy for Barbara. For much of the summer she was too ill to go to Brookline, a refuge she usually enjoyed. Her postpartum recovery was slow; after seven weeks she was too fatigued to socialize and her hand trembled so much she feared no one could read her writing. But the baby was plump and healthy and his older sister chubby, red-cheeked, and good-humored. Little Barbara was also rather self-willed and rough-mannered, which sometimes caused her to “be mistaken for a boy,” much to the displeasure of her mother.

Barbara’s infirmities became more severe. She began to experience serious problems with her eyes. Her face was peaked and bloodless. There was talk of an ocean voyage, but Walter could not afford the time to accompany her, and with two small children it was out of the question. James Jackson recommended a briefer journey. Fortuitously, William had been invited to deliver the sermon at the upcoming ordination of Jared Sparks as minister to the Unitarian congregation in Baltimore. It was decided that Barbara and her baby should accompany William, along with her sister-in-law Susan. En route they would visit Lucy Russel in New York. Walter was especially anxious for Barbara to consult Dr. Philip Syng Physick, one of his Philadelphia professors, in whose diagnostic and therapeutic skills he had great confidence.

Traveling together for many days by horse-drawn carriage gave Barbara and William the chance to become better acquainted. William was in fine form—conversing, laughing, doing everything he could for the entertainment and comfort of his companions. Barbara’s “gentle, sweet and affectionate spirit,” her contentment and cheerfulness also delighted the party. They paused in New York, where William encouraged the Russels and their Unitarian friends to establish a liberal church. There is no record of a stopover in Philadelphia or a consultation with Dr. Physick. In Baltimore William delivered a memorable sermon enunciating for posterity the fundamentals of Unitarian doctrine. Thereafter Barbara and some of the others went on to the nation’s capital, thus completing a rather remarkable excursion for a young wife and mother so far from home.

Barbara thought the journey did her good, though her eyes remained troublesome. Walter, who was “pretty well tired of living alone & had really grown pale on solitude,” welcomed her back. His own health problems resurfaced
and he spent a few weeks at Ballston, a popular spa in New York State not far from Saratoga. When he returned he found his wife “quite sick,” the result he thought of a chilly excursion in the country. Again she had to keep to her bed. Many Bostonians were concerned for their health that summer. A yellow fever epidemic originating on board one of the ships recently arrived from Africa spread among the houses in the waterfront area, causing alarm throughout the city. Channing’s mother and sister fled, though Walter did not sympathize with what seemed to him to be unreasonable apprehension.\textsuperscript{110}

It is hazardous to attempt a diagnosis of Barbara’s condition based on letters written by her relatives and friends. Some of her symptoms, especially the weak eyes and trembling hands, suggest several diseases attributable to nutritional deficiency, a common condition in an era when the benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables were not understood and such foods were not easily available much of the year.\textsuperscript{111} The frequent colds, respiratory ailments, and general fatigue give hints of a predisposition for tuberculosis and knowing the outcome, we can predict that the accumulation of illnesses would lead inexorably to consumption, the disease with which everyone, laity and physicians, was all too familiar. Consumption (phthisis) was the scourge of the nineteenth century, prevalent in all social classes, especially in urban settings. The only prescription was rest and fresh air, which might strengthen resistance. Walter had good reason to be fearful. However, denial is a powerful weapon, especially in the face of a potentially tragic outcome.

Barbara herself was aware of her tenuous future. On the pages of the journal where she had once copied sections of Walter’s European journal, she added a long poem, which began

\begin{quote}
Not to the rosy maid whom former hours
Beheld me fondly covet, tune I now
The melancholy lyre: no more I seek
Thy aid Hygaia! sought so long in vain.
But 'tis to thee O sickness! 'tis to thee
I wake the silent strings, accept the lay.
\end{quote}

The “Ode to Sickness” gave full expression to deep feelings of sorrow and pain, but it ended affirmatively.

\begin{quote}
For all I bless thee! Thou hast taught my soul
To rest upon itself; to look beyond
The narrow bounds of time and fix its hopes
On the sure basis of eternity.\textsuperscript{112}
\end{quote}
When she became pregnant for the third time, there was further cause for anxiety. Mary Elizabeth Channing was born July 4, 1820, and was baptized, as her older siblings had been, by William at the Federal Street Church. Barbara had an easier recovery but the eye problems worsened and she feared permanent blindness. For weeks she was not allowed to gaze on her new child and became very depressed. Again Susan Channing described the situation. "She says that all that she has ever endured before is nothing to this... she suffers so much positive pain & is so apprehensive of making them worse by the slightest exertion either of body or mind that she lives in a constant agony. She is perfectly helpless and they are afraid to leave her alone for a minute."

When the episode passed, she resumed her maternal duties.

With three children under the age of five, Barbara was fully engaged in their care. Little Bab and Ellery loved stories, especially when read or created by their father, whose fertile imagination produced many enchanting tales. Barbara decided to educate her older daughter at home, following a demanding schedule that began at 9:00 A.M. and ended at 5:00 P.M. There were recitations from the Bible, spelling lessons, and instruction in nature, art, geography, and sewing. One hour a day was set aside for play. Barbara needed patience and gentleness as well as perseverance when dealing with her daughter. Ellery, on the other hand, was "a fine tempered child," though "passionate on contradiction."

By the summer of 1822 Barbara was in the final stages of consumption, spitting blood, breathing with difficulty, often beset with a violent cough. She was also pregnant again. She knew that the outlook was grim and Walter became more fearful. He even hoped for a miscarriage, which might have relieved the added demands on her weakened body. Susan Channing was less pessimistic, explaining, "as pregnancy produces every kind of evil and women live through everything, I can not despair of her." Her mother too refused to think negatively.

As Barbara's disease continued to worsen, Walter, whose fervent affection for his wife and children was evident to all who knew him, watched her gradual decline with ever-increasing apprehension. The baby was born in early October, three or four weeks prematurely. She was named Lucy Bradstreet Channing, but there is no official record of her birth or her baptism, suggesting that Walter and the rest of the family were too distraught to give attention to these formalities.

The final four days of Barbara's life were almost continuous suffering, mitigated by "her angelick patience & gentleness." Even the nurse commented on her fortitude in the face of agony and death. Her frequent spasms were also agonizing for Walter, as well as her mother, sisters, and sister-in-law, who
remained by the bedside thinking each breath was the last. When finally she died on October 10 the torture ceased for everyone. Barbara was buried in the Peck and Perkins family mausoleum in the Granary Burying Ground, adjacent to the Boston Common.

Despite the years of warning and final weeks of waiting, Channing could not believe "such a blessing" had been taken from him. He was completely distraught, unable to care for his children and unwilling to remain in the house where he and Barbara had been living. If there had been an unmarried sister, she might have assumed charge of his children and home, but this was not the case. He first considered boarding out, then decided to live with his mother in the house on Berry Street acquired for her by William following his marriage in 1814 to his cousin Ruth Gibbs and their move to Beacon Hill. The children were distributed among relatives: little Barbara to Susan Channing, Mary and the baby (with a nurse) to the Perkins grandparents. The baby was alternately sick and well, causing some to think she would not survive and others to declare her the most beautiful babe ever born. Ellery had already been sent to live with his Forbes cousins in Milton. Aunt Margaret Forbes, a sister of Samuel Perkins, had seven children, the youngest four years Ellery's senior. Nonetheless, it was not a good situation. The Forbes household was more Puritanical than Ellery had known at home, the cousins were not compatible, and his aunt was not affectionate. Ellery was isolated from his father and sisters at a time when he desperately needed love and consolation. The strangeness that became part of his personality may well have had its origins in this unfortunate arrangement.

Channing continued his professional commitments, visiting patients, lecturing at the medical school, attending at the hospital. Otherwise, he spent his time grieving and alone. Friends found his spirits variable. "[H]e seems at times so wretched that it is distressing to be with him." The tragedy was exacerbated by the nearly simultaneous death of William Ellery Channing's small son, left in Boston with a maiden aunt while William and his wife were in Europe. They had made the journey for the sake of William's health, yet the news that awaited them in Rome, the deaths of their child and of a dearly loved sister-in-law, was certain to negate any improvement.

William wrote an extraordinary letter to his brother, whose loss he felt more deeply than his own. "Sweet lovely & full of promise as our little boy was, I cannot but feel that you are the most bereaved & I would rather comfort you than speak of myself." He too grieved for Barbara, "so faultless, so spotless that I know not in what I would have changed her. . . . Her heart was a deep calm fountain of love." He had long believed that Walter was "one of the most privileged of men in having such a sharer & guardian of your happiness."
William offered faith in the wisdom of God and hope for reunion in the next world. “We, in the blindness of human love, would have detained her. But suffering had done its purifying work & she was prepared for a higher sphere . . . a spirit such as hers was at this moment needed in the community of the ‘just made perfect.’” He feared that his brother’s “constitutional sensi­tiveness” would make grief unbearable and urged him to make “the true use of your suffering.” He had much to live for and to enjoy.124

William approved Walter’s decision to live with their mother, for he could help “support and brighten her last years.” Other observers were less certain that the two would be good for each other, since Lucy too could be withdrawn and taciturn.125 Yet he found a measure of peace and comfort living quietly under her roof, visiting frequently with his children, but avoiding society. He began to accept the situation. “I must be at rest where I am,” he wrote to Lucy Russel.

I look forward to no change in situation or circumstance. My steady pursuit of my professional duties I think will always give me the means of comfortable subsistence for myself & children. . . . there is too little about me or mine to make me an object of interest beyond my mere usefulness and with this & with the sad lessons of my experi­ence constantly before me, I can hardly look or ask for more. To be tolerably cheerful is to me now great gain. There is a sadness which to me is now more nearly allied to happiness than gaiety. It has in it more of the past, & the ultimate future, than of the present, or the tomorrow. . . . I feel lonely Lucy at times beyond yr imagination to comprehend, for I find the dead even among the living.126