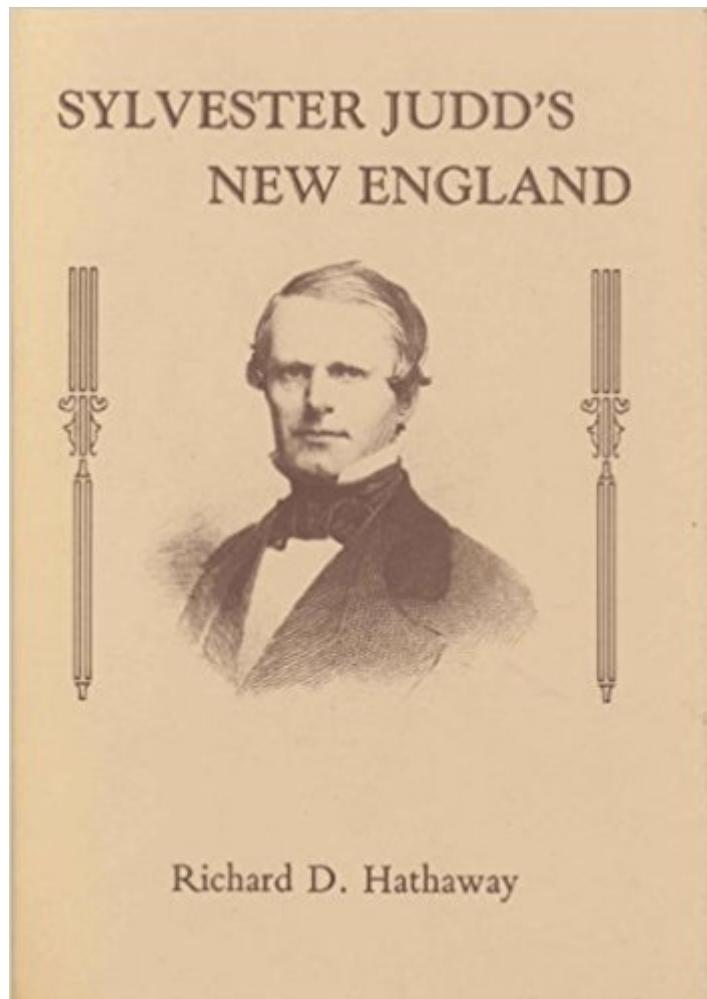


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Sylvester Judd's New England



Synopsis

Sylvester Judd (1813-53) is presented here as a representative figure whose life and works illustrate the intellectual and religious tensions of Emerson's day. A convert from Congregationalism to Unitarianism, Judd flirted next with transcendentalism, touching on most points in the New England compass during his intellectual and spiritual odyssey. How did a youth from a backwater Massachusetts village reach the point where Margaret Fuller called his Margaret 'this one 'Yankee novel' and Lowell hailed it as 'the first Yankee book with the soul of Down East in't'? Born in Westhampton, 'where carpets, pianos, art works, Unitarians, and novels were regarded as not only unnecessary but downright unwelcome,' Judd became a Unitarian and arrived at the Harvard Divinity School in time to hear Emerson deliver his 'American Scholar' address. Although he could not accept fully the Emersonian heresy, he became a friend of Jones Very, the transcendentalist poet. As a Unitarian minister in Augusta, Maine, for the last 13 years of his brief life, Judd preached against the 'moral evils' of war, slavery, and sectarian strife. He also married the richest girl in town, daughter of a U.S. Senator, and his father-in-law defended Judd's right to espouse unpopular social causes. Judd committed the greater indiscretion, even for a Unitarian divine, of publishing novels and poems. One novel, Margaret, was attacked by genteel critics as 'vulgar' but was championed by Lowell, Margaret Fuller, and Theodore Parker for its vigor and its use of back-country vocabulary. Margaret 'combines the real with the ideal in a homely way,' verging on the pantheism of ultra-transcendentalists but clinging to the certainties of Christianity, children, and chickens.

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Customer Reviews

Richard D. Hathaway began research on Sylvester Judd while at Harvard, then located and examined the Judd Papers (now in Houghton Library), and finally consulted scores of relatives and family friends to complete his work. He is professor of English at the State University of New York College New Paltz.

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