

Edward Eggleston: Evolution of a Historian

Thorp L. Wolford*

In 1837, near the beginning of his career, Emerson greeted the young scholars of Harvard at the commencement of their literary year with a stirring appeal for a new kind of scholarship, devoid of complacency and pedantry. He stated that literature was beginning to concern itself with "the philosophy of the street" and "the meaning of household life," and he called this development one of the "auspicious signs of the coming days."¹

That same year, a thousand miles away in the Indiana village of Vevay, Edward Eggleston was born. Destiny was to lead him to a day near the end of his career when he would greet the eminent scholars of the American Historical Association at the commencement of a new century with a plea for the writing of a "New History." It would be free of outmoded traditions and would concern itself with "the little details of life" which, according to Eggleston, gave history its true vitality and significance. He, like Emerson in 1837, saw auspicious signs in 1900 of better days to come.²

Eggleston's achievements could not have been foreseen in 1837, but his emergence from boyhood both on and near the frontier to prominence as a pioneer scholar in cultural history was a natural evolution. Recalling his origins from the vantage point of later years, Eggleston noted that he had begun life in an intellectual atmosphere. His father graduated from William and Mary College with very high honors before he died in 1846, and he exerted a strong influence on his son. Edward's mother, a child prodigy, was said

* Thorp L. Wolford is lecturer in English at University College, University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," *The Complete Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York, 1929), 34-35.

² Edward Eggleston, "The New History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the year 1900* (2 vols., Washington, 1901), I, 38, 47. Eggleston read Emerson from childhood, and there were significant parallels in the thoughts and careers of the two men. See James A. Rawley, "Some New Light on Edward Eggleston," *American Literature*, XI (January, 1940), 456, and Harlan DeBaun Logan, "An Unpublished Journal of Edward Eggleston's with Supplementary Letters" (M.A. thesis, Dept. of History, Indiana University, 1932), 97, 100.

to have read *Pilgrim's Progress* before she was four years old. All four of their children were novelists; Edward and his brother, George Cary, also became journalists and historians.³

Although Eggleston disclaimed the credit of being a self-made man, he was largely self-educated. His total school attendance after the age of ten was only eighteen months.⁴ Nevertheless, he acquired the kind of education which served him well in future years when he turned his major attention to social history. Before he was twenty-five, he dabbled in six or seven languages; and five years before his death he told a reporter that he read French, Italian, Spanish, and usually Latin without a dictionary and three other languages with the aid of one. "Dutch," he said, "I have taken up in the last year or two."⁵ The habits and intellectual curiosity of youth continued throughout his life.

He never forgot the disappointment he experienced when ill health prevented his attending Indiana Asbury University (now DePauw), but the years brought an awareness of compensating factors. "Something, no doubt, I lost;" he wrote in 1890, "but I am not sure that the gain did not more than compensate for it."⁶ He recalled the habit of independent study which he had acquired. As a youth he read English drama, Racine, Molière, and Corneille, although religious scruples kept him from reading novels or seeing plays performed at that time. Sometimes he rose at four to read Virgil or Xenophon. Other reading included Gray's "Elegy," which was a favorite of his childhood; Irving's *Sketch Book*, which awakened all his impulses to a literary life; Lamb's *Works*, which provided an antidote to the priggery found in certain other moralistic reading; and the *Aeneid* and *Paradise*

³ Edward Eggleston, "Formative Influences," *The Forum*, X (November, 1890), 280-82. The romantic novels of George Cary Eggleston offer an interesting contrast to Edward's regional realism. Jennie, as Edward's sister Jane Lowry was commonly called, published a temperance novel, *Gray Heads on Green Shoulders*; but Joe, another brother, never found a publisher for his novel, *Carry Me Back*. William Randel, *Edward Eggleston* (New York, 1963), 21.

⁴ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 280, 283.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 283. "Edward Eggleston: An Interview," *The Outlook*, LV (February 6, 1897), 435.

⁶ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 283.



EDWARD EGGLESTON'S BIRTHPLACE, VEVAY, INDIANA

Reproduced from John Drury, *Historic Midwest Houses* (Minneapolis, 1947).

Lost.⁷ This breadth of interest revealed a spirit that would transcend the narrow confines of frontier Methodism and reject the limitations of traditional American historiography.

Eggleston witnessed varied aspects of the life of southern Indiana while it was still a young state. Singing schools, lyceums, camp meetings, barbecues, fairs, and circuses were frequent forms of entertainment in the Indiana of his boyhood. He later drew heavily upon his memory of these events to provide background for his fiction and comparisons with colonial life in his historical studies.⁸ In Vevay, where he spent his earliest years, he observed a pioneer society in which both French and English were still commonly spoken. In Decatur County, where his family spent the summer of 1850 with relatives, he found a more primitive life. There he first heard the back-country Hoosier dialect, which he subsequently preserved in *The Hoosier School-Master*, and acquired an interest in philology, which led to his friendship with Lowell and such historical studies as "Folk-Speech in America."⁹ Madison and New Albany, where the family lived briefly in the early 1850's, were larger than Vevay and represented a more advanced society.

Although Eggleston spent most of his later years in the East, in 1890 he declared that he retained "enough of local prejudice to feel that I should have lost more than I could have gained, had I been born near Plymouth Rock or on Beacon Hill." In fact, when his Vevay teacher said she graded

⁷ *Ibid.*, 283-84; Edward Eggleston, "Books That Have Helped Me," *The Forum*, III (August, 1887), 579, 582-83. Even in his days of greatest religious dedication his thoughts expanded into other realms. Years later he recalled a day when, riding his circuit, he alternately read Milton's "L'Allegro" and looked off "at the poetic landscape" until he "was lifted out of the sordid world into the region of imagination and creation." *Ibid.*, 584. He named his next child Allegra.

⁸ See Logan Esarey, "Elements of Culture in the Old Northwest," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LIII (September, 1957), 257-64.

⁹ See Edward Eggleston, "Folk-Speech in America," *The Century Magazine*, XLVIII (October, 1894), 867-75, and Edward Eggleston, "Preface to the Library Edition," *The Hoosier School-Master: A Novel* (Revised, with an introduction and notes on the dialect, Chicago, 1892), 5-27. [Referred to hereafter as Library Edition to distinguish it from Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master: A Novel* (New York, 1871).] Other novels by Edward Eggleston referred to in this article are *The End of the World: A Love Story* (New York, 1872); *The Mystery of Metropolisville* (New York, 1873); *The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age* (New York, 1874); *Roxy* (New York, 1878); *The Hoosier School-Boy* (New York, 1883); *The Graysons: A Story of Illinois* (New York, 1888); and *The Faith Doctor: A Story of New York* (New York, 1891).

his composition severely because he was "destined to become an author," Eggleston confessed, "I was as happy as though I had achieved more fame than will ever fall to my lot."¹⁰

In 1854 a still different type of society made its impression on Eggleston when he went to Amelia in tidewater Virginia to live with his father's relatives. Despite their generous hospitality, he declined to remain more than thirteen months and to accept the further social and educational advantages which were offered. He was uncomfortable in a society dependent upon slavery and offensive to his religious ardor. Although this experience did not alter his aversion to slavery, it gave him a basis for understanding the dilemma of the South in the Civil War era. While acknowledging the loveable quality of the Virginians he had visited, he said in retrospect:

Though I saw slavery in its mildest form among my relations, I could not be blind to the essential and manifold injustices and the unavoidable cruelties of the system. From the time of my visit to Virginia, I counted myself an abolitionist. But I always resented the abusive terms in which the more violent abolitionists were wont to speak of the southern people. I very much doubt whether history will not conclude that a more moderate style of speech on the part of the anti-slavery men would have much better served their cause.¹¹

Edward returned to Indiana in 1855, but his health soon deteriorated. In May of 1856, at the age of eighteen, he persuaded his mother to let him go alone to Minnesota Territory, which was then reputed to have a beneficial climate. There he saw frontier life in the most primitive stage he had yet encountered. He became a part of this life, carrying the chain for a surveying party and driving a triple yoke of oxen with a plow breaking new ground. After two or three months in Minnesota he returned to Indiana with restored health, walking nearly four hundred miles of the distance. He arrived home penniless and exhausted, but he had added another chapter to his observation of life in the United States.¹²

Both the satisfactions and the hardships Eggleston experienced in his early years prepared him to understand and interpret life as novelist and historian. When his novels about the interior valley began to win attention in the 1870's, Eggleston acknowledged, "I was only drawing on the resources

¹⁰ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 279, 283.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹² *Ibid.*, 288-89.

which the very peculiar circumstances of my life had put at my disposal."¹³

Eggleston naturally turned to the ministry as his first major vocation. He was reared in a Methodist home in a community where Methodists observed the Sabbath with a severity reminiscent of that of the Puritans whose history Eggleston later pursued.¹⁴ The marriage of his young widowed mother in 1850 to Williamson Terrell, a Methodist minister,¹⁵ was a further influence on Edward's religious career.

At the age of twelve or thirteen Edward, spurred by certain religious books in the family library, had followed a rigorous devotional schedule which John Wesley had recommended for preachers. He rose at four, prayed on his knees a solid hour, prayed at other specified times throughout the day, and imposed upon himself a sparse diet.¹⁶ This religious impulse also found expression in a private diary he kept while visiting in Virginia in 1855. On February 4 he recorded a self-rebuke for pride in his own prayers, and the following week he wrote, "O that I were perfectly holy." On June 2, 1855, he asked in his diary, "How have I spent this week? What a solemn thought! The actions the words the *thoughts* of another week are irrevocably recorded against the day of Judgment." When Eggleston began his historical studies of Puritanism, he could readily comprehend the impulse reflected in the *Personal Narrative* and other writings of one of its greatest defenders, Jonathan Edwards.¹⁷

On Eggleston's return to Indiana from Minnesota in 1856, while still eighteen years old, he began a career as

¹³ *Ibid.*, 290.

¹⁴ George Cary Eggleston recalled that when he and Edward were growing up in Madison it was "held to be sinful to take a bath on Sunday, or to shave, or to brush one's shoes on that day. . . . No cooking of any kind was permitted," and George's walks in the woods between religious services were abruptly terminated after the minister protested to his mother. George Cary Eggleston, *The First of the Hoosiers* (Philadelphia, 1903), 122, 123.

¹⁵ Randel, *Edward Eggleston*, 29.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷ Edward Eggleston, "Private Diary," quoted in Randel, *Edward Eggleston*, 34. The parallel in religious intensity of Eggleston and Edwards is striking. Eggleston wished in February, 1855, that he "could be instrumental in the conversion of some of my schoolmates" and resolved in 1857, if possible, to "pray every hour to keep the fire burning." Logan, "Unpublished Journal of Edward Eggleston's," 23, 37. Edwards noted that as a youth he "used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys. . . ." Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections* (rev. ed., New York, 1962), 57.

circuit rider in typical Methodist fashion. "I was put astride a horse," he recalled, "with my wardrobe in a pair of saddlebags, and sent to ride a four-week circuit, with ten preaching places, among the rough Ohio River hills of Dearborn County, Indiana."¹⁸ Soon his health deteriorated; and he went back to Minnesota in 1857, undergoing even greater hardships on the frontier as circuit rider and Bible agent. His annual report to the American Bible Society illustrated both the demands of the office and the devotion it evoked:

In the ten months, while my health permitted me to labour, I travelled from two thousand five hundred to three thousand miles. . . . I have spent half a night in an uninhabited prairie in the most frightful rain and thunder storm I have ever known. I have . . . frozen portions of my body at times; yet so highly do I estimate the work . . . that gladly would the agent continue to labour in this great field did health permit.¹⁹

Eggleston remained in Minnesota from 1857 to 1866. There he acquired experiences which enabled him to describe realistically in *The Circuit Rider* the dedication of the frontier ministry and later to portray sympathetically the difficulties of the New England Puritans in his historical works. After he became engaged in historical research, Eggleston looked back upon his time spent in this frontier work "with considerable satisfaction." He had learned to meet emergencies and to know human life in its rudimentary conditions. "Are not these," he asked, "as well worth learning as the art of scanning Virgil, the list of ships in Homer, or Caesar's method of building a military bridge?" Recalling the frontier preachers with whom he had been associated, he called it "the privilege of a lifetime to have known a company of men so sincere and disinterested as most of these were."²⁰

In Minnesota in the 1860's Eggleston's preaching was sufficiently orthodox for him to receive desirable pastorates in churches at Stillwater, St. Paul, and Winona.²¹ Nevertheless,

¹⁸ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 289.

¹⁹ Quoted in Randel, *Edward Eggleston*, 53.

²⁰ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 290.

²¹ Manuscripts of many sermon outlines from Eggleston's Minnesota period are deposited in the John M. Olin Research Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Microfilm copies of a portion of this collection are in the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. One of the sermons in this collection, delivered at Stillwater on October 21, 1860, on the theme of "Depravity," took its text from a passage in Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. . . ." While not typical of the bulk of Eggleston's output, this does recall the uncompromising words of Edwards in his famous "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Most of Eggleston's themes preserved from this period of his ministry were conventional and not as extreme as this.

he showed tendencies toward a broader outlook than most of his fellow ministers possessed. While risking his life "to preach in undaubed cabins with the thermometer below zero," he had "often carried a volume of poetry, a scientific book, or perhaps a tome of French dramas."²² He carried a volume of Thomas à Kempis, too; but eventually à Kempis was relegated to the top shelf of his library. "I would rather walk in wide fields with Charles Darwin," he said in later years; ". . . the objective life seems the better."²³

In 1890 Eggleston observed that the duality of his past still lingered. "Two manner of men were in me," he recalled, "and for the greater part of my life there has been an enduring struggle between the lover of literary art and the religionist. . . ."²⁴ He attributed to his early religious impulse a "serious view of life" and "the highest moral aspirations." Nevertheless, he compared his liberation from its restrictions to that which society experienced as it advanced from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and from Puritanism to Unitarianism. "I also had my period of renaissance," he said, "—that exhilaration [*sic*] . . . which the liberated mind feels in the rebound from constraint, and which carries it . . . to a higher level than it might otherwise have attained."²⁵

What Eggleston called his "accursed versatility" of interest drew him from the ministry to the field of journalism in 1866. He had published a few articles and Indian stories

²² Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 290.

²³ Eggleston, "Books That Have Helped Me," 586. As early as September 16, 1860, Eggleston delivered a sermon at Stillwater in which he invoked an evolutionary argument as support for a belief in Christianity. Nature, he argued, showed that there must always be a first cause. Christianity had led to the current western culture. Then he asked the members of his congregation if they would willingly exchange their Christian culture for any of the inhumane ones of ancient civilizations. The manuscript is in the Cornell collection. Microfilm copy, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

²⁴ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 286. Eggleston, who sometimes felt that he had wasted his early years, must have been reminded of his own career in 1888 when he described Dean George Berkeley's naive sacrifice in leaving England to found a college for Indians in Bermuda. Berkeley spent most of his time in the new world not as missionary "but as the thinker nature had made him." His plan failed and he returned to England. Eggleston commented, "there had probably come to him . . . that disillusion which is hardest of all to bear—the discovery that in following an impulse entirely generous, one has misunderstood his vocation, wasted his best years. . . ." Edward Eggleston, "The Church of England in the Colonies," *The Century Magazine*, XXXVI (May, 1888), 119.

²⁵ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 285.

before June, 1866, when he moved to Chicago and became associate editor of *The Little Colonel*, a magazine for children. In the next four years he assumed editorial posts on *The Sunday School Teacher*, *The Independent*, and *Hearth and Home*.²⁶ After the enthusiastic reception given *The Hoosier School-Master*, which appeared in *Hearth and Home* from September to December, 1871, Eggleston turned his attention increasingly to fiction, approaching it with the zeal of an evangelist and the fidelity of a historian.

The chief impulse that inspired Eggleston's novels was his desire to record faithfully segments of the American life he had observed which were in danger of being forgotten. *The Hoosier School-Master* portrayed a backwoods Hoosier community so realistically that one critic aptly termed it "in one sense a chapter in the history of the middle western frontier."²⁷ The next year, when Eggleston wrote *The End of the World*, he explained that "the picture of Western country life in 'The Hoosier School-Master' would not have been complete without this companion-piece, which presents a different phase of it."²⁸ In *The Mystery of Metropolisville* he stated, "A novel should be the truest of books. It partakes . . . of the nature of both history and art. . . . I have wished to make my stories of value as a contribution to the history of civilization in America."²⁹

Perhaps the strongest assertion of his purpose, however, was made in the Preface to *The Circuit Rider*. Here Eggleston described a way of life which had demanded and received from him the highest degree of dedication and sacrifice. After observing that some might be offended because he portrayed "the rude as well as the heroic side of early Methodism," he begged such persons to

remember the solemn obligations of a novelist to tell the truth. Lawyers and even ministers are permitted to speak entirely on one side. But no man is worthy to be called a novelist who does not endeavor with his whole soul to produce the higher form of history, by writing . . . dispassionately of those forms of life that come within his scope.³⁰

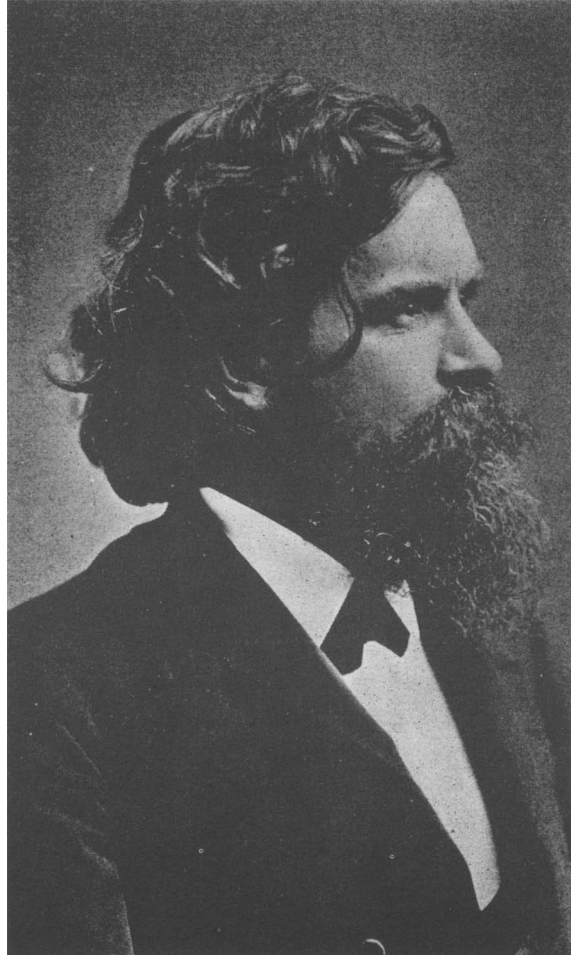
²⁶ Randel, *Edward Eggleston*, 61-62, 69-73, 78-84, 86-89.

²⁷ John T. Flanagan, "The Novels of Edward Eggleston," *College English*, V (February, 1944), 251.

²⁸ Eggleston, *The End of the World*, 7.

²⁹ Eggleston, *The Mystery of Metropolisville*, 7. In the course of the narrative Eggleston excused his failure to elaborate upon a situation by saying, "As an authentic historian, I am bound to limit myself to the simple fact." *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁰ Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, vii.



EDWARD EGGLESTON, 1875

Reproduced from George Cary Eggleston,
The First of the Hoosiers (Philadelphia, 1903).

In retrospect, Eggleston was able to make a dispassionate estimate of his fiction with which most critics would agree: "Whatever may be the rank assigned to these stories as works of literary art, they will always have a certain value as materials for the student of social history."³¹ No American regional realist was more conscientious in his attempt to convey a true impression of the society he described.

Just as Eggleston the historian would later insist upon obtaining his facts from original sources, so Eggleston the novelist gathered material for his fiction from the most original of all sources—his own experiences and observations and accounts he acquired directly from participants. In *The Hoosier School-Master* he used actual names of some of the characters described.³² In *The Circuit Rider* he recalled "the forms and weather-beaten visages of the old preachers" who had survived alligators, Indians, robbers, and fevers for their religion; and he retold their story. In *The Faith Doctor* he had one important character express ideas "taken almost verbatim from the writings of those who claim to be expounders of Christian science."³³

Even as a novelist Eggleston utilized the techniques of a historian, sometimes to the artistic detriment of his fiction. He was tempted "to append some remarks . . . upon the

³¹ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 286. Nicholson predicted in 1902 that "when *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* and *Roxy* cease to entertain as fiction they will teach as history." He commented that the pioneer days of Indiana were past, and "but for Eggleston's tales there would be no trustworthy record of the period he describes." Meredith Nicholson, "Edward Eggleston," *The Atlantic Monthly*, XC (December, 1902), 804, 807. Nearly fifty years later Leisy called Eggleston's novels about frontier folk and social customs "sound historical documents." Ernest E. Leisy, *The American Historical Novel* (Norman, Okla., 1950), 125. Another critic has called Eggleston's Hoosier novels "indispensable documents, even finished chapters, for his uncompleted [historical] masterpiece." William P. Trent et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (3 vols., New York, 1947), III, 76.

³² Nicholson, "Edward Eggleston," 806. Eggleston's portrayal of Hannah, the bound girl in the novel, provides an example of a thread running from Eggleston's life through his novels to his history. She was suggested by Jane Burnett, a thirteen-year-old girl who was entrusted with the care of George and Edward when they were children in Vevay. G. C. Eggleston, *First of The Hoosiers*, 30, 37. The terms of her indenture are set forth in Effa Morrison Danner, "Edward Eggleston," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXIII (December, 1937), 437n. Subsequently, Eggleston traced the origins of colonial trade in bond servants in his "Social Conditions in the Colonies," *The Century Magazine*, XXVIII (October, 1884), 853ff.

³³ Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, vi; Eggleston, *The Faith Doctor*, 4.

dialect" in the first edition of *The Hoosier School-Master*. Twenty-one years later in the Library Edition he not only discussed the differences and origins of Indiana dialect in a new Preface but also appended footnotes to the narrative on such topics as the divisions of Baptists and the custom of pronouncing a "y" sound before certain words.³⁴ In *Roxy* footnotes were used to define "sugar-water" and to trace the evolution of the expression, "muley cow"; and in *The End of the World* a footnote deplored the omission of a provincialism in dictionaries.³⁵

Eggleston used pictorial as well as literary art to produce verisimilitude in his fiction as he did in the eighties in his historical articles and textbooks. The spelling bee in *The Hoosier School-Master*, the castle and sedilium in *The End of the World*, and the spring house in *The Circuit Rider* are visually illustrated, the latter being accompanied by a detailed verbal description of its measurements, location, and composition.³⁶ Descriptions of the camp meeting in *The Circuit Rider* and the Whig barbecue and the village funeral in *Roxy* may be read as social history with little or no change. Eggleston's sense of historical perspective is also apparent in *The Hoosier School-Boy* where he describes the master's stick used "under the rule of President Fillmore" as the same which "had beaten the boys in the log school-house in the days of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson."³⁷

Ordinary activities such as hoedowns, turkey-shoots, and marriage festivities were Eggleston's chief interest in fiction as they would become in his history. He complained in 1884 that most novelists neglected the chowder and the county fair, adding, "But we shall never have a genuinely American literature so long as we shrink from the life of our common

³⁴ Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master*, 7; Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Master* (Library Edition), 5-27, 134n, 43. In 1894 Eggleston as historian called attention to a document evincing a similar pronunciation in Delaware much earlier. Eggleston, "Folk-Speech in America," 874.

³⁵ Eggleston, *Roxy*, 207n, 15n; Eggleston, *The End of the World*, 37n.

³⁶ Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, 96, 94. Novels were highly regarded for their illustrations as well as their narratives. The title pages of the first editions of *The Hoosier School-Master* and *The End of the World* stated, for example, that the novels contained twenty-nine and thirty-two illustrations, respectively.

³⁷ See Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, 104, and Eggleston, *Roxy*, 10, 78-79; Eggleston, *The Hoosier School-Boy*, 85.

people."³⁸ It is significant that when he wrote *The Graysons* he avoided any suggestion that one of his characters named Abraham Lincoln eventually became president of the United States.

After the publication of his first four novels between 1871 and 1874, Eggleston accepted the pastorate of a church in Brooklyn, New York, in 1875. By this time his intellectual and ethical concern had gained such ascendancy over his early pietism that he required the church to become nondenominational as a condition for his acceptance. Under its new name and Eggleston's leadership, this "Church of Christian Endeavor" received members holding varying doctrinal beliefs, built up its library, and sponsored discussions of such topics as the tariff, trade unionism, and the relations of capital and labor.³⁹ During Eggleston's Brooklyn pastorate he voiced strong criticism of his more pretentious fellow ministers. "For if Christ were to come . . . in the overalls of a workingman, repudiating our social pride and our pride of orthodoxy," he asked, ". . . do you think we should know him?"⁴⁰ His hatred of hypocrisy came to particular prominence in this final ministry and evinced a standard by which he subsequently measured men and events in his historical studies.

Reflecting the beliefs of Emerson, who was still alive in Concord, Eggleston declared that if "a man has a high sense of right and wrong, and a fearless self-reliance," regardless of creed, "he will be a tonic to the moral nature of men."⁴¹ His faith in the gradual improvement of society was also expressed in words which indicated his developing philosophy of history:

We live at the dawning of a better time. . . . The severe . . . parson passes away. No longer, clad in . . . funereal black, shall he

³⁸ Edward Eggleston, "Americans at Play," *The Century Magazine*, XXVIII (August, 1884), 555. In the "Words Beforehand" to *The Mystery of Metropolisville*, 12, Eggleston wrote, "The history of Athens is not of value on account of its temples and statues, but on account of its men and women." This statement foreshadowed his future approach to history.

³⁹ G. C. Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 351-54.

⁴⁰ Edward Eggleston, "To the Clergy," *Scribner's Monthly*, XVII (February, 1879), 490.

⁴¹ Edward Eggleston, "Parsons and Parsons," *Scribner's Monthly*, XVII (November, 1878), 141. Admonishing "parsons who wear uniforms of sanctity in the cut of their coats," Eggleston said, "Your name being Peter Smith, do you be Peter Smith; stand on your manhood and not on your office. . . ." *Ibid.*, 139. This was a principal theme of Emerson's "American Scholar" address in 1837.

sit like Poe's raven, cawing a sepulchral "nevermore" to the despairing human spirit. The strong men of our time know how much better is love than fear, hope than despair. . . .⁴²

In the late 1870's Eggleston's outlook became increasingly secular. It was partly as a matter of principle that he resigned his final pastorate in 1879 and sailed for Europe. Also, his health had again worsened, and about this time he wrote to his daughter that he had "rather lost interest in this thing we call life."⁴³

Before Eggleston left America, his friend, Roswell Smith, suggested that he connect his name "with a great historical work." The idea did not excite him at the moment, but by the time he reached England the purpose became fixed. "I was not interested in politics or wars," he said later, "but felt that I should like to write a history of life in the United States, finding suggestions in the modern school of French historians."⁴⁴

There were many reasons why Eggleston was attracted by this project. Already his fictional writings had given evidence of his interest in social history, but he had grown weary of writing novels. This was a new challenge in the direction in which his thought was tending. Writing to his daughter in 1880, he said, "My project of a 'History of Life in the United States' interests me much. . . . But it is a life work almost. . . . I am ripe for it. Everything in my life seems to have prepared me for it."⁴⁵ Recalling, in 1897, his rapid changes in youth "from one social environment to

⁴² *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴³ Edward Eggleston to Mrs. Elizabeth E. Seelye, July 5, 1880, quoted in Charles Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston: Pioneer in Social History," Eric F. Goldman (ed.), *Historiography and Urbanization: Essays in American History in Honor of W. Stull Holt* (Baltimore, 1941), 189.

⁴⁴ "Eggleston: An Interview," 433, 434.

⁴⁵ Eggleston to Mrs. Elizabeth E. Seelye, June 14, 1880, quoted in Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston," 190. He wrote his brother early that year that he was prepared to devote the next ten years of his life to the project but said that it was not really a new departure for "I have been writing history all the time in my novels." G. C. Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 363, 104-105. The project was greater than he realized, and his two completed volumes only carried the story to about 1640. One critic calculated that "had the work proceeded on the same scale to the end of the nineteenth century it would have gone to forty volumes." Trent, *Cambridge History of American Literature*, III, 191-92.

another," he said, "That preparation, quite as much as any natural bent, gave me the tendency to write a history of life." His resolve was strengthened near the beginning of his new career, when after he told Francis Parkman of some of his experiences, Parkman responded, "You are the only man in America that can write a history of life in the United States; you are the only man who has seen so many forms of our life."⁴⁶

Eggleston approached his new labors with eager anticipation. He wrote his daughter in 1880:

What chapters I can write on "Religious Life in New England," "The Great Kentucky Revival," "Flight of Emigrants Across the Mountains," "Indian Wars and Cabin Life in the Interior," "Early Fur Traders," "The Old Gentry in the South," "Social Changes of the Revolution". . . .⁴⁷

Many of these themes he would never live to trace. Others, however, soon appeared in a series of thirteen articles published in *The Century Magazine* from 1882 to 1890 as preliminary studies for his *History of Life in the United States*. Each of the *Century* articles, which comprised "A History of Life in the Thirteen Colonies,"⁴⁸ was independent of the others. Together they constituted an authoritative and lively social history of America from the early years of exploration through approximately one hundred years of its colonial development.

At the outset Eggleston emphasized that he had acquired his data chiefly from books, tracts, letters, documents, and records of writers contemporaneous with the events nar-

⁴⁶ "Eggleston: An Interview," 433, 432.

⁴⁷ Edward Eggleston to Mrs. Elizabeth E. Seelye, June 14, 1880, quoted in Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston," 194.

⁴⁸ The complete series as it appeared in *The Century Magazine* was as follows: "The Beginning of a Nation," XXV (November, 1882), 61-83; "The Planting of New England," XXV (January, 1883), 350-66; "Migrations of American Colonists," XXV (March, 1883), 724-44; "The Aborigines and the Colonists," XXVI (May, 1883), 96-114; "Indian War in the Colonies," XXVI (September, 1883), 697-718; "Husbandry in Colonial Times," XXVII (January, 1884), 431-49; "Commerce in the Colonies," XXVIII (June, 1884), 234-56; "Social Conditions in the Colonies," XXVIII (October, 1884), 848-71; "The Colonists at Home," XXIX (April, 1885), 873-92; "Social Life in the Colonies," XXX (July, 1885), 387-407; "Church and Meeting-House before the Revolution," XXXIII (April, 1887), 901-12; "The Church of England in the Colonies," XXXVI (May, 1888), 107-22; "Nathaniel Bacon, the Patriot of 1676," XL (July, 1890), 418-35.

rated.⁴⁹ He expressed regret that magazine requirements prevented his giving acknowledgement of sources—a regret reminiscent of his reluctance to forego footnotes in the first edition of *The Hoosier School-Master*. His meticulous research was abundantly evident, however; and his commentary was supplemented with illustrations of such diverse subjects as maps of the period, colonial furniture, weapons, Indian villages, battle scenes, corn grinding, fish processing, fire-places, flax wheels, old coins, portraits, spectacles worn by Patrick Henry, and wigs drawn from pictures in Memorial Hall at Harvard.⁵⁰ Eggleston identified the sources of his illustrations and directed the reader to their current custodians. Many of the Virginia illustrations had been drawn by John White of the Raleigh colony and were first published by Eggleston with special permission of the British Museum.⁵¹ In fiction Eggleston's desire to document his narratives authentically had been only partially fulfilled; in history it was achieved by the reproduction of scenes and drawings contemporaneous with the events described.

In the first few articles Eggleston described the exploration and early settlement of Virginia, New England, and certain middle colonies. Indians were captured by early explorers and displayed in England as curiosities. Eggleston believed that such an exhibition suggested Caliban to Shakespeare.⁵² He reviewed many foolish notions such as the

⁴⁹ Eggleston, "The Beginning of a Nation," 61n. He was especially proud of discovering in the British Museum original documents about Bacon's Rebellion never used by a student before. He called November 23, 1618, "the great forgotten anniversary of American history" when the Virginia Company gave its colony the "'Great Charter,' by which representative government was set up in America for the first time." Eggleston, "Nathaniel Bacon, the Patriot of 1676," 418.

⁵⁰ A single article contained illustrations of "The One-Hoss Shay" from an old etching, the Brooklyn Ferry-House from a 1746 view, an eighteenth-century American sleigh, a stagecoach of 1795, a cut paper valentine of 1764, snuffboxes, a tankard presented to the first white person born in New Netherlands, silverware of the colonial period, a spinet, and the interior of a theater from a 1791 print. See Eggleston, "Social Life in the Colonies," 387-407.

⁵¹ The editors stated that great pains had been taken "to insure the authenticity and veracity of these cuts," adding that "it is, indeed, intended to make them as valuable for historic purposes as the text itself." "Dr. Edward Eggleston's Historical Papers," *The Century Magazine*, XXX (July, 1885), 487-88.

⁵² Eggleston, "The Beginning of a Nation," 63-64. Eggleston's frontier experiences made him avoid the idealization of Indians often indulged in by his contemporaries. He questioned a part of the Pocahontas legend and presented Indians generally as mistreated but savage creatures. *Ibid.*, 75. He had seen an Indian massacre and remembered living "on the very ground where my grandfather—brave old Indian-fighter!—had defended his family. . . ." See Eggleston's Preface to *The Circuit Rider*, v, and "Dr. Eggleston's Historical Papers," 487.

persistent belief that America was an island; and he described the discouraging false starts made in colonization. He tried to be historically objective, but experience had taught him to respect the pioneer. Consequently he showed a higher regard for dashing adventurers than for leaders who erred on the side of caution or complacency. He described Raleigh in Victorian terms as "a favorite of the queen, doubtless, in a sense not at all honorable to that passionate daughter of Henry VIII." Nevertheless, he viewed him with sympathy as he imagined that "in confinement for years in a gloomy cell of the Tower," he may temporarily have suspended writing his *History of the World* when he heard of the new attempt to colonize Virginia "to which he had given his best endeavors in vain for so many years."⁵³ John Smith, too, was projected as the romantic figure he was, having, by the age of twenty-eight, been shipwrecked, robbed, stranded in France, thrown into the sea, imprisoned by the Turks, and put into slavery. Sailing to Virginia, he survived a movement aboard ship to hang him for "conspiring to make himself a king." Smith governed the colony, according to Eggleston, "like a stout champion in the days of the Hebrew anarchy: a great fear of him fell on all the heathen round about." As evidence of Smith's able leadership, Eggleston pointed out that within eight months after he departed the 490 colonists were reduced to sixty by Indian warfare, desertion, and famine.⁵⁴

Eggleston treated American colonization as a great epic. It had its heroes, whose legends he had verified; its hardships, which drove some colonists to avoid starvation by eating their own dead; and its destiny, which was assured when prospective wives were sent to the colonists in 1619. There was said to be "a great terror" in England as "many young girls concealed themselves" to avoid being taken by force; but Eggleston's developing historical perspective evoked his observation that "this cruel violence, like the rape of the Sabine women . . . , provided wives for the beginners of a great empire."⁵⁵

⁵³ Eggleston, "The Beginning of a Nation," 69, 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-78. By 1896, however, Eggleston was better aware of the untrustworthy nature of Smith's accounts about himself. See Edward Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation: A History of the Source and Rise of the Earliest English Settlements in America with Special Reference to the Life and Character of the People* (New York, 1896), 61-64.

⁵⁵ Eggleston, "The Beginning of a Nation," 82-83. Eggleston qualified the element of coercion in *The Beginners of a Nation*, 72.

Eggleston's experience as novelist had developed in him a dramatic fictional style, but the charm of his historical writing exceeded that of some of his novels. Frequently his opening sentence stated the theme of the article and then almost compelled the reader to continue reading. The article on "Migrations of American Colonists" began, "There is no story in American history more picturesque than the coming of the first Dutch vessel into American waters in 1609, about the time that John Smith left Jamestown." It then proceeded to contrast the romantic seafaring adventures of Henry Hudson with the more commonplace steamship travel of Eggleston's day.⁵⁶ When the author compared the colonists' domestic life with that of their English brethren, he concluded that "life in the colonies was simply the life of Europe . . . made small by reflection in a provincial mirror."⁵⁷

Eggleston's attitude toward the superstitions and ignorance of colonists and aborigines was one of simultaneous amazement and sympathy. In backwoods Indiana and Minnesota and in Virginia he had observed the frequent mixture of good motivations and limited knowledge. Now he recorded such earlier misconceptions as the belief held by some colonists that Indians had been born white but turned red because they were nearly naked. The Indians' wild dances led Puritans naturally to the belief that they practiced witchcraft. Eggleston showed that attempts of Catholics and Puritans to educate and Christianize the Indians, forcefully or by persuasion, were unsuccessful, not because of lack of dedication but because a civilization cannot suddenly be transformed. He sought to correct the erroneous notion that the Indians warred because they were not paid for their land; instead, he pointed out, they simply did not understand the intricacies of the English law of land tenure and considered payments only temporary peace offerings.⁵⁸

Eggleston began his account of the colonists' social life with a recognition that they were still Englishmen:

The transplanted Englishman of the seventeenth century, for the most part, clung with tenacity to his heritage of ancient customs and prejudices. As the original current of a great river holds the peculiar

⁵⁶ Eggleston, "Migrations of American Colonists," 724.

⁵⁷ Eggleston, "The Colonists at Home," 892.

⁵⁸ Eggleston, "The Aborigines and the Colonists," 96. Eggleston, "Indian War in the Colonies," 705.

tint derived from its banks, after . . . the stream has pushed far out to sea, so English life in the New World was slow to lose its characteristics in novel conditions; only by degrees did the powerful reaction of new circumstances bring about differences between the English planted in America and those who remained in the old nursery.⁵⁹

The colonists brought with them the Englishman's respect for clothes suitable to rank and punished persons who defied convention by wearing clothes and wigs appropriate only for a station higher than they occupied. There was a great fondness of tobacco, and gaming was almost a universal vice.⁶⁰

Eggleston noted that involuntary servitude in America began with indentured white servants. In 1670 Virginia had six thousand English indentured servants and only two thousand Negro slaves. Some white servants bound themselves voluntarily; but many were kidnapped, lured onto a ship while drunk, or transported to America as an alternative to criminal prosecution. The author had lived with slavery in Virginia and preached against it in Minnesota. He now described without reservation the cruelties of the colonial system of servitude but pointed out that the harshness of the times also extended to the treatment of free men.⁶¹

Despite changes which had taken place, Eggleston was on familiar ground as he dealt with Puritan religious practices. Here he found an earlier version of what he had experienced in the Methodism of his youth. The meeting-houses were austere and cold, prayers and sermons were long, and singing was droning without hymnals to avoid popism.⁶² Eggleston, who had dealt with funerals and weddings as minister and novelist, described with fascination

⁵⁹ Eggleston, "Social Conditions in the Colonies," 848.

⁶⁰ Eggleston, "The Colonists at Home," 887-92; Eggleston, "Social Life in the Colonies," 402.

⁶¹ Eggleston, "Social Conditions in the Colonies," 853-70. In his sermon on "Christian Patriotism" on August 17, 1862, Eggleston had expressed disapproval of Brown's raids and denied the right to disobey a law merely because it was unjust, but he supported the Union cause on the ground that rebellion was unjustified and slavery was worse than war. This sermon is in the Cornell collection. Microfilm copy, Lilly Library, Indiana University. See William P. Randel, *Edward Eggleston: Author of The Hoosier School-Master* (New York, 1946), 74.

⁶² Eggleston, "Church and Meeting-House before the Revolution," 901, 909-11. In *The Circuit Rider* Eggleston strongly chided his "genteel, and cultivated Methodist reader" who would have been shocked at the rudeness of frontier Methodism, but he admitted that "Methodism was to the West all that Puritanism was to New England. Both of them are sublime when considered historically; neither of them were very agreeable to live with, maybe." Eggleston, *The Circuit Rider*, 158-59.

the great amount of shooting and drinking which characterized such events in Virginia and other colonies. Funerals could be expensive because of the practice of giving gloves, mourning rings, and silk scarves to ministers and "under-bearers" and sometimes to guests. At one Massachusetts funeral three thousand gloves were given. In New England the Puritans at first allowed no religious services at funerals "lest they should 'confirm the popish error . . . that prayer is to be used . . . over the dead.'"⁶³

Eggleston's religious orientation was never primarily doctrinal. By the 1880's he viewed various Protestant and other sects with considerable detachment. After describing the character of certain debauched Anglican clergymen in America, he wrote, "But this is only the dark side of the picture. There were always in the Chesapeake colonies clergymen of another stamp, whose character shown the brighter by their proximity to sluggards and drunkards." Such a one, he noted, was Anthony Garvin, who, like certain circuit riders of a later day, "exchanged an easy parish for a destitute one on the frontier, where he preached in widely separated places."⁶⁴

A distrust of reliance upon laws to effect social changes for which society was not yet prepared was shown by numerous comments Eggleston made on colonial society. His disapproval of bundling, "the very name of which one hesitates to write to-day," was so complete as to suggest his ignorance of its practical but not its immoral use. Nevertheless, he found its prevalence in staid New England "but one of many instances of the failure of law and restraining precept to work a refinement of manners." Dancing, he observed, was so popular that it could not be repressed by early New England magistrates. Eventually dances were held for launching a ship, assembling court, and ordaining a minister. The colonists also enjoyed shows of all types and responded enthusiastically when Lewis Hallam brought his English actors to Virginia in 1752. When the Revolutionary fever and objections of the Continental Congress forced them to flee, Eggleston said, they "sailed for the West Indies, to return

⁶³ Eggleston, "Social Life in the Colonies," 394. See also Eggleston's description of a funeral in *The Mystery of Metropolisville*, 208-209.

⁶⁴ Eggleston, "The Church of England in the Colonies," 109.

northward, like migratory birds of song, when storms should have blown over."⁶⁵

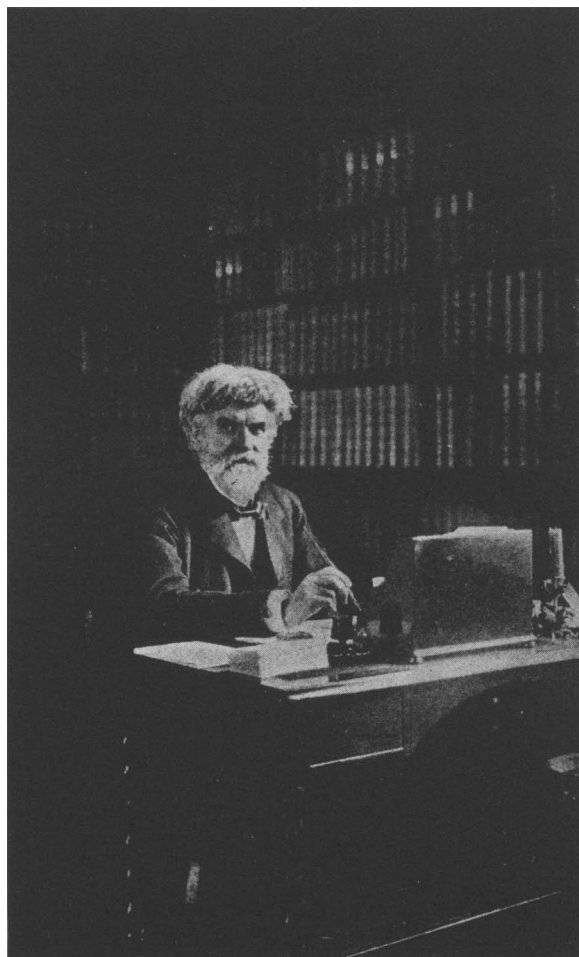
Eggleston's "History of Life in the Thirteen Colonies" was a deliberate attempt to describe colonial society in a manner both graceful and scientific. The editors were correct in stating that "no such exhaustive study of the social, domestic, industrial, religious, and intellectual life of the colonists . . . has ever before been made"; but they were mistaken in predicting that it would "be long before such a comprehensive investigation will be undertaken again."⁶⁶ Indeed this was the forerunner not only of Eggleston's projected *History of Life in the United States* but of a new school of American historiography.

In 1896 Eggleston published the first volume of his long-awaited historical treatise under the full title, *The Beginners of a Nation: A History of the Source and Rise of the Earliest English Settlements in America with Special Reference to the Life and Character of the People*. It did "not pretend to be the usual account of all the events attending colonization," he said in his Preface, but "rather a history in which the succession of cause and effect is the main topic. . . ." He sought "to trace from their source the various . . . movements that resulted in the early English settlements in America, and in the evolution of a great nation. . . ." His aim was to "reflect the character of the age . . . and the traits of the colonists" and emphasize "the social, political, intellectual, and religious forces that promoted emigration." At the same time, borrowing a phrase from Augustin Thierry, he sought to make this "a work of art as well as of historical science."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Eggleston, "Social Life in the Colonies," 390, 401-402, 407. In his attempt to present both sides of the controversy over drama, Eggleston admitted that the irregular lives of the actors made them susceptible to Puritanical attacks. In Newport the actors attempted to quiet the religious opposition by advertizing *Othello* as a series of moral dialogues in five parts, noting the moral instruction of the play. *Ibid.*, 407.

⁶⁶ "Dr. Eggleston's Historical Papers," 487.

⁶⁷ Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation*, vii, ix. Four years earlier, in an essay praising Parkman, Eggleston had criticized the "new school of historians, men of . . . accurate scholarship, who are destitute of skill in literary structure, and who hold style in contempt." Edward Eggleston, "Note on the Completion of Mr. Parkman's Work," *The Century Magazine*, XLV (November, 1892), 46. In an interview he noted the abuse Macaulay suffered "for saying that he would not be content if his history was less interesting than a novel." "Eggleston: An Interview," 433.



EDWARD EGGLESTON, 1896

Reproduced from George Cary Eggleston,
The First of the Hoosiers (Philadelphia, 1903).

Eggleston explicitly rejected the historical tradition of throwing "a mantle over the nakedness of ancestors." The novelist who had asserted his duty to tell the whole truth about frontier Methodism now assumed that same obligation as historian of the Puritans and other settlers. "Here are no forefathers or foremothers," he announced, "but simply English men and women of the seventeenth century, with the faults and fanaticisms as well as the virtues of their age."⁶⁸

Eggleston declared that *The Beginners of a Nation* was not a reissue of any of his previous works, pointing out that a series of lectures he had given on culture history at Columbia College and elsewhere was never printed and his *Century* articles merely served as "preliminary studies." Actually, in several instances his expression as well as his subject matter here and in *The Transit of Civilization* followed closely what he had previously written in the *Century* series. On the other hand, departures from previous positions showed that further study required the historian to alter some of his earlier judgments. He publicly blamed himself for putting too much credence in Captain John Smith's trustworthiness "before I had had an opportunity to examine and compare all his writings." Eggleston's basic honesty would allow no intentional compromise with historical accuracy.⁶⁹

The Beginners of a Nation was a product of some sixteen years of research on the colonization of Virginia, Massachusetts, and certain middle colonies. It was carefully documented with marginal notes and "Elucidations" following each chapter; yet it achieved the author's aim of being literary as well as instructive. His use of similes and metaphors was particularly striking. For example, Winthrop "went to America confident of a call divine like that of Moses" and Roger Williams was "a poet in morals, enamored of perfection, and keeping his conscience purer than Galahad's."⁷⁰

Eggleston was overenthusiastic in his portrayal of such figures as Sir Edwin Sandys and John Robinson, but he

⁶⁸ Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation*, viii, vii. Eggleston's rebellion against hypocrisy was never stronger than in his last novel, where he asked "where is the aristocracy which does not regard wealth won by ancient thievery as better than money modernly earned in a commonplace way?" Eggleston, *The Faith Doctor*, 55.

⁶⁹ Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation*, x-xi, 62. After acknowledging his indebtedness to those who had been helpful, he was compelled to add, "The New York Mercantile Library, on the other hand, I have not found hospitable to research." *Ibid.*, x.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 205, 283.

tried to be fair even toward those for whom he had less admiration. Admitting that it was hard to view Archbishop Laud sympathetically, he nevertheless acknowledged that with all his vindictiveness "he was the farthest possible from a coward, and he accepted death on the scaffold with the serene composure of a martyr."⁷¹ Throughout the book Eggleston emphasized the delusions and harshness of the age but avoided the temptation to judge its chief actors by the standard of his own more enlightened generation.⁷² His belief was stated in an interview in 1897, when he said, "A man has a right to be judged by the standards of his period. But one cannot judge an age by its own standards. One can judge an age only by modern standards, otherwise it is no judgment at all."⁷³

The author's own growth is made dramatic when one recognizes how impossible it would have been for him to have written about Puritanism with any degree of detachment in his youth. In his treatment of the Puritans Eggleston, who had moved from à Kempis to Darwin, disclosed his evolutionary concept of history. The fact that many of the early Virginia settlers perished he considered "a distinct gain to Virginia. Unfitted for their environment, they were doomed to extinction by that pitiless law which works ever to abolish from the earth the improvident, the idle, and the vicious." Even the moral excesses of Puritanism were credited with lifting society to a permanently higher plane. And, writing only three years after Turner had read his famous paper on "The Influence of the Frontier in American History," Eggleston found that "the severe economic conditions imposed by the soil and climate were even more potent than Puritanism in producing the traits that go to make up the New England of history."⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷² See especially Eggleston's comments on John Cotton. *Ibid.*, 300-301.

⁷³ "Eggleston: An Interview," 437.

⁷⁴ Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation*, 59, 178. Robert W. Johannsen has pointed out that Eggleston's portrayals of frontier character as a product of environment brought this idea to the attention of the literary world long before Frederick Jackson Turner urged its importance upon the historical world. Robert W. Johannsen, "Literature and History: The Early Novels of Edward Eggleston," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLVIII (March, 1952), 42. Further research should be done on the extent to which Eggleston's historical philosophy coincided with Turner's thesis and possibly found earlier expression in Eggleston's historical writing in the 1880's.

The reviews of *The Beginners of a Nation* were generally favorable, and several pointed out certain characteristics of the book which sprang from the author's unique background. "Of the literary merit" of the work, *The Critic* found, "it would be hard to speak too highly." A reviewer for *The Forum* observed that "Eggleston's training as a novelist has made him give a personal and dramatic interest to chapters which the average historian would make . . . orthodox and heavy." He praised Eggleston's "excellent contribution to culture-history" but looked forward to his future volumes which would trace the "progress of the Western pioneer subduing the wilderness. . . ." Herbert L. Osgood's praise of the stylistic beauty, superior spirit, and realistic treatment of men and events was impressive, coming as it did from a professional historian whose own future volumes on colonial history achieved an enviable distinction in historiography.⁷⁵

When *The Transit of Civilization* appeared in 1901, it was commended by reviewers for the popular magazines but was generally disappointing to historical scholars.⁷⁶ Eggleston had been in poor health following a stroke in 1899, and this second volume of his treatise showed evidence of haste in preparation. Also, it was unconventional in form, departing from the chronological method of presentation to treat six major areas of colonial life individually. Except for its greater documentation and lack of illustrations it bore more resemblance to the *Century* articles than to *The Beginners of a Nation*. Charles M. Andrews, who, as eminent colonial historian of the new scientific school and president of the American Historical Association, would later attack the idea that historians should strive to write colorfully, reviewed it for the *Political Science Quarterly*. He deplored certain factual errors and Eggleston's tendency to generalize but acknowledged that the essays were "interesting and read-

⁷⁵ Untitled review of *The Beginners of a Nation*, *The Critic*, XXX (January 2, 1897), 3; W. P. Trent, "Dr. Eggleston on American Origins," *The Forum*, XXII (January, 1897), 597, 591, 599; Herbert L. Osgood, Untitled review of *The Beginners of a Nation*, *The American Historical Review*, II (April, 1897), 528, 530.

⁷⁶ Randel, *Edward Eggleston: Author*, 226-27. See James A. Rawley, "Edward Eggleston: Historian," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XL (December, 1944), 350-51. The complete title was *The Transit of Civilization from England to America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1901).

able."⁷⁷ Barrett Wendell called the book "a collection of out-of-the-way and curious memoranda" and suggested that the author had taken into his head more than he could handle.⁷⁸ Eggleston, too, believed that he had failed.

The weaknesses in the book were largely attributable to Eggleston's declining health and his lifelong fascination with all kinds of strange phenomena. But more than curiosity led him to describe the primitive medical beliefs of early colonists, the transmission of Surrey English to American slaves, and early religious customs. He liked to trace current phenomena to their origins. Colonial medical notions may have reminded him of the superstitions of Virginia slaves and Hoosier backwoods people he had known. He described the colonists' use of rosin found on pine bark for a skin remedy, kidney beans for strengthening the kidneys, brains of a screech owl for headaches, and bedbugs for lying-in cases.⁷⁹

Not until a generation had passed did historians give significant attention to *The Transit of Civilization*. One of these was Dixon Ryan Fox, who pointed out that the problem of carrying forward the arts and sciences transmitted from England was a continuing one. "Few men," he declared, "could have realized this more vividly than Eggleston himself, who had spent the years of his young manhood as a circuit rider in southern Indiana and the farther West and been a herald and exemplar of civilization in the backwoods."⁸⁰ More recently Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Sr., who promoted the study of American social history as much as any historian of his generation, introduced a paperback edition of *The Transit of Civilization*. In his Introduction he applauded Eggleston's discerning accounts of "'out-of-the-way subjects,' no longer considered freakish and off-center." Although later scholars "have piled up detailed studies of many of the same themes,"

⁷⁷ Charles M. Andrews, Untitled review of *The Transit of Civilization*, *Political Science Quarterly*, XVII (March, 1902), 162-66. For a discussion of Andrews' presidential addresses, see Herman Ausubel, *Historians and Their Craft: A Study of the Presidential Addresses of the American Historical Association, 1884-1945* (New York, 1950), 141-44, 237-41.

⁷⁸ Barrett Wendell, Untitled review of *The Transit of Civilization*, *The American Historical Review*, VI (July, 1901), 805, 803.

⁷⁹ Eggleston, *The Transit of Civilization*, 70-72.

⁸⁰ Dixon Ryan Fox, *Ideas in Motion* (New York, 1935), 3-4. Chapter I, inspired by *The Transit of Civilization*, appeared earlier as Dixon Ryan Fox, "Civilization in Transit," *The American Historical Review*, XXXII (June, 1927), 753-68.

he said, "Eggleston's pioneering effort still shines through with a special glow of its own."⁸¹

Eggleston's life was set in a golden age of American historical writing. George Bancroft dominated the scene for many years with the rhetoric and patriotism of his works. Richard Hildreth anticipated a more realistic school in his portrayal of American founders "unbedaubed with patriotic rouge," and "often rude, . . . superstitious, and mistaken."⁸² Within their own more limited fields of investigation, John L. Motley, William H. Prescott, and Francis Parkman delighted Eggleston and his contemporaries with the beauty of their glowing and authentic narratives.

Romanticism led to humanism, and each exalted the importance of everyday life. In England John Richard Green achieved immediate distinction with the publication of his *Short History of the English People* in 1874. It was both scholarly and lucid in its emphasis on social rather than political history. Green's example strongly influenced Eggleston to perform a similar service in American history.⁸³ John Bach McMaster's *History of the People of the United States* began to appear during the course of Eggleston's colonial articles in *The Century Magazine*. McMaster proposed "to describe the dress, the occupations, the amusements, the literary canons of the times; to note the changes of manners and morals. . . ." His monumental work had less social orientation than Eggleston's but was an important landmark.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "Introduction: Evolution of a Historian," Edward Eggleston, *The Transit of Civilization* (Boston, 1959), xviii. I was encouraged but disconcerted to find after originally preparing this paper that Professor Schlesinger had used the same title for his Introduction. The title was retained, however, in gratitude to him who was once my teacher in Social and Intellectual History of the United States and must have influenced my thoughts in some mysterious way to follow his clearer vision.

⁸² Richard Hildreth, *The History of the United States of America . . . to the Organization of Government under the Federal Constitution, 1497-1789* (rev. ed., 3 vols., New York, 1854), I, vii.

⁸³ Green, like Eggleston, was born in 1837, was always frail, and turned from the ministry to social history which he wrote colorfully. Eggleston's tribute to Green also fit himself: He "put himself into his history. . . . A philanthropic clergyman, lover of his race to begin with, he gradually outgrew all his doctrinal predilections, until . . . there was only the philanthropic impulse left. From this point . . . he judged all religious life." Eggleston, "The New History," 45.

⁸⁴ John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War* (8 vols., New York, 1883-1913), I, 1. Schlesinger found Eggleston's volumes "more philosophical, less political, better digested and more gracefully written" than McMaster's. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "Edward Eggleston," *Ency-*

A lesser but significant luminary was Eggleston's friend, Moses Coit Tyler, who sought in his masterly surveys of American colonial literature to discover the spirit of the age and to trace the evolution of thought and events. Both his life and beliefs paralleled Eggleston's in several respects.⁸⁵

Two years after Eggleston's death, Albert Bushnell Hart introduced his *American Nation* series by specifying that it "must include the social life of the people, their religion, their literature, and their schools." The following year Edward Channing prefaced his *History of the United States* with the statement that he would trace the growth of the nation from institutional and social points of view.⁸⁶ What was an innovation when Eggleston began his *Century* articles soon became commonplace.

Eggleston demanded more of historians, however, than social orientation: they must also be able to interpret their material. "It is one thing to unearth new facts," he said, ". . . it is another to see what the facts collectively amount to. . . ."⁸⁷ His own philosophy of history was based upon a belief in the gradual advance of civilization. He declared in 1890 that "in history, as in fiction, I am mainly interested in the evolution of society."⁸⁸ It was an evolution he had witnessed in America. Eggleston had even seen American historiography evolve from an infancy of unverified anecdotes and patriotic biography to a mature stage of reinterpretations,

clopaedia of the Social Sciences (15 vols., New York, 1931), V, 440. Also he pointed out that nearly three fourths of McMaster's history was devoted to politics, diplomacy, and war. Schlesinger, "Introduction," xvii.

⁸⁵ Tyler, almost an exact contemporary of Eggleston's, was also a minister in the 1860's before he turned his attention to literary history. He and Eggleston were among the founders of the American Historical Association in 1884.

⁸⁶ Albert Bushnell Hart, "Editor's Introduction to the Series," Edward Potts Cheyney, *European Background of American History, 1300-1600* (New York, 1904), xvii; Edward Channing, *A History of the United States* (6 vols., New York, 1905-1925), I, v.

⁸⁷ Edward Eggleston to his wife and daughter, February 14, 1883, quoted in Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston," 204.

⁸⁸ Eggleston, "Formative Influences," 286. Acceptance of Eggleston's practice of tracing institutions from their origins has become commonplace as indicated by such typical titles as Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (2 vols., New York, 1927); Carl L. Becker, *Beginnings of the American People* (Boston, 1915); Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York, 1943); Louis M. Hacker, *The Shaping of the American Thought* (New York, 1947); Curtis P. Nettels, *The Roots of American Civilization* (New York, 1938); and Max Savelle, *Seeds of Liberty: The Genesis of the American Mind* (New York, 1948).

graduate seminars, scientific methods, and cooperative surveys. Throughout all this he had grown with the age.

Eggleston received many honors. After the publication of *The Beginners of a Nation*, he was given a reception at the Authors' Club in New York. McMaster and Henry Van Dyke spoke and letters of congratulations were read from Tyler, Justin Winsor, and others. Eggleston was elected president of the American Historical Association for 1900. His historical books were cited in scholarly bibliographies.⁸⁹ According to his brother, certain elementary school histories he had written emphasizing social rather than constitutional beginnings "fairly revolutionized the teaching of history in schools."⁹⁰

Nevertheless, Eggleston's "accursed versatility," which had led him into many digressive endeavors, combined with his meticulousness and ill health to deny him the satisfaction of publishing more than a beginning of his ambitious historical work. Consequently, the contributions he did make were neglected. In his place, James Harvey Robinson assumed the role of pioneer in the "New History" movement. Neither Robinson's book, *The New History*, published twelve years after Eggleston's 1900 address by the same name, nor Robinson's own 1929 presidential address on "The Newer Ways of Historians," acknowledged the work pioneered by Eggleston. Actually, Eggleston had championed social history for years while Robinson was still pursuing traditional studies of western European history.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston," 192, 193n. Typically, Hart referred to *The Beginners of a Nation* as "A very careful and thoughtful book" and to Hildreth's *The History of the United States* as "Full and accurate, though dry." Albert Bushnell Hart (ed.), *American History told by Contemporaries* (4 vols., New York, 1897-1901), I, 26, 27.

⁹⁰ G. C. Eggleston, *First of the Hoosiers*, 364. See, for example, Edward Eggleston, *A History of the United States and Its People for the Use of Schools* (New York, 1888) and *Stories of Great Americans for Little Americans* (New York, 1895).

⁹¹ See James Harvey Robinson, *The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York, 1912). See Ausubel, *Historians and Their Craft*, 300, 347-48, for a discussion of Robinson's role in the movement. The failure of Robinson's student, Barnes, to mention Eggleston is astonishing, particularly in sections devoted to the "New History." See Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing* (Norman, Okla., 1937, and 2nd. rev. ed., New York, 1963); Harry Elmer Barnes, *The New History and the Social Studies* (New York, 1925). On the other hand, Michael Kraus in his *A History of American History* (New York, 1937), 588-89, gives Eggleston credit for his pioneer contributions and the "charm" and "strong influence" of his two historical volumes.

It remained for Schlesinger, Robinson's former student at Columbia, who had found his lectures "most provocative," to say what Robinson neglected to say:

Eggleston . . . seemed to me the unrecognized but real father of American social history. . . . Over a decade before James Harvey Robinson, he had coined the expression "The New History" in his presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1900.⁹²

Schlesinger, an academic historian, concluded that despite the financial and other incentives to scholarship which had become available, "as yet no pregnant contributions comparable to those of an Eggleston or Turner or Beard have come to view."⁹³

Unexpectedly, *The Transit of Civilization*, rather than *The Beginners of a Nation*, has received the greater comment in recent years as a pioneer effort meriting more attention. A study by Lester J. Cappon led to the conclusion that *The Transit of Civilization* needed redoing "with the benefit of augmented source materials and the contributions of modern scholarship during the past half century."⁹⁴ There are equally or more compelling reasons, however, for reexamining Eggleston's thirteen articles on colonial life published in *The Century Magazine* during the eighties. These commenced while McMaster was still teaching civil engineering at Princeton and before the first volume of his *A History of the People of the United States* was published. Thus, the articles are more clearly a pioneer effort than either of Eggleston's historical books. Collectively they present a fresh, detailed, brilliantly-written analysis of colonial culture exceeding the combined length of the two historical volumes. These "preliminary studies" deserve a better fate than to remain forever buried under the dust of university library shelves. When they are revived and studied, it may even be said of Eggleston, as has been suggested of Wordsworth, that in writing the prelude to his uncompleted masterpiece he had written the masterpiece itself.

Eggleston was too ill in 1900 to deliver his address before the American Historical Association in person, but the words he sent to be read to the distinguished assemblage were

⁹² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., *In Retrospect: The History of a Historian* (New York, 1963), 34, 188.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹⁴ Lester J. Cappon, "The Colonial Period Reexamined," John Francis McDermott (ed.), *Research Opportunities in American Cultural History* (Lexington, Ky., 1961), 9.

vibrant. Other presidential addresses have dealt with the importance of literary style, philosophy, facts, research, and selectivity in history.⁹⁵ Eggleston, who could have discussed any of these themes with authority, chose to place his major emphasis on the kind of history he had pioneered in America, which he designated "The New History."

In what Ausubel termed "the first really large-scale presidential attack on the political and military content of history,"⁹⁶ Eggleston chastized his fellow historians for following too blindly Herodotus, who reported the manners of the times but whose major emphasis was on wars and politics. In place of the ancient historians he recommended Raleigh, who was "in a sense both Herodotus and Thucydides and something more," and Macaulay, whose "famous third chapter came to interrupt the course of the history" in its brilliant portrayal of English manners. "Time will come," he said, "when we shall date from Macaulay." Of Bancroft he wrote, "He knew nearly everything a historian ought to know except culture history."⁹⁷

Unfortunately, Eggleston failed to acknowledge the contribution of McMaster, whose fifth volume of *A History of the People of the United States* appeared in 1900. On the other hand, he proclaimed his indebtedness to graduate students and praised local historians who quietly recorded annals which would be greedily sought in future years. He called history "the great prophylactic against pessimism" and concluded on a note of confidence:

History will be better written in the ages to come. The soldier will not take the place he has taken. I do not say that the drum and trumpet history will have gone out; but when the American Historical Association shall assemble in the closing week a hundred years hence, there will be, do not doubt it, gifted writers of the history of the people. . . . We shall have the history of culture, the real history of men and women.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ See Ausubel, *Historians and Their Craft*, 188, 300.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁹⁷ Eggleston, "The New History," 38, 44, 45, 46.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47. It is hard to accept the charges with which Hirschfeld concludes his otherwise excellent analysis of Eggleston as a social historian. The presidential address did show signs of carelessness, but Hirschfeld's contention that Eggleston had become a pessimist and that his speech contained no mention of his earlier evolutionary doctrine is unsound in the light of such passages as: "What a brute is man! . . . But the brute age . . . must pass. . . . It is the object of history to cultivate this out of man. . . ." *Ibid.*, 41. See Hirschfeld, "Edward Eggleston," 207-10.

Death, Edward Eggleston's never-distant companion, finally halted the pen of the historian on September 3, 1902. From that moment Eggleston's role in historiography was history. In an article appearing the following December Meredith Nicholson wrote a generous tribute:

History was not to him a dusty lumber room, but a sunny street where people come and go. . . . He pursued his task with scientific ardor and accuracy, but without fussiness or dullness. His occupations as novelist and editor had been a preparation for this later work, for it was the story quality that he sought in history, and he wrote with an editorial eye to what is salient and interesting. It is doubtful whether equal care has ever been given to the preparation of any other historical work in this country.⁹⁹

Eggleston's final destiny could not have been foretold at birth, but the pattern of his evolution is now clear. It bears a remarkable resemblance to the story of America he planned to tell. Both had experienced a youth of Puritanical introspection, an adolescence of frontier conditioning and independence, a middle age of postwar realism, and a maturity of scientific awareness in a culture so different from its origins as to defy identification. Yet the progressive stages of Eggleston's evolution were as logical in retrospect as the manifest destiny of America.

The lessons learned in Vevay and Madison, in Amelia and on the Minnesota frontier, in Brooklyn and London had given Eggleston a rare opportunity to observe and interpret the varied colors of life. He responded to the wealth discovered through his historical research with the innocent animation of a child and recorded it with a freshness rare in historiography. At the same time, his lack of formal advanced education kept him from comprehending the magnitude of the historical goal he set for himself and the impossibility of his bringing it to completion.

Eggleston's role in cultural history was, as it had been in the areas of religion and fiction, that of a pioneer: one who prepares the way for others to follow. It was a role that Eggleston played exceptionally well. The direction he led was the direction taken, but the pioneer himself was almost forgotten. That, too, is a part of evolution.

⁹⁹ Nicholson, "Edward Eggleston," 808.