

## LITTLE EDWARD BEGAN TO SMILE

Moncure Daniel Conway, from Fredericksburg, Virginia, was one of the most dynamic Southern Unitarian ministers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. He had early become enthralled with the ideas of fellow Unitarian Ralph Waldo Emerson. As a consequence he entered Harvard Divinity School to prepare for the Unitarian ministry. While at Harvard, he spent many enjoyable weekends at Concord with the Emersons, their children, and their friends. Here is one episode from Conway's autobiography. The year is 1853.

"I managed to make friends with the Concord children. Never had a small town a more charming circle of lovely children, ... and as it was vacation time they were prepared for walks, picnics, boating, etc. Other of their elders beside myself found delight in the society of these young people, especially Thoreau [Henry David Thoreau, Unitarian naturalist, philosopher, and social activist].

"I remember Ellen Emerson asking her father, 'Whom shall we invite to the picnic?' – his answer being, 'All children from six to sixty.' Then there were huckleberrying parties. These were under the guidance of Thoreau, because he alone knew the precise locality of every variety of the berry. I recall an occasion when little Edward Emerson, carrying a basket of fine huckleberries, had a fall and spilt them all. Great was his distress, and our offers of berries could not console him for the loss of those gathered by himself. But Thoreau came, put his arm around the troubled child, and explained to him that if the crop of huckleberries was to continue, it was necessary that some should be scattered. Nature had provided that little boys should now and then stumble and sow the berries. We shall have a grand lot of bushes and berries in this spot, and we shall owe them to you. Edward began to smile."

Ref: Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904), vol. 1, p. 148.