

# William Henry Furness Biography

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## Biography

William Henry Furness, Unitarian religious writer, was born in Boston and educated at the Boston Latin School, where he befriended Emerson. He graduated from Harvard College in 1820 and from the Divinity School in 1823. In 1825 he was ordained and installed as minister of the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, a post he held until his death. Furness's most important work is his *Remarks on the Four Gospels* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1836). Contrary to the established Unitarian view that the miracles of the New Testament were performed as God's way of convincing man of the truth of Christianity, Furness argued that man has an intuitive perception of religious truths which requires no such confirmation, thus making Christianity depend upon the teachings of Christ rather than His supposed deeds. His book, published in the same year as Emerson's *Nature*, was an important influence on the Transcendentalists, applying as it did transcendental philosophy to Biblical criticism. Furness was also interested in the life of Christ and published the results of his studies in *Jesus and His Biographers* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1838) and three subsequent works. In the area of social reform, Furness actively supported the anti-slavery cause. He also edited numerous Unitarian hymnbooks and was an early translator of German literature in America. His friendship with Emerson lasted until the latter's death; their correspondence is printed in *Records of a Lifelong Friendship* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910).