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## Lotus Eating: A Summer Book. New York: Harper and brothers

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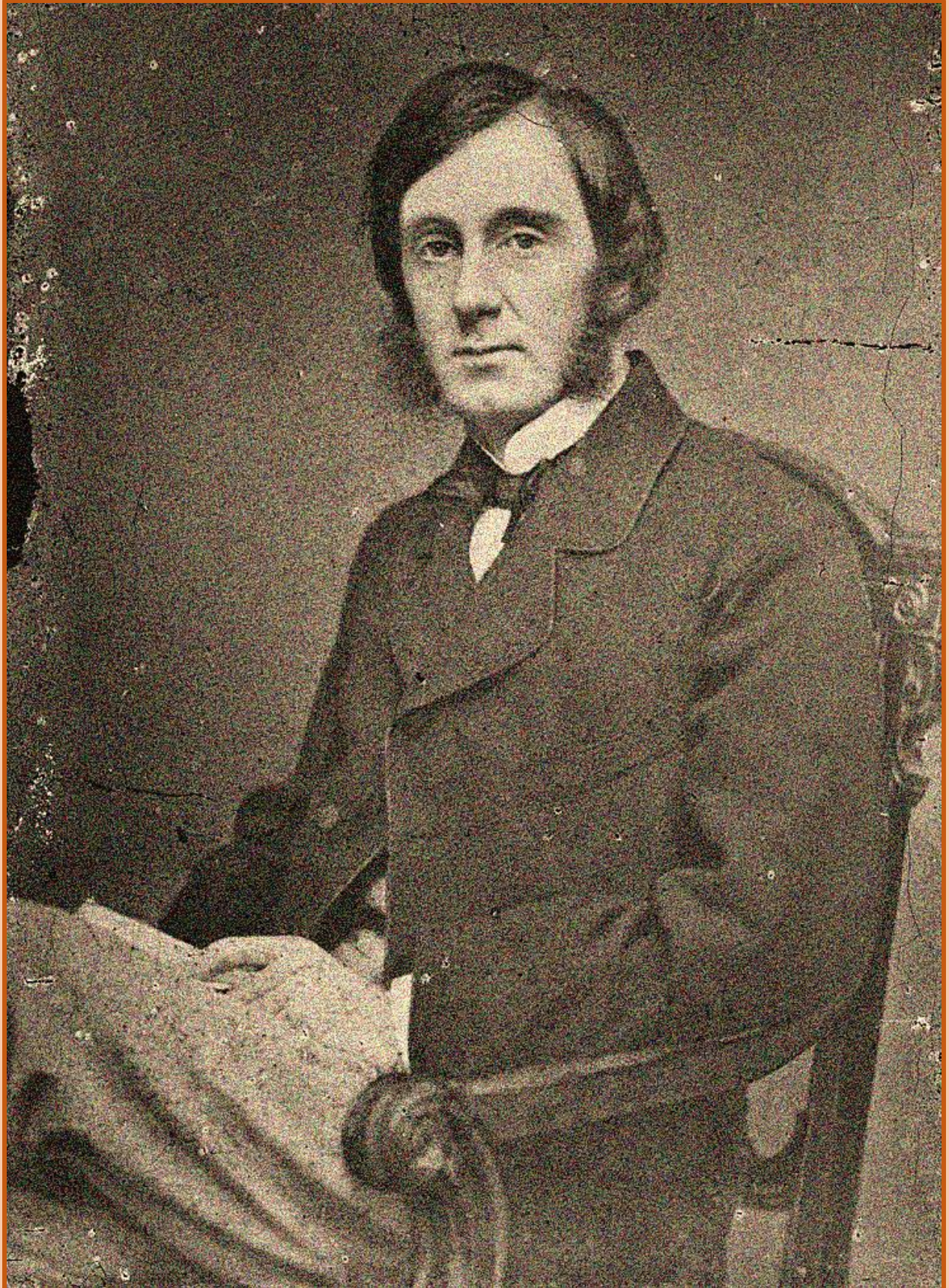
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**Lotus Eating: A Summer Book. New York: Harper and brothers**

**Cover Page Footnote**

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***American Letters: Archives***

George William Curtis (1824-1892)

From: 1868. *Lotus Eating: A Summer Book*. New York: Harper and brothers

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“For none more than the Americans make it a principle to desert the city, and none less than Americans know how to dispense with it. So, we compromise by taking the city with us, and the country gently laughs at us in scorn.”

## I. The Hudson and the Rhine (12-23)

[...] For none more than the Americans make it a principle to desert the city, and none less than Americans know how to dispense with it. So, we compromise by taking the city with us, and the country gently laughs at us in scorn.

[...] It was remarkable during the revolutions of 1848, in Europe, that there were no monarchists so absolute as the Americans. They declared, almost to a man, that Europe was not fit for republicanism. As if time would ripen republics from despotism, so that, like mellow pears, they would fall off without any confusion; or as if it were the habit of kings to educate their subjects to dispense with royalty.

But it is still very amusing to see how the English patronize the continent. They ascend the Rhine imperturbably. They evidently feel that they are conferring much honor upon the landscape, by looking at it, than ever the landscape can give them pleasure

[...] A few evenings afterward I was standing with a fellow-countryman upon the terrace of the castle of Heidelberg, looking out toward the glorious opening of the Neckar valley upon the plain of the Rhine, and was severely taken to task by him for my indiscreet Rhenish raptures and absolute light-speaking of the Hudson.

“Of course, you don’t prefer the Rhine!” exclaimed my friend with patriotic ire.

I contemplated the height of the terrace from the ground, and accommodated my answer to it.

“Yes! for this night only I think I do. But I have no doubt I shall sleep it off. I am sure I shall be better in the morning.”

I did not sleep it off, however, that night, at least, for a day or two afterward I returned to the Rhine, and in my friend’s absence carried the question clear against the Hudson.

The difference between the rivers is that of the countries. The Rhine is a narrow belt of turbid water winding among the vineyards that wall it upon each side. In its beautiful reach between Bingen and Bonn, the only beautiful part of the river, except near Lake Constance, it has no shores but vineyarded hillsides, and occasionally a narrow grain field in front of them. There are no trees, no varieties of outline, and the vines, regularly planted and kept short for wine, not left to luxuriate at length, for beauty, are a little formal in their impression. The castles—the want of which is so lamented upon the Hudson shores—are not imposing, but romantic. They are rather small and toy-like, and stand like small sentries upon small hills commanding the entrances to small valleys.

But they are interesting enough to make their own traditions, even better than those you read in Murray’s red-book: and the mass of travelers who merely pass in the steamers, when the white glare of noon hardens the hills, as if they were sullen, and would not reveal their charms to a hasty stare, can have but faint idea of the tranquil and romantic beauty of the river.

[...] These are the genuine delights of the Rhine. They are those of romantic association and suggestion. They are those which are only possible in an old and storied country. It is not what you see there, but what you feel through what you see, that charms you. The wild grape in our woods is pleasant from the association with the Rhenish vineyards, and they in turn from their association with the glory of the grape in all literature and tradition. The Rhine is a lyric, or a ballad.

[...] The Hudson, however, is larger and grander. It is not to be devoured in detail. No region without association, is, except by science. But its spacious and stately character, its varied and magnificent outline, from the Palisades to the Catskill, are as epic as the loveliness of the Rhine is lyrical. The Hudson implies a continent behind. For vineyards it has forests. For a belt of water, a majestic stream.

For graceful and grain-goldened heights it has imposing mountains. There is no littleness about the Hudson, but there is in the Rhine. Here everything is boldly touched. What lucid and penetrant lights, what broad and sober shadows! The river moistens the feet, and the clouds anoint the heads, of regal hills. The Danube has, in parts, glimpses of such grandeur. The Elbe has sometimes such delicately penciled effects. But no European river is so lordly in its bearing, none flows in such state to the sea.

Of all our rivers that I know, the Hudson, with this grandeur, has the most exquisite episodes. Its morning and evening reaches are like the lakes of dreams.

