

Samuel Johnson Biography

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Contents

Samuel Johnson Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Samuel Johnson.....	3

Samuel Johnson

Samuel Johnson (10 October 1822-19 February 1882), Transcendentalist minister and Orientalist, was born in Salem, Massachusetts. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Johnson refused ordination and instead accepted an invitation to minister to a Unitarian society in Lynn, Massachusetts, on the condition that it sever all ties to the Unitarian body and reorganize as an independent group. His connection with the Lynn Free Church lasted from 1853 until his retirement in 1870. During his tenure, he preached abolitionism, temperance, woman's rights, labor rights, and universal religion. The latter topic was of particular importance to Johnson, who viewed the various religions of the world as evolving toward a single or universal religion. Johnson elaborated his theory in sermons and speeches throughout New England and finally brought it to focus in *Oriental Religions and Their Relation to Universal Religion*, three large volumes on *India* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1872), *China* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1877), and *Persia* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885). Although soon outdated because of rapid advances in Western knowledge of the cultures and sacred literature of Asia, the importance of the works lies in their synthesizing approach. They are a natural extension of the Transcendentalist quest for communion between East and West first articulated by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and an important link with such later investigators as Paul Carus, Alan Watts, and the hundreds of lesser-known figures currently exploring ways in which the religions of the East may speak to the spiritual condition of the West. He died in Andover, Massachusetts.