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Care as Self-help : Self-fashioning Conducted by Alternative Medicine in Antebellum America

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	作成者: 鈴木, 七美
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Care as Self-help: Self-fashioning Conducted by Alternative Medicine in Antebellum America

Nanami Suzuki
National Museum of Ethnology
The Graduate University for Advanced Studies

A popular health movement led by irregular doctors called medical sectarians, or unorthodox healers appeared in the United States in the first half of the 19th century. It denounced regular doctors and their practices as an affront to the entire order of "nature" in health. Beginning with Thomsonianism (the botanical movement that started in the 1820s), it came to include eclectics, hydropathy (the "water-cure" movement), and homeopathy. The large-scale alternative medicine movement that sprang up in the 19th century was a unique response to the emergence of what was then called "orthodox medicine."

In this paper, I compare Thomsonianism and hydropathy, which both made distinctive assertions about childbirth and the historical change from the world of midwives to doctors, and offered alternative approaches to self-help.

Both sectarian movements were opposed to the new midwifery of regular doctors, but their attitudes toward childbirth were quite different. While Thomson believed in "nature," and asked husbands to assist "nature" in childbirth, hydropathy could no longer rely on "nature," and encouraged individual women to create a new "second nature" to perform their childbirth, defined as a "healthy event." However, both movements had a common objective: namely to assist ordinary people to reconsider their way of life on the basis of "nature" and become autonomous self-fashioning subjects through childbirth experiences, during what was then a transitional period for childbirth in general.

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1 Introduction

The United States in the 18th to 19th century experienced a significant change in medical treatment. Medical schools were rapidly founded from the mid-18th century onward and the newly emerged professionals called "regular doctors" began to treat patients. These doctors began to be trained at medical schools — established by physicians who studied mainly at Edinburgh in Britain — in Northeastern cities such as Philadelphia (Rothstein 1988: 34; Murphy 1991: 22–24). As more and more states began to establish their licensing system and to give licenses to practice medicine only to graduates of medical schools, various practitioners who had previously been active in treatment and healing — orthopedic doctors, midwives, Indian doctors, herbalists — were put in the category of "irregular doctors" and called bad "quacks." They often found their treatment activities were regarded as problematic, and were even subject to punishment (Rothstein 1972: 74–80; Shryock 1967: 3–42; Gevitz 1988: 2–6).

Regarding childbirth practice, it has experienced two major changes (Figure 1) (Leavitt 1986: 11–12). In the colonial period before 1760, childbirth was almost exclusively placed in the hands of women. Midwives, women relatives and friends attended birthing women. The first significant change was brought by an

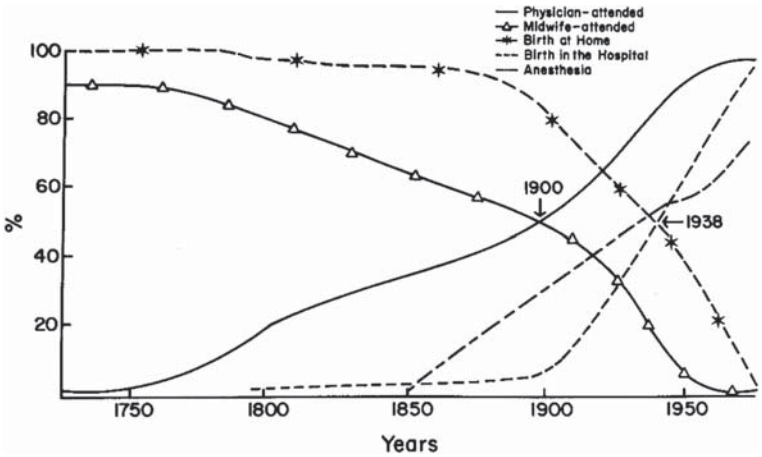


Figure 1 Graph illustrating trends in U.S. childbirth practices, based on estimates. (Leavitt, J.W. *Brought to Bed*, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.12).

obstetrician, William Shippen, who returned from study in England and began attending labor and delivery in 1763. He also founded medical schools to train orthodox doctors. The second change, beginning in the later part of the 19th century, marked the transfer of the birthing place from home to hospital.

However, founding medical schools and hospitals did not always advance medical technology nor promise good treatment. Medical theory did not seem to develop much at all. It was considered that fevers, swelling, and flushing red were an excited state of the body and they were manifestations to be calmed down. To deal with such symptoms, allopathic treatments were applied, such as bloodletting and mercury-based laxatives. Cholera, one of the diseases that prevailed in the 19th century, was a debilitating disease that was not relieved by bloodletting and laxatives. The newly introduced doctors had completed only a short course of study, often consisting of three months' lectures without practical experience. They could not perform appropriate treatments or childbirth assistance. Physicians who could not successfully treat patients turned to treatment known as "heroic medicine," distinctive to the United States, frequently using bloodletting and laxatives in large quantities. In addition, physicians used forceps as an artificial method for the purpose of enhancing the delivery process that often led to loss of the lives of both mother and child, and this issue was most actively discussed among people that were dissatisfied with the medical practice of new regular doctors.

The social history of American childbirth has been intensively studied since the 1970s by researchers in medical history, family history and women's studies. However, there is a problem that has not been paid sufficient attention yet. It is the "popular health movement" led by irregular doctors called medical sectarians. They appeared in the first half of the 19th century, the transition period from midwives to doctors, and presented their opinion regarding the "natural" way of assisting childbirth. Primarily, Thomsonianism (the botanical movement) of the 1810s to 1830s advised people to return to the days of midwives when childbirth seemed to be more natural and safe, and hydropathy (the water-cure movement) in the middle of the 19th century advocated that people realize "natural" childbirth as a painless and healthy experience.

I investigate Thomsonianism and hydropathy closely and examine their concepts of the "power of nature" and caring through comparing their arguments over childbirth as well as health.

2 Self-help in Thomsonianism (The Botanical Movement)

2.1 The Rise of Thomsonianism

One of the people who strongly criticized the medical practice of regular

doctors was Samuel Thomson (1769−1843). Thomson thought that his mother had lost her life by the heroic medicine practiced by a regular doctor. He also remembered that several regular doctors did not know how to heal his wife's disorder after giving birth. Thomson was finally relieved to see his wife got better when cared for by two lay healers. They were called "root doctors" that used local herbal medicine from the land (Thomson 1822: 25−26). Thomson strongly believed that the role of the healer was to help the body to make use of its natural power (Thomson 1827: 114−115; 1835: 160). He called for a return to the curing practices in the same manner of "self-help" that predated the emergence of the modern physician and the institutionalization of medicine. He wrote manuals for health and traveled around to heal people, and began the botanical movement known as Thomsonianism (Thomson 1835: 10).

Previous studies on Thomsonianism have focused on the great success of this movement in relation to certain societal factors, such as the Jacksonian Democracy of the "common man" in the 1820s. Thomsonian herbal treatment was merely viewed almost the same as allopathic medicine carried out by regular medicine and the underlying idea of the treatment was ignored (Rothstein 1988: 42−46; Kett 1968: 108−112). Although Samuel Thomson made many remarks and proposals on alternative methods to regular medicine concerning the spread of regular doctors and changes in midwifery, no detailed study of them has been conducted[1)]. The idea of self-help by assisting the power of nature represented in popular Thomsonian manuals has not yet been adequately focused on. While there have been attempts to situate Thomsonianism within American cultural and social history (Fuller 1989; Heller 2000), they did not focus on Thomson's emphasis on the importance of healing practice similar to cooking in the everyday life of lay people (Thomson 1835: 13; Mattson ed. 1839: 137). It is partly because insufficient attention has been paid to his autobiography, *A Narrative, of the Life and Medical Discoveries of Samuel Thomson* (hereafter written as *Narrative*), which described his life as a pioneering farmer and a healer (Figure 2). As an itinerant healer, Thomson recorded the specific changes in the environment such as population concentration and health issues of rapidly urbanizing regions such as Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston. He also described the changes in human relationships surrounding treatment. The information written in plain language in the Thomson's two books also became familiar to people in the Midwest and South, since Methodist missionaries traveling along pioneer trails brought the books for the people who wanted to learn regimen and herbal medicines[2)]. I clarify this through analyzing *Narrative* (first edition of 1822), three different editions (1827, 1829, 1835) of the *New Guide to Health, or Botanic Family Physician* (hereafter written as *NGH*), and other Thomsonian journals (Figure 3). I explore those ideas about diet and food that were profoundly involved with health and views of treatment as self-help.

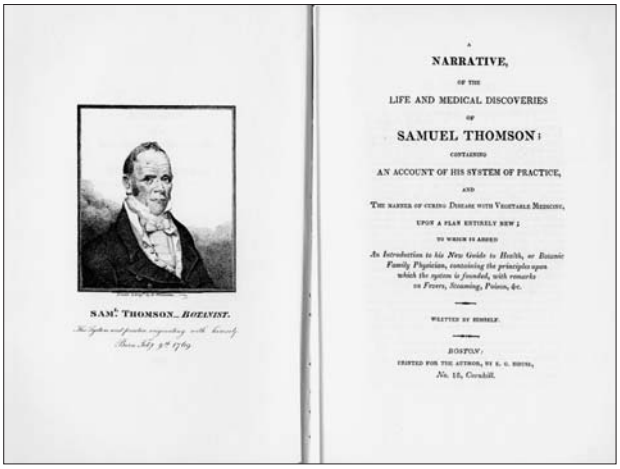


Figure 2 Thomson, S., *A Narrative of the Life and Medical Discoveries of Samuel Thomson*, Boston: E. G. House, 1822.

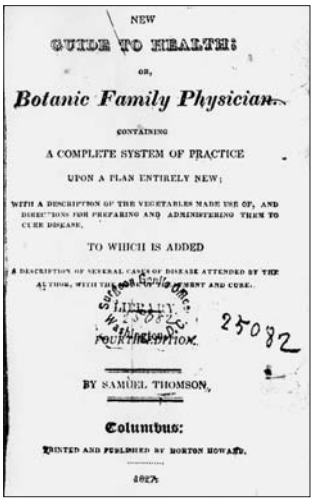


Figure 3 Thomson, S., *New Guide to Health: or, Botanic Family Physician*, Columbus: Horton Howard, 1827.

2.2 Local Herbal Medicine as Friends of Nature

Thomson believed that the sole cause of all diseases and disorders was the body becoming cold by an imbalance induced by gastrointestinal problems. For the best way to regain strength and preserve health, he recommended people to maintain a good and proper diet in order to restore the body's "natural heat" (Thomson 1835: 13, 164–167). Thomson believed that his idea was in accordance with the teachings of Hippocrates in ancient Greece.

Thomson prescribed six treatments primarily based on the lobelia herb[3]. He claimed he had "discovered" the efficacy of the herb as a small boy (Thomson 1822: 16−17; Numbers ed. 1987: 141). His treatments started by giving patients herbal teas and subjecting them to sweat baths using hot stones to get rid of ills inside the body. This treatment would adjust the condition of the body of patients so that it could take in fresh nutritious food and achieve regularity. Treatment using herbal teas and sweat baths were traditional methods employed by American Indians as well as used by many Americans as a self-help means on an everyday basis. Although the Thomsonian regimen did not seem to present any new discovery, at the height of the popularity of Thomsonianism, about one-third of Americans used herbal treatments. The number of people describing themselves as herbal doctors claiming to be Thomsonians also grew (Kett 1968: 103−106). In response to the force of the movement advocating everyone should be his own doctor, some states even went so far as to repeal the system of giving licenses only to regular doctors.

Thomson's beliefs in the power of herbal medicines as well as food, and the role of lay people in treating disorders and diseases by themselves have been cultivated through his own childhood experiences. He wrote about the environment in which he grew up where there was no physician living within a ten-mile radius. Thomson's family had always relied on a midwife, Benton, when they could not solve difficulties with disorders by themselves. She served people in the area as the only practitioner known as a "root and herb doctor (Thomson 1822: 15−16)."

Since Thomson's father was a pioneer farmer in rural New Hampshire, as the eldest son Thomson had to help his father to clear their own woodland even before he was four years old despite having a disability in one of his legs. The father, who was a strict Baptist, believed that his son would learn best through working and did not allow Thomson to attend school. Thomson was disappointed to learn that he could not go to school but he soon found Benton to be an important teacher for him to obtain the knowledge of herbal medicine that he was interested in. He would accompany her as she walked around gathering medicinal herbs. With Benton's teachings as well as Thomson's experiments on the efficacy and usage of each herb, Thomson accumulated the knowledge to bring the natural power of the human body into play, the only and most essential aspect of healing. Thomson even claimed that he had discovered the "lobelia herb" that would thoroughly clean the human body to prepare it to recieve other herbs used in teas or nutritious food as soup to strengthen the body (Thomson 1822: 14−16; 1835: 9−10).

Thomson continued to clear the land and when he was nineteen, he became all the more attracted to the power of the medicinal herbs that grew naturally around him. One day when Thomson was clearing some wasteland along the Onion River in Vermont, he severely injured his ankle. First, Thomson and his father applied a plaster made from comfrey root and turpentine as a home remedy, and

then following the suggestion of a local healer, boiled some apple-tree bark and washed his wound with it. However, they learned that neither of these remedies worked and only made the injury worse. Finally Thomson was carried by his father on a straw bed through the snow to the herbal doctor Kitteridge. There, Thomson was welcomed to lie before the fireplace in the doctor's living room and recovered after receiving treatment using medicinal herbs for several days (Thomson 1822: 19−23). He described such good herbs as "friend of nature" (Thomson 1835: 166−167) and explained that "there is medicine enough in the country within the reach of everyone, to cure all the disease incident to it (Thomson 1822: 32)." He continued to study herbal medicine by himself, and he began to prescribe to his family and to the neighbors, ultimately becoming an itinerant healer, searching and using curative herbs indigenous to the North American continent.

The "admiration of nature" was often expressed in the antebellum period when people started to look upon nature to be taken care of and in which to enjoy life just as Thoreau wanted to lead a self-sufficient life at Walden Pond in the progressive urbanization of the period (Miller, C. 1988; Miller, P. 1967; Albanese 1990)[4]. Thomson also used the expression "the God of Nature (Thomson 1835: 6−7; 1822: 14)." One of the reasons for the popularity of Thomson's belief of trust in nature seemed to resonate with people's admiration of nature of that era.

2.3 Hospitality for Healing

Thomson obtained the idea of another important point for healing practice especially when he was taken care of by root and herb doctor Kitteridge (Thomson 1822: 22−23). Thomson experienced treatment in a comfortable warm room within Kitteridge's home and his stay there allowed them to cooperate together to find a good treatment for Thomson. This experience reminded Thomson of Benton's way of treatment that he witnessed in his childhood when she often came to visit Thomson's family and, if necessary, stay with the family. However, this was not the case for newly produced regular doctors who conducted more formal visits to a patient's home and mostly did not receive patients in their home. Thomson insisted that the healer needed to have knowledge of the herbs as well as hospitality in order to obtain sufficient knowledge of each patient's natural condition[5].

Thomson emphasized in his *New Guide to Health* of 1827 that his ideal of medical practice following the efforts of the natural power of patients was even more important in assisting birthing women. He insisted that childbirth as a natural process not requiring medical intervention would best be assisted by midwives who had performed the traditional methods of childbirth (Thomson: 1827: 114−115).

Since colonial times in New England, only women and midwives came to stay with birthing women to assist and prepare for the birth of a child in the traditional method of birth, so-called "social childbirth." They would gather in a room known

as the "birthing room," which with its fireplace, was often adjacent to the family's living room. A manual known as *Aristotle's Masterpiece* that had a long tradition since 17th-century Europe and continued to be published until the middle of 19th-century USA had an illustration of birthing women after birth and a newborn child, both being cared for by assisting women (Figure 4). These women prepared nourishing food and even helped with everyday chores for the birthing woman awaiting the "true time of a woman's labor" to receive the child (Aristotle 1813: 102). The "true time" was known to a midwife and women by the pain experienced by that birthing woman (Suzuki 1997: 46−48). They gave the expectant mother toast, buckwheat gruel, mutton, meat soup, and freshly laid eggs to keep up her strength, and provided herbal tea or cordial to alleviate pain before the "true time of birth." After the birth of a child, women often celebrated by partaking of nice food and drink, such as "groaning cake" and "groaning beer" available to visitors and attendants (Scholten 1977: 433; Wertz and Wertz 1989: 1−28)[6]. Since midwives rarely emigrated from Europe to the New World, for women, including ministers' wives, it was important to learn how to help one another especially in times of birth by combining their knowledge and hospitality in the United States (Ulrich 1990, 2001).

Although Thomson considered it most appropriate to conduct medical treatment and childbirth at home supported by the mutual aid and hospitality of lay people, such practices became uncommon with the coming of the new age. As more regular doctors known as "man-midwives" began to treat childbirth (Channing

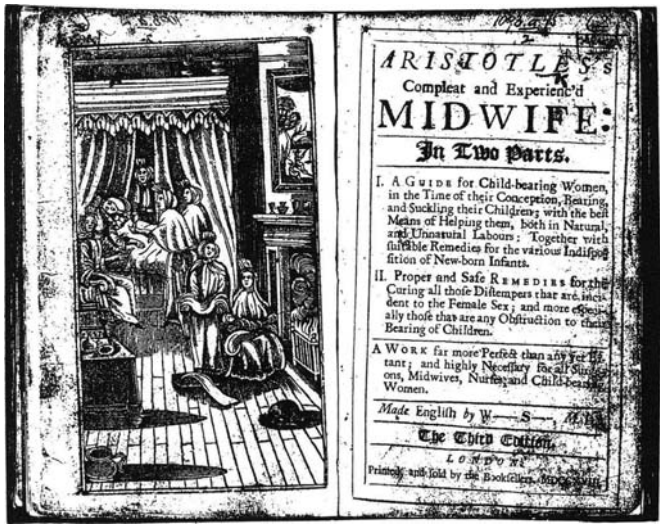


Figure 4 A Birthing room illustrated in a manual of childbirth used since 18th century America (Aristotle (pseud.) *Aristotle's Compleat* (sic.) *and Experienc'd Midwife: In Two Parts*, Made English by W- S-, M.D., The Third Edition, London, 1718 bound with *Aristotle's Master Piece*, 1710).

1820: 20–21) especially of middle class women, "social childbirth" gradually changed from a virtual help exclusively from women to just a formal visit after successful childbirth (Scholten 1977: 444–445). In that situation, women who could not afford to have a male medical doctor come to the house had to go to a hospital. Thomson also reported on his experiences of witnessing the tradition of mutual assistance before and after birth became symbolic describing women's new custom of visiting after the child was swaddled to wish the mother well (Thomson 1835: 178).

Finding that the assistance of a midwife and women were not always available and women might fear giving a hand, Thomson decided to learn to assist his wife in childbirth to avoid regular doctors. He included precise instructions in his 1835 edition of his self-help manual for treatment, *New Guide to Health*, based on his experience of husband and wife performing childbirth as "home-birthing" (Thomson 1835: 156–180)[7].". Thomson taught the husbands that the best thing they could give birthing wives was good food and drink, the same thing as when treating diseases of their family and themselves. For instance, a cup of tea made with tansy or mugwort and raspberry leaves mixed with ginger would warm the body of women and strengthen nature's power during pregnancy. He explained that the herbal tea worked in both directions; it would alleviate pain if the true time of birth had not yet arrived, while if the baby was ready to come out, the tea would help to speed up the birth.

Now that Thomson understood people could not rely on experienced women and everyday practical assistance from neighbors, he proposed the formation of herbal friends' associations, "Friendly Botanic Society," with the members helping one another out by studying his manual (Thomson 1815).

2.4 Home as the Place for Cooking and Healing

Thomson emphasized the importance of the home as the location where lay people could help each other to treat and cure as mutual cooperation with their hospitality; he also pointed out the importance of the home as the base for everyone to have and to learn to have good food for health in everyday family life. He recommended people accept medicine from the hands of women who had made bread, butter, and cheese at home by hand (Thomson 1839: 137). Thomson considered herbal treatments to be the same as "cooking" in everyday life (Thomson 1839: 137; 1835: 8–9, 13, 166–167). He insisted that the healing arts should be conducted in the kitchen as "colleges" and women as the "teachers" (Thomson 1839: 137). Thomson was concerned that people who lost the tradition of self-help would forget this mindset for themselves. He warned that the professionalization of life in all areas — not just medicine — including politics and religion would certainly take away the ability of people to decide for themselves their own way of life. Thus Thomson strongly recommended a way of life in which

care was conducted on a self-help basis, just as it had been done in colonial America.

Thomson's claim that reserving autonomy by caring for oneself in everyday life was the foundation of freedom resonated with the philosophy of many early Americans, especially Jeffersonians. In the early 19th century, Thomsonianism enjoyed enthusiastic support from people who valued living in the "country of the free" (Kett 1968: 110−111).

However, people's lifestyles and relationships surrounding healing and childbirth were in the process of change. In an age in which more people lived in urban settings and required care given by medical professionals, Thomson's insistence on tending to the traditions of self-help and mutual assistance with the home as the base was found to be an anachronism.

A late-period Thomsonian, Thomas Hershey, presented a new childbirth manual in 1836 (Hersey 1836). He claimed that some capable women ought to become specialists in childbirth by being given formal education. Meanwhile, Alva Curtis (1797−1881) began to develop the so-called eclectics that combined the best of botanical treatments and the methods of regular doctors. Hersey and Curtis established medical schools, which Thomson had not approved. They also placed power in the sale of medicinal herbs. As Thomson noted, large patches of marsh rosemary from which he had easily gathered herbs began to disappear (Thomson 1822: 141). Botanical treatment lost its characteristic of being an alternative medicine movement in the change of the environment and people's relationship with natural herbs[8)].

Thomsonianism, the only US-born popular health movement, began to lose its popularity in the latter half of the 19th century. Other sectarian movements, such as homeopathy, hydropathy, and eclectics gradually got people's attention. Homeopathy, a German alternative medicine movement not only advocated the power of nature, but also gave precise explanation for the policies of their treatment, such as a small amount of medicines similar to the materials that would cause people disease would cure the same disease, and a smaller amount of medicines shaken well to activate them would work better in curing the disease. While homeopathy valued time for dialogue shared by the practitioner and patient, it also emphasized that practitioners should have sufficient education and knowledge in order to fully understand the theories of homeopathy and be specialized in preparing drugs. Eclectics, the combination of herbal drugs as well as the theory of regular medicine, also claimed that practitioners should have good knowledge and education of medicine, and Austrian hydropathy, the water-cure treatment, that valued self-help of ordinary people also emphasized the lifelong learning of people in order to aquire health. Every alternative movement that flourished in the latter half of the 19th century recommended people to acquire specialized knowledge of

body and soul hopefully by education at school or other institutions, and not be limited by the knowledge that "common man" could have by leading his daily life on the premises of autonomy and self-help alone. In the process, the Thomsonian movement that had sought a renaissance of American traditions gave way to other movements. In the next section, I investigate the meaning of health and autonomy sought by hydropathy. Like Thomsonianism, hydropathy also concerned the deterioration of the natural power of the body in the process of industrialization and urbanization, but it advocated other methods of self-help for people who sought better health in a rapidly changing environment.

3 Diet as a Health Reform in Hydropathy

3.1 Alternative Medicine Led by Regular Doctors

Hydropathy started in the mid–19th century. It was considered to be one of the alternative medicines, but was introduced to the United States in the 1840s by physicians who had studied orthodox medicine. The doctors, Joel Shew (1816–55) and Russell Thatcher Trall (1812–77) decided they could not rely on the orthodox medicine they had first learned and explored methods that they could practice in search of health.

Shew was born in Providence, Saratoga County, New York, and later moved to Philadelphia to work. There he worked in a daguerreotype shop for fifteen years and became sick with the chemicals he used in his work. He decided to study medicine himself. In 1840, he entered medical school and graduated with an MD degree in 1843. He heard of the water-cure practiced by Vincenz Priessnitz (1799–1851) in Gräfenberg, Austrian Silesia. Shew went to Gräfenberg to study this method and brought the Priessnitz system back to the United States.

Previously, Priessnitz was a farmer. While farming, he always treated his injuries and disorders as well as those of his animals by simply applying water inwardly and outwardly. He seriously injured his ribs in the 1810s and his doctor had given up on finding a cure for it. However Priessnitz continued to apply cold water to the injury and finally he succeeded in healing it. He began to treat his neighbors. Firstly, his treatment became locally known and gradually, he served people of high status, including the emperor's brother, Anton Victor. Priessnitz modified his father's house into a sanatorium, and finally, he founded a water-cure practice in Gräfenberg known as the Water University (Cayleff 1987: 21; Donegan 1986: 19; Whorton 2002: 78–81).

After studying Priessnitz's treatment at Gräfenberg, Shew returned to the United States to open a water-cure infirmary in New York City in 1844. This was the first hydropathic institution in the US. In 1854, Shew published *The Hydropathic Family Physician* to teach ordinary people how to treat themselves with the water-

cure method (Shew 1854). He also served as editor of the *Water-Cure Journal* (*WCJ*), the main journal of hydropathy. That journal published not only the teachings of the leaders of hydropathy, but also questions and experiences of subscribers as well. At its peak in the 1850s, *WCJ* claimed to have had more than 100,000 subscribers (Cayleff 1987: 3)[9].

Russell Trall came from New England to live in New York. Partly because he had suffered poor health, he began to study medicine. He graduated from Albany Medical College in 1835 with an MD degree (Donegan 1986: 24). Although firstly, he practiced the regular medicine of his day, he was not satisfied with the treatment known as "heroic therapies," the violent application of bloodletting and purgatives. Finally he decided to abandon the drug system and began to explore medical art that had an aspect of preventive treatments useful for improving people's physical condition. As a preventive medicine, he paid much attention to diet and opened the New York Hydropathic and Physiological School in 1853. This school was a co-educational school, an exceptional concept at that time. In 1849, Trall succeeded Shew as editor of the *WCJ*, and in 1850, Trall organized the American Vegetarian Society and became its vice president.

3.2 New Lifestyles to Prevent the Weakening of Body and Soul

As with Thomsonianism, leaders of hydropathy regarded the intervention with heroic therapies of regular doctors as harmful. But they were also concerned with the undesirable effects induced by the changes of people's lifestyles in the 19th century. They especially focused on people's diets as a way to deal with those problems related to lifestyles, because they thought people had more nervous disorders because they enjoyed more luxurious eating habits. Since hydropathists particularly worried about the weakening of women's health, they sought to devise effective plans.

Previous researches have mainly focused on hydropathy's perspective on women's activities, because hydropathy made efforts in educating and supporting women healers that was unique among other medical fields in those days (Cayleff 1987; Donegan 1986). Despite hydropathy's particular interest in a vegetarian diet (Suzuki 2010), insufficient attention has been paid to its contents and meanings. In this paper, I focus on the discourse regarding diet including vegetarianism to clarify the concerns of hydropathists as health reformers and the prescriptions they devised to help people create a healthy body autonomously, compared to those of Thomsonianism.

Just as in Thomsonianism, leaders of hydropathy also considered the frequent incidents that led to women having difficulties during childbirth. Shew was especially interested in applying the water-cure for birthing women, because he found many difficult cases of childbirth in the era including that of his wife, Marie

Shew. Along with Marie, who had suffered difficulties in childbirth under the assistance of regular doctors, his goal was to find a good way for women to gain the physical power to avoid the need for the service of regular doctors (Shew 1854: iii–iv, 95–102).

On the other hand, Shew also worried about the changes in the environment and lifestyles of people that were having a detrimental effect on people both mentally and physically. He studied extensively about various lifestyles and health of people around the world and was convinced of the difficulty in finding perfect health in a civilized country.

> It is a sad reflection upon civilization to assert, that the more cultivated and refined man has become thus far in the world, the more sickly and diseased he is found to be. (Shew 1854: 20)

Shew considered the causes of mental illnesses that were often found in 19th century America, such as hysteria, convulsions, epilepsy, chorea, trance, and ecstasy. He investigated information about different types of living conditions in rural areas and assumed:

> In regard to the health of the different races, we find a vast difference in different parts of the world. In the same race also, varying according to a multitude of circumstances, the health of nations is found to differ in almost indefinite degree, according to the dietetic and other voluntary habits of the people. (Shew 1854: 20)

Shew thought that convulsions occurred more frequently in large and crowded towns and cities than in rural areas. He found that people in Poland and Russia that ate simple dishes consisting of mainly vegetables and potatoes and worked in cold climates had better health than Americans living in large cities. He noticed as well that "red men" (i.e., American Indians) did not suffer from gout and rheumatism until they began to enjoy rum introduced from Europe (Shew 1854: 20–21). He further observed that farmers were healthier than businessman working in the city even in the United States. He firmly believed that working outside in the fresh air depends on the weather, and deciding each day what type of work to do were important factors for mental health.

By this, hydropathy differed from Thomsonian herbalism in that it did not seek to revive traditional healing. Although leaders of hydropathy were trained as regular doctors, they did not think it sufficient to just give people prescriptions; rather they aimed to find a way toward health reform when the power of the body and soul was perceived to be in critical decline. A hydropathist even insisted on the need to create an entirely new "second nature" for each individual to attain a whole body that would not need care by a doctor and to survive during a time of

great transformation[10].

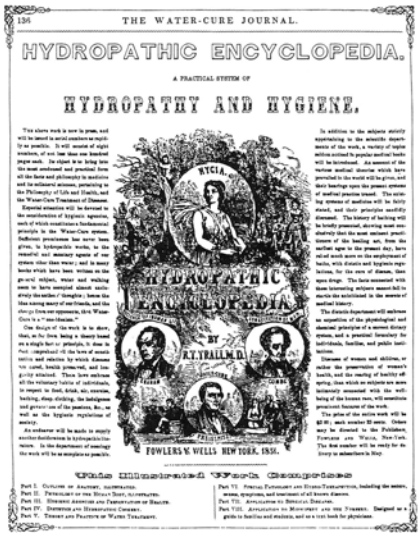
However, the reason that hydropathy aimed at building a "healthy" and "perfect" body in a period of rapid industrialization was not just drawn from the worries of the deterioration of people's health. For hydropathists, health was a testament of development. Trall stated his belief in health and development as follows.

> [e]very organized being is beautiful in its perfect development, and health is the sole condition of such development.[11]

The aim of hydropathy was presented as one to make people's health "perfect"[12].

In order to plan the road to health, Trall disclosed his idea that they would rely on three distinguished fields of scientific knowledge about human physiology of the era (Figure 5). The first one was of course the water cure originated by Priessnitz and sophisticated in America by hydropaths. In order to perform the water-cure effectively, various issues regarding human physiology were investigated and presented in the journal of hydropathy, *WCJ* (Figure 6).

The second field was "vegetarianism," proposed mainly by Sylvester Graham (1794–1851), who was active in educating people who were interested in vegetarianism and water cure. Graham had been a Presbyterian minister, suffered from a nervous disease in his youth and studied medicine in Philadelphia. Graham sought ways to good health and found that the human body became too excited from eating meat and assumed that this state could lead to various nervous


136 THE WATER-CURE JOURNAL.

HYDROPATHIC ENCYCLOPEDIA.

A PRACTICAL SYSTEM OF

HYDROPATHY AND HYGIENE.

HYGIEIA.

HYDROPATHIC ENCYCLOPEDIA

BY R.T.TRALL,M.D.

FOWLERS & WELLS NEW YORK, 1851.

Figure 5 Three distinguished fields of scientific knowledge of hydropahy (*WCJ*, 1851, p.136).

THE WATER-CURE JOURNAL.

The American and French Fashions Contrasted.

Figure 6 An article of *WCJ* explaining appropriate dress for the health of American women without corset (*WCJ*, Vol. 12, No 4, 1851, p. 84).

problems. He studied vegetarianism and presented "Grahamism," a diet method refined by Graham. The well known recipe for health, Graham bread, appeared in *The New Hydropathic Cookbook* (New York, 1855). "Grahamism" was taught and practiced in many water-cure institutions.

The third field was phrenology. This was originated by Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828) in Austria and further developed by George Combe (1788–1858) in Edinburgh. Trall, Shew and the Fowler brothers who had enthusiastically published journals and books on hydropathy were extremely interested in phrenology (Walters 1997: 162–163). They believed that they could see people's development phase and potential from outside scientifically (Figure 7). First of all, Trall and Shew related race as well as a classification of temperaments to phrenology. Trall assumed that the "nervous temperament" corresponds to the development of the brain and nervous system, and concluded that people who had a highly developed brain had a high risk of acquiring a nervous disease (Trall 1851: 287–288) (Figure 8). Hydropathists convinced of the superiority and the leadership of this "race," while worrying about the weakness of the nerves, they began to try to teach their followers how to live well.

3.3 Eating Habit as a Foundation of Reforms toward Well-Being

Hydropathists focused on promoting health rather than curing diseases. They presented various preventive methods called "preparatory treatment" (Nichols 1850: 190). This consisted of a regimen of a large intake of water, "proper"

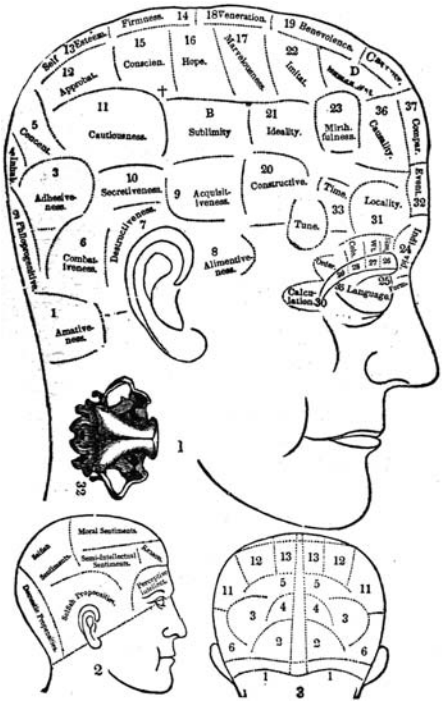
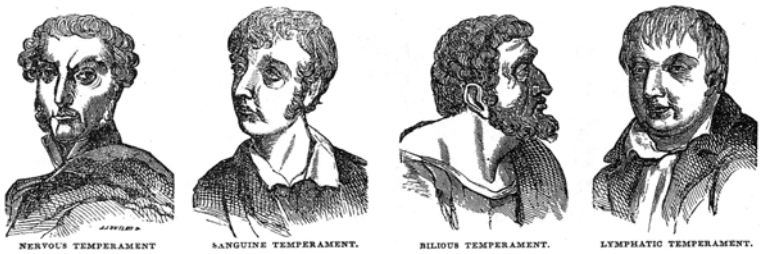


Figure 7 A map of phrenology drawn by Fowler, an editor of the *WCJ*, based on the writings of George Combe, a phrenologist of Britain (O. S. Fowler, *Fowler's Practical Phrenology*. Tenth Edition, Enlarged and Improved. New York: Wholesale and Retail, by O. S. and L. N. Fowler,1844.)



nervous sanguine bilious lymphatic

Figure 8 Temperament and phrenology presented in R. T. Trall's *The Hydropathic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1851.

vegetarian diet, various forms of exercise, and sleep. Regularity was considered especially important. "Rain baths" were strongly recommended for city people to allow them to obtain the power of "nature." These were performed by simply taking a walk in the rain without carrying an umbrella. Such conduct was considered to be an opportunity for people to reform their lifestyle.

For eating habits, attention was skewed in particular, because food was

considered to be deeply related to nervous disorders. However, the purpose of diet reform was not limited to the elimination of neurosis, but was expected to work as the "cornerstone" of all other reforms (Trall n.d.: 15). Hydropathy was most interested in vegetarianism as an effective means of diet reform. Health reformers including many hydropathists established the American Vegetarian Society[13)]. People not only interested in diet reform, but also in the issues of the era such as clean living, temperance, dress reform, and abolition of slavery attended the meetings organized by the Vegetarian Society. A physician and mayor of Oberlin, Ohio, Isaac Jennings (1788–1874) was an active member of the American Vegetarian Society. He described vegetarianism as a "universal reform," because he believed that paying attention to diet must lead to reviewing life in general and the result of efforts toward good diet was easy to understand and rewarding (Jennings 1847: xiii).

Religious people called "Bible Christians" also joined the society. "Bible Christians" who were members of the Bible Christian Church, a Methodist denomination were known to have led the vegetarian movement in England. William Cowherd (1763–1816), a religious reformer from Manchester worked as a leader of the movement. The minister William Metcalfe (1788–1862) brought the teachings to America in 1817. Metcalfe was deeply interested in the relation between eating habits and the mind, and published *Abstinence from the Flesh of Animals* in 1821. He also founded the Bible Christian Vegetarian Society in 1823. After 1830, Sylvester Graham served as lecturer to the society (Spencer 2000: 255–256).

In 1860, The following statement was included as one of the resolutions at the eleventh annual meeting of the American Vegetarian Society, held at a Bible Christian Church in Philadelphia: "That the object of all true and successful reform should be to make men healthier, wiser, better, and happier" (Trall n.d.: 15).

3.4 Learning Health Reform through Cooking Good Food and Eating at Home

Hydropathy considered that bad food was not only limited to meat. Spices such as salt, pepper, and mustard were also considered bad and had to be eliminated. Those items were considered bad because they could make meat taste better thus increasing people's appetite for it and also meant the luxuries being newly introduced into America such as Worcestershire sauce. Cakes, coffee, or tea were also bad for the same reason. Isaac Jennings, a physician and active member of the American Vegetarian Society, also warned: because "[T]he action of tea and coffee is primarily upon the brain and nerves, affecting directly the sensibility" so "slaves to the teapot" often suffer from periodic headaches (Jennings 1847: 183–185). New luxuries that had changed American eating habits since the 18th century were

condemned as a cause of weakness in people's health.

Even bread was a target for investigation by hydropathy. In those days, more bread was commercially produced from white flour and readily available at groceries and bakeries. Such bread was often made with shortening and other ingredients to make it more delicious (Graham 1837: 26). Hydropathists believed that good quality bread for health should be made from whole wheat instead of refined white flour. In the chapter on "Hydropathic Cookery" in his encyclopedia for health, Trall gave a precise explanation on the ideal bread type.

> Unquestionably the best bread is that made of coarse-ground, unbolted meal, mixed with pure water, and baked in any convenient way. . . . The inhabitants of new countries where flouring-mills are not to be found . . . have a sweet and wholesome article when they do not spoil it with grease, or shortening. Many of the New England housewifes[sic.] formerly had a method of making bread without raising or fermentation of any kind. (Trall 1851: 423)

Some vegetarians even declared that whole wheat worked like a medicine as was evidenced by well-known Graham bread (Graham 1837: 87–102) to refresh the brain and nerves. Trall was proud of the food history of America whereby "the inhabitants of new countries" could eat "a sweet and wholesome article when they did not spoil it," and recommended people to enjoy the abundance of good food received from the American land. He reminded people of the "New England custom," the simple way of making the best bread, without additives such as yeast and sugar, and hoped that the custom would be passed down from mother to daughter (Trall 1851: 423). Trall even warned people not to rely on stores or to visit luxury hotels that readily provided people with delicious bread that included ingredients such as shortening.

> The fine Indian meal often found at groceries and provision stores does not make good bread or cake. . . . At ordinary hotels and boarding-houses . . . nearly all the farinaceous parts of the food are brought from the baker's shop, or prepared according to the recipes of "French" and "domestic" cook-books, which teach little else than the art of compounding dishes so as to produce the greatest possible amount of disease in the human body. (Trall 1851: 419, 424)

Trall insisted that people learn how to make bread using only good material at home for health. "French" and "domestic" cookbooks that became popular were denounced because this would only teach people how to make delicious bread containing fat that would cause disease. Several manuals were provided for people who were eager to learn how to cook good food for the body.

Many people sympathized with the hydropathy movement, believing in the reform of society and people (Engs 2000: 95–98). Catherine Esther Beecher (1800–1878) was among those reformers. She believed that the reform should be started

by the power of women and founded an academy especially for women to study physical and moral development. Catherine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe explained in their domestic-advice manual, *American Woman's Home* (1869), that since the body and soul were in close contact, both should be given much attention (Beecher and Stowe 1869: 255–262). They insisted that women should play an important role in "domestic reform" by learning the "scientific way" of cooking and home management so as to create a healthy and happy family that served as a starting point for the reform of society as a whole. In the chapter on "Healthful Food," they wrote about the responsibilities of mothers and wives. The person who decides what shall be the food and drink of a family, and the modes of its preparation, is the one who decides, to a greater or less extent, what shall be the health of that family (Beecher and Stowe 1869: 119).

Dr. William Androus Alcott (1798–1859), a cousin of an educational reformer Bronson Alcott, also eagerly suggested that people focus on health management so as to lead a happy family life. He received his MD from the Yale Medical College, and was keen to advance health and education reform at the same time. He served as the first president of the American Physiological Society founded in 1837 by reformers in Boston inspired by Graham's ideas of vegetarianism (Sack 2001: 189; Walters 1997: 155). He too, considering that reform would start from scientific home management, gave advice in a chapter entitled "Domestic Reform" in his manual for women on how to avoid luxurious food such as coffee, alcohol, or spices, and instead to make simple and healthy meals following appropriate cooking manuals such as Graham's *Bread and Bread-Making*, for example. In a chapter on "Love of Home," Alcott further suggested people should not rely on servants, because they did not always share the mindset of health reform (Alcott 1837: 179–191). Alcott shared the idea of the Beecher sisters that home works best for people cultivate good habits toward a happy and healthy life, starting with a good diet. Alcott said that "the first school" should be conducted at home. Alcott began another advice book for men, husbands and fathers with an illustration entitled, "There is no school like the family school" (Figure 9).

Shew also hoped that the water-cure facilities would work as the "home" (Shew 1854: 805–806). "Home" was a hot topic in the 1830s and 1840s among the white middle-class population. The era had often been referred to as the age of the "empire of the mother"[14]. In the rapidly changing environment under urbanization and industrialization, much attention was paid to the role of women as housewives in the care and education of the family in order to protect and enhance the well-being of society as a whole. Hydropathists, or health reformers hoped that "home" would serve as a "school" where all people could spend a sufficient amount of time to reconsider their way of life and learn the way of living in order to be ready to survive changes of the new era, while being provided with all the necessary

Figure 9 A picture of family life as a school presented by W. M. Alcott in his manual *The Young Husband, or Duties of Man in the Marriage Relation*. Boston: George W. Light, 1841.

information and practical help.

4 Conclusion

During a period when the world of medicine changed drastically in antebellum United States, two sectarian movements led by irregular healers proposed their methods of health treatment. Both sectarian movements were opposed to the medicine of newly introduced regular doctors and midwifery, but their attitudes toward the natural state of the human body and their method of restoring health as self-help were quite different. While Thomsonianism (botanical movement) believed in the power of nature of the human body, and asked people to learn to assist and draw on the power of nature, hydropathy (water-cure movement) could no longer rely on the power of "nature," and especially encouraged women to create a new "second nature" to perform their childbirth, defined as a "healthy event." In spite of this difference, in both movements, caring for oneself was considered to be important and the road to achieving self-fashioning was shown by the taking of food in everyday life.

Samuel Thomson, the leader of Thomsonianism, formally a pioneering farmer reminded people of the traditional lifestyle in which people sought ways to heal themselves. Thomson regarded healing practice as having the same meaning as politics and religion. He was convinced that unless people made efforts in the conduct of healing, politics and religion by themselves, they would lose the chance to create the space in which they would want to lead their life. Thomson's world

of healing was conducted by practitioners who were familiar with the constitution, or natural state of a patient and with the herbs obtained from the land where both patient and practitioner lived. It was supported by the spirit of hospitality and intimacy, in which the treatment-giver helps to restore the natural power of a sick person by staying with them patiently in front of the fireplace at home.

Even in an age of medical specialization, when the people's herbal doctor and midwife were disappearing from their respective areas, Thomson encouraged everyone to become their own physician, one way of being able to conduct self-help. He showed how people could cure themselves by themselves including the proposal whereby a husband helped his wife in the event that they were unable to find capable women accustomed to helping with childbirth. It was based on the same act as raising crops and making food by oneself associated with the life in which immigrants and people worked out their own lives.

However, Thomson himself found that it became harder to obtain abundant medicinal herbs in a changing urban environment. Late-term Thomsonians changed their method of producing and selling proprietary medicines and established infirmaries and schools for professionalization of which Thomson did not approve. As people's relationships to medical practice had changed, it became impractical to ask a practitioner and patient to stay together for a long period of time.

Hydropathy that was active in the mid 19th century was deeply concerned about people losing their power of nature in the change of lifestyle produced in the midst of urbanization and industrialization. Hydropathists hoped that people would create a strong body and soul that required no treatment from regular doctors.

They were also convinced that people would attain perfect health as evidence of successful development in order to survive in the new environment of a changing society. They diligently studied the new fields of the science of the day, phrenology and vegetarianism in addition to water-cure to create effective preventive treatment. Hydropathists learned from that scientific knowledge that people blessed with a good brain are susceptible to nervous disease and the major cause of nervous disease lay in one's eating habits.

Thus hydropathists made efforts to give practical advice to people on how and what to eat: (1) giving up eating meat, drinking alcohol, which had been popular in the United States; (2) refraining from eating delicious foods that were newly introduced such as white bread, meat with seasonings; and (3) avoiding contaminated foods and unhealthy additives at stores.. Other people such as educators and religious leaders were interested in diet reform because they saw it as a reform of lifestyle customs that led to a reform of society as a whole. In order to achieve success in diet reform as a base of every reform, the home regarded work as a base, a family school, and mothers and wives were expected to play an important role as the main organizers and teachers at home. Reform of the lifestyle presented by

hydropathy created an exclusive association of people who were ready to learn how to live in the changing society.

Both movements had a common objective: namely to assist ordinary people to reconsider their way of life on the basis of investigating the power of nature of humans and become autonomous self-fashioning subjects during a transitional period of medical practice.

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Notes

1) I have made a comparative examination of the perspectives of Thomsonianism and hydropathy in relation to birthing practices. See Suzuki 1997: 167–177.
2) The gradual organization of the U.S. postal system also made it easier for his books to be distributed widely (Cassedy 1977: 45–46).
3) *Lobelia inflata* (Indian tobacco, wild tobacco), often called "emetic herb" was one of the few native plants that were popular in early American Medicine (Numbers ed. 1987: 141).
4) Catharine L. Albanese discusses the spiritual aspects of yearning for nature in her book, *Nature Religion in America* (1990).
5) A previous research reported that more doctors began to describe the condition of their patients as normal compared to average by measurement instead of as natural in view of their usual state (Warner 1986: 85–91). Thomson's claim that practitioners should know their patients better might resonate with this change of diagnosis partly based on the relationship between practitioner and patient.
6) Researchers have called the American traditional childbirth practices "social childbirth."
7) Thomson pointed out that it became hard to find a midwife as well as women who were not afraid of attending a birth rather than just visiting a mother after she gave birth.
8) Thomson also pointed out the contamination of meat and water as a result of urbanization, which he observed on a trip to New York City.
9) Many hydropathy-related journals were published in the United States from 1845–1913 (Cayleff 1987: 236). Thirty-four volumes of the *Water-Cure Journal* (hereafter cited as WCJ) were published between 1845 and 1862, including: *Water-Cure Journal* (Dec. 1845–Apr. 1848), *Water-Cure Journal and Herald of Reforms* (May 1848–Dec. 1858), *Water-Cure Journal and Herald of Health* (Jan. 1859–June 1861), *Water-Cure Journal: A Guide to Health* (July 1861–June 1862), *Hygienic Teacher and Water-Cure Journal*

(July–Dec. 1862). During this period, hydropathy was carried out actively as an alternative treatment by doctors who had been trained in regular medical schools but were dissatisfied with the harmful side effects of some common treatments.

10) Thomas Nichols, "Practice in Water-Cure," *WCJ* 10, 1850, p. 189.
11) Russell Thatcher Trall, "The Natural State of Man," *WCJ* 12, 1851, p. 25.
12) See, for example, Mary Nichols, "Maternity: and the Water-Cure for Infants," *WCJ* 11, 1851, pp. 57–59.
13) About a meeting of the American Vegetarian Society, see, for example, William A. Alcott, "American Vegetarian Society," *WCJ* 10 (1850), p. 6: In 1849 a public meeting of the newly formed American Vegetarian Society was held in Philadelphia: "President: Dr. Wm. A. Alcott of Massachusetts; Vice-Presidents: Dr. R. D. Mussey of Ohio, Sylvester Graham of Mass., P. P. Steward of Troy, N. Y., H. H. Hite of Va., Dr. Prince of Missouri, Joseph Wright of New Jersey, Dr. Joel Shew of New York, Wm. C. Chapin of Rhode Island, Joseph Metcalfe of Pennsylvania; Recording Secretary: Dr. R. T. Trall of New York; Corresponding Secretary: Rev. Wm. Metcalfe of Kensington, Philadelphia; Treasurer: S. R. Wells, of New York."
14) A discussion of domesticity and women's roles can be found in Mary Ryan's *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830–1860*, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985.

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