

**THE ESSENTIAL  
WRITINGS OF RALPH  
WALDO EMERSON**

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**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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WRITINGS OF  
RALPH WALDO  
EMERSON

EDITED BY BROOKS ATKINSON

*Introduction by Mary Oliver*



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NEW YORK

## RALPH WALDO EMERSON

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Ralph Waldo Emerson was born on May 25, 1803, in Boston, Massachusetts. At Harvard he won prizes for his oratory and essays. He studied briefly at Harvard Divinity School but was forced to interrupt his courses because of eye trouble. In 1826 he began a career as a minister, eventually becoming junior pastor of the Second Church of Boston. He married Ellen Tucker in 1829, despite the fact that she was already ill with tuberculosis; she died two years later at the age of nineteen.

After the death of his wife, Emerson went to Europe, where he met Landor, Milton, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and others. On his return he settled in Concord, Massachusetts, and a year later married Lydia Jackson. What would eventually be called the Transcendental Club had begun to form around him, its members including Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, and Orestes Brownson. The spiritual ferment of the Concord group found expression in Emerson's first significant work, the essay "Nature" (1836), in which he sketched the ideas that his later writings were to elaborate: "The use of natural history is to give us aid in supernatural history: the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation.... By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause." This was followed by two profoundly influential orations, "The American Scholar," a powerful statement of individualism, and "The Harvard Divinity School Address," whose unorthodox religious views created a scandal: "Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion.... It has dwelt, it dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus. The soul knows no persons."

Around this time Emerson became closely associated with Henry David Thoreau and with the mystical poet Jones Very. He gave up preaching and collaborated with Margaret Fuller on the journal *The Dial*, in which he began to publish his essays. These appeared in book form as *Essays: First Series* (1841) and *Essays: Second Series* (1844). He became more involved with political issues, launching attacks on the Mexican War and slavery. His essays had made him an internationally known figure, and on a return trip to Europe in 1847 he met with a wide range of writers and thinkers, including Dickens, Tocqueville, and Tennyson. He published further collections of his essays and public addresses—*Nature, Addresses, and Lectures* (1849), *Representative Men* (1850), *English Traits* (1856), *The Conduct of Life* (1860)—while lecturing against slavery throughout the Northeast. Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* elicited an enthusiastic response from him, although he attempted to persuade the poet to tone down the poem's sexual imagery.

Following the Civil War, Emerson continued to lecture energetically, publishing *Society and Solitude* (1870) and the verse collection *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1867). In 1872 his health began to fail, and after a final trip to Europe he settled into a quieter routine as his memory gradually weakened. He died in Concord, of pneumonia, on April 27, 1882.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE DISTINCTION and particular value of anything, or any person, inevitably must alter according to the time and place from which we take our view. In any new discussion of Emerson, these two weights are upon us. By time, of course, I mean our entrance into the twenty-first century; it is almost two hundred years since Emerson's birth in Boston. By place, I mean his delivery from the town of Concord, and his corporeal existence anywhere. Now he is only within the wider, immeasurable world of our thoughts. He lives nowhere but on the page, and in the attentive mind that leans above that page.

This has some advantage for us, for he is now the Emerson of our choice: he is the man of his own time—his own history—or he is one of the mentors of ours. Each of these possibilities has its attractions, for the man alive was unbelievably sweet and, for all his devotion to reason, wondrously spontaneous. Yet as time's passage has broken him free of all mortal events, we begin to know him more clearly for the labors of his life: the life of his mind. Surely he was looking for something that would abide beyond the Tuesday or the Saturday, beyond even his first powerful or cautionary or lovely effect. "The office of the scholar," he wrote in "The American Scholar," "is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances." The lofty fun of it is that his "appearances" were all merely material and temporal—brick walls, garden walls, ripening pears—while his facts were all of a shifty vapor and an unauthored goodwill: the luminosity of the pears, the musics of birds and the wind, the affirmative staring-out light of the night stars. And his belief that a man's inclination, once awakened to it, would be to turn all the heavy sails of his life to a moral purpose.

THE STORY of his life, as we can best follow it from its appearances, is as follows. Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in 1803; his father, William Emerson, died in 1811. The family—his mother, two sisters, and five brothers—were poor, devout, and intellectually ambitious. Death's fast or slow lightning was a too-frequent presence. Both girls and one boy died in childhood; Emerson's brothers William, Edward, and Charles survived only into early manhood. The only remaining brother was Robert, who was a man of childish mind. As the poet Walt Whitman for most of his life took responsibility for his child-minded brother, Eddie, so did Emerson keep watch over this truculent survivor.

Emerson graduated from Harvard College, then divinity school, and in 1829 he began preaching at the Second Church (Unitarian) in Boston. In that year he married the beautiful but frail Ellen Tucker. Her health never improved, and in 1832 she died. Emerson was then twenty-nine years old.

I think it is fair to say that from this point on, the greater energies of his life found their sustenance in the richness and steadfastness of his inner life. Soon after his wife's death he left the pulpit. He had come to believe that the taking of the sacrament was no more, nor was meant to be more, than an act of spiritual remembrance. This disclosure he made to his congregation, who perhaps were grateful for his forthrightness but in all honesty did not wish to keep such a preacher. Soon after, Emerson booked passage to Europe. He traveled slowly across the Continent and, finally, to England. He was deeply touched by the magnificence of the past, so apparant in the cities, in their art and architecture. He also made it his business to explore the present. The list of those he met and talked with is amazing: Coleridge, Wordsworth, Walter Savage Lander, John Stuart Mill among them. His meeting with Thomas Carlyle began a lifelong friendship, their letters going back and forth across the Atlantic until Emerson's death.

Emerson returned from Europe and established a manner of living that he would scarcely alter for the rest of his



life. He married again, a young woman named Lydia Jackson. In his journals, which he had begun in college and never abandoned, he tore down wall after wall in his search for a style and for ideas that would reach forth and touch both poles: his certainty and his fluidity. He bought a house in the town of Concord, an easy distance from Boston yet a place with its own extraordinary style and whose citizens were farmers, tradesmen, teachers, and the liveliest of Utopians. Here, as husband and father, as writer and lecturer, Emerson would live for years his seemingly quiet, seemingly peaceful life.

THE BEST use of literature bends not toward the narrow and the absolute but to the extravagant and the possible. Answers are no part of it; rather it is the opinions, the rhapsodic persuasions, the ingrafted logics, the clues that are to the mind of the reader the possible keys to his own self-quarrels, his own predicament. This is the crux of Emerson, who does not advance straight ahead but wanders to all sides of an issue; who delivers suggestions with a kindly gesture; who opens doors and tells us to look at things for ourselves. The one thing he is adamant about is that we *should* look—we *must* look—for that is the liquor of life, that brooding upon issues, that attention to thought even as we weed the garden or milk the cow.

This policy, if such it might be called, he established at the start. The first book he published was called *Nature*; in it he refers, with equal serenity, to “Nature” and to “nature.” We understand clearly that by the first he means “this web of God”—everything that is not the mind uttering such words—yet he sets our lives down among the small-lettered noun as well, as though to burden us equally with the sublime and the common. It is as if the combination, and the understanding of the combination—the necessary honoring of both—were the issue of utmost importance. *Nature* is a text that is entirely about divinity, and first purposes, a book of manners, almost, but for the inner man. It does not demean by diction or implication the life that we are most apt to call “real,” but it presupposes the heart’s spiritual awakening as the true work of our lives. That this might take place in as many ways as there are persons alive did not at all disturb Emerson, and that its occurrence was the beginning of paradise here among the temporal fields was one of his few unassailable certainties.

In 1836, at the issue of this initial volume, and in the first years following, he was a man scarcely known to the world. Descended from seven generations of preachers, in conventional terms a failed churchman himself, he held no more important post than his membership in the Concord volunteer Fire Association. If he tried to be at home among the stars, so too he strove to be comfortable in his own living room. Mentor to Thoreau and neighbor to Hawthorne, the idiosyncratic Bronson Alcott, the passionate Margaret Fuller, the talkative Ellery Channing, and the excitable Jones Very, he adorned his society with friendliness and participation. His house was often full of friends, and talk. Julian Hawthorne, then a young boy, remembers him sitting in the parlor, “legs crossed and—such was their flexibility—with one foot hitched behind the other ankle. Leaning forward, elbow on one knee, he faced his guests and held converse ...” There was an evening when his daughter Ellen called him away to talk to the butcher about mutton. It is reported that he rose mildly to do as he was bid. And there is another story, as he reports it himself in his journal, on a June day: “Now for near five years I have been indulged by the gracious Heaven in my long holiday in this goodly house of mine, entertaining and entertained by so many worthy and gifted friends, and all this time poor Nancy Barron, the mad-woman, has been screaming herself hoarse at the Poorhouse across the brook and I still hear her whenever I open my window.”

EMERSON WAS the leading member of the group we know as the New England transcendentalists. It is hardly a proper philosophy; certainly it is not a school of thought in which all members were in agreement. Impossible such a finding would have been with the various sensibilities of Concord! For each member, therefore, it must be reported somewhat differently. For Emerson, it devolved from Coleridge and German philosophy, from Swedenborg, no doubt from half a hundred other voices as from his religious beliefs and his own appreciation of the world’s more-than-

utilitarian beauty. For Emerson, the value and distinction of transcendentalism was very much akin to this ~~swerving and rolling away from acute definition. All the world is taken in through the eye, to reach the soul, where~~ it becomes *more*, representative of a realm deeper than appearances: a realm ideal and sublime, the deep stillness *that is*, whose whole proclamation is the silence and the lack of material instance in which, patiently and radiantly, the universe exists. Emerson would not turn from the world, which was domestic, and social, and collective, and required action. Neither would he swerve from that unperturbable inner radiance, mystical, forming no rational word but drenched with passionate and untranslatable song. A man should want to be domestic, steady, moral, politic, reasonable. He should want also to be subsumed, whirled, to know himself as dust in the fingers of the wind. This was his supple, unbreakable faith.

HIS CERTAINTY that a man must live also in this world, enjoined with the similar faith of the other transcendentalists, was no small force in the New England of the 1830s and 1840s, especially in speech and action in behalf of abolition. Slow as he often was to express outrage, Emerson burst forth in his journal thus: “This filthy enactment [of the Fugitive Slave Law] was made in the 19th century, by people who could read and write. I will not obey it, by God.” And he did not.

WRITING THAT loses its elegance loses its significance. Moreover, it is no simple matter to be both inspirational and moderate. Emerson’s trick—I use the word in no belittling sense—was to fill his essays with “things” at the same time that his subject was conceptual, invisible, no more than a glimmer, but a glimmer of immeasurable sharpness inside the eye. So he attached the common word to the startling idea. “Hitch your wagon to a star,” he advised. “The drop is a small ocean.” “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” “We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them.” “Sleep lingers all our lifetime about the eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir tree.” “The soul makes the body.” “Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view,” he says, and suddenly that elite mystical practice seems clearer than ever before, and possible to each of us.

Of course his writing is made up of the nineteenth-century sentence, so nimble with commas. The sparks of his expression move forward softly and reasonably, in their shapely phrases—then they leap. He rests upon the gnomic as a poet will rest upon meter, and comes not to a conclusion but to a pause in which the reader’s own impetus, given such a bright shove, takes over. And yet it is not ornamental eloquence, but natural, fecund, ripe, full of seed and possibility. Even, or especially (it is his specialty, after all), when talking about the utterly unprovable, he sends out good news, as good reports come all day from the mockingbird, or the soft tongues of the Merrimack. The writing is a pleasure to the ear, and thus a tonic to the heart, at the same time that it strikes the mind.

Thus he wrote and lectured, often in Boston and New York but also as far west as Missouri and beyond. He did not especially like travel, or being away from home, but he needed the money and trusted the lecturing process as a way for him to develop and polish his essays for eventual publication.

IN 1847 Emerson, by then an established writer and widely honored on both sides of the Atlantic, returned to England. The audiences for his lectures were large and curious. Crabb Robinson, in his diary of those years, relates first his own reponse and then the reaction of the writer Harriet Martineau:

... Tuesday, I heard Emerson’s first lecture, “On the Laws of Thought;” one of those rhapsodical exercises of mind, like Coleridge’s in his “Table Talk,” and Carlyle’s in his Lectures, which leave a dreamy sense of pleasure, not easy to analyze, or render an account of... I can do no better than tell you what Harriet Martineau says about him, which, I think, admirably describes the character of his

mind. "He is a man so *sui generis*, that I do not wonder at his not being apprehended till he is seen. His influence is of a curious sort. There is a vague nobleness and thorough sweetness about him, which move people to their very depths, without their being able to explain why. The logicians have an incessant triumph over him, but their triumph is of no avail. He conquers minds, as well as hearts, wherever he goes; and without convincing anybody's reason of any one thing, exalts their reason, and makes their minds worth more than they ever were before." 9th June, 1848.

That we are spirits that have descended into our bodies, of this Emerson was sure. That each man was utterly important and limitless, an "infinitude," of this he was also sure. And it was a faith that leads, as he shows us again and again, not to stasis but to activity, to the creation of the moral person from the indecisive person. Attachment to the Ideal, without participation in the world of men and women, was the business of foxes and flowers, not of men, not of women. This was, for Emerson himself, difficult. Outwardly he was calm, reasonable, patient. All his wildness was in his head—such a good place for it! Yet his certainty that thought, though it might grow most robust in the mind's repose, was sent and meant for participation in the world, never altered, never ebbled. There are, for myself, a hundred reasons why I would find my life—not only my literary, thoughtful life but my emotional, responsive life—impoverished by Emerson's absence, but none is greater than this uncloseting of thought into the world's brilliant, perilous present. I think of him whenever I set to work on something worthy. And there he is also, avuncular and sweet, but firm and corrective, when I am below the mark. What we bring forth, he has taught me as deeply as any writer could, is predictable.

But let him have the last word. In his journal he wrote:

I have confidence in the laws of morals as of botany. I have planted maize in my field every June for seventeen years and I never knew it come up strychnine. My parsley, beet, turnip, carrot, buck-thorn, chestnut, acorn, are as sure. I believe that justice produces justice, and injustice injustice.

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## NATURE

*[Nature was Emerson's first book. He had been meditating on it several years before he published it in 1836. Some of it was written in the same room where Hawthorne wrote Mosses from an Old Manse. Five hundred copies of Nature were published anonymously. Although the book made a few friends in England, notably Carlyle, Richard Monckton Milnes and John Sterling, it was not enthusiastically received as a whole. It was not reissued until 1847.]*

A subtle chain of countless rings

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The next unto the farthest brings;  
The eye reads omens where it goes,  
And speaks all languages the rose;  
And, striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.

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## INTRODUCTION

OUR AGE is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth. In like manner, nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature?

All science has one aim, namely, to find a theory of nature. We have theories of races and of functions, but scarcely yet a remote approach to an idea of creation. We are now so far from the road to truth, that religious teachers dispute and hate each other, and speculative men are esteemed unsound and frivolous. But to a sound judgment, the most abstract truth is the most practical. Whenever a true theory appears, it will be its own evidence. Its test is, that it will explain all phenomena. Now many are thought not only unexplained but inexplicable; as language, sleep, madness, dreams, beasts, sex.

Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly speaking, therefore, all that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE. In enumerating values of nature and casting up their sum, I shall use the word in both senses—in its common and in its philosophical import. In inquiries so general as our present one, the inaccuracy is not material; no confusion of thought will occur. *Nature*, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf. *Art* is applied to the mixture of his will with the same things, as in a house, a canal, a statue, a picture. But his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so grand as that of the world on the human mind, they do not vary the result.

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am never alone, whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mournful piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear. In the woods, too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and what period soever of life is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these



plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs is overspread with melancholy to-day. Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

## II

### COMMODITY

WHOEVER CONSIDERS the final cause of the world will discern a multitude of uses that enter into that result. They all admit of being thrown into one of the following classes: Commodity; Beauty; Language; and Discipline.

Under the general name of commodity, I rank all those advantages which our senses owe to nature. This, of course, is a benefit which is temporary and mediate, not ultimate, like its service to the soul. Yet although low, it is perfect in its kind, and is the only use of nature which all men apprehend. The misery of man appears like childish petulance, when we explore the steady and prodigal provision that has been made for his support and delight on this green ball which floats him through the heavens. What angels invented these splendid ornaments, these rich conveniences, this ocean of air above, this ocean of water beneath, the firmament of earth between? this zodiac of lights, this tent of dropping clouds, this striped coat of climates, this fourfold year? Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn serve him. The field is at once his floor, his work-yard, his play-ground, his garden, and his bed.

“More servants wait on man

Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other's hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man.

The useful arts are reproductions or new combinations by the wit of man, of the same natural benefactors. He no longer waits for favoring gales, but by means of steam, he realizes the fable of Aeolus's bag, and carries the two and thirty winds in the boiler of his boat. To diminish friction, he paves the road with iron bars, and, mounting a coach with a ship-load of men, animals, and merchandise behind him, he darts through the country, from town to town, like an eagle or a swallow through the air. By the aggregate of these aids, how is the face of the world changed, from the era of Noah to that of Napoleon! The private poor man hath cities, ships, canals, bridges, built for him. He goes to the post-office, and the human race run on his errands; to the book-shop, and the human race read and write of all that happens for him; to the court-house, and nations repair his wrongs. He sets his house upon the road, and the human race go forth every morning, and shovel out the snow, and cut a path for him.

But there is no need of specifying particulars in this class of uses. The catalogue is endless and the examples so obvious, that I shall leave them to the reader's reflection, with the general remark, that this mercenary benefit is one which has respect to a farther good. A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work.

### III

## BEAUTY

A NOBLER WANT of man is served by nature, namely, the love of Beauty

The ancient Greeks called the world *κόσμος*, beauty. Such is the constitution of all things, and such the plastic power of the human eye, that the primary forms, as the sky, the mountains, the tree, the animal, give us a delight *in and for themselves*; a pleasure arising from outline, color, motion, and grouping. This seems partly owing to the eye itself. The eye is the best of artists. By the mutual action of its structure and of the laws of light, perspective is produced which integrates every mass of objects, of what character soever, into a well colored and shaded globe, so that where the particular objects are mean and unaffecting, the landscape which they compose is round and symmetrical. And as the eye is the best composer, so light is the first of painters. There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful. And the stimulus it affords to the sense, and a sort of infinitude which it hath, like space and time, make all matter gay. Even the corpse has its own beauty. But besides this general grace diffused over nature, almost all the individual forms are agreeable to the eye, as is proved by our endless imitations of some of them, as the acorn, the grape, the pine-cone, the wheat-ear, the egg, the wings and forms of most birds, the lion's claw, the serpent, the butterfly, sea shells, flames, clouds, buds, leaves, and the forms of many trees, as the palm.

For better consideration, we may distribute the aspects of Beauty in a threefold manner.

1. First, the simple perception of natural forms is a delight. The influence of the forms and actions in nature is so needful to man, that, in its lowest functions, it seems to lie on the confines of commodity and beauty. To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street and sees the sky and the woods, and is man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself. The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough.

But in other hours, Nature satisfies by its loveliness, and without any mixture of corporeal benefit. I see the spectacle of morning from the hilltop over against my house, from daybreak to sunrise, with emotions which an angel might share. The long slender bars of cloud float like fishes in the sea of crimson light. From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations; the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind. How does Nature deify us with a few and cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous. The dawn is my Assyria, the sunset and moonrise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams.

Not less excellent, except for our less susceptibility in the afternoon, was the charm, late evening, of a January sunset. The western clouds divided and subdivided themselves into pink flakes modulated with tints of unspeakable softness, and the air had so much life and sweetness that it was a pain to come within doors. What was it that nature would say? Was there no meaning in the live repose of the valley behind the mill, and which Homer or Shakspeare could not re-form for me in words? The leafless trees become spires of flame in the sunset, with the blue east for their background, and the stars of the dead calices of flowers, and every withered stem and stubble rimed with frost, contribute something to the mute music.

The inhabitants of cities suppose that the country landscape is pleasant only half the year. I please myself with the graces of the winter scenery, and believe that we are as much touched by it as by the genial influences of summer. To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before and which shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their glory or gloom on the plains beneath. The state of the crop in the surrounding farms alters the expression of the earth from week to week. The succession of native plants in the pastures and roadsides, which make the silent clock by which time tells the summer hours, will make even the divisions of the day sensible to a keen observer. The tribes of birds and insects, like the plants punctual to their time, follow each other, and the year has room for all. By watercourses, the variety is greater. In July, the blue pontederia or pickerel-weed blooms in large beds in the shallow parts of our pleasant river, and swarms with yellow butterflies in continual motion. Art cannot rival this pomp of purple and gold. Indeed the river is a perpetual gala, and boasts each month a new ornament.

But this beauty of Nature which is seen and felt as beauty, is the least part. The shows of day, the dewy morning, the rainbow, mountains, orchards in blossom, stars, moonlight, shadows in still water, and the like, if too eagerly hunted, become shows merely, and more

us with their unreality. Go out of the house to see the moon, and 't is mere tinsel; it will not please as when its light shines upon your necessary journey. The beauty that shimmers in the yellow afternoons of October, who ever could clutch it? Go forth to find it, and it is gone; it is only a mirage as you look from the windows of diligence.

2. The presence of a higher, namely, of the spiritual element is essential to its perfection. The high and divine beauty which can be loved without effeminacy, is that which is found in combination with the human will. Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue. Every natural action is graceful. Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine. We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual. It is his. Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will. He may divest himself of it; he may creep into a corner, and abdicate his kingdom, as most men do; but he is entitled to the world by his constitution. In proportion to the energy of his thought and will, he takes up the world into himself. "All those things for which men plough, build, and sail, obey virtue;" said Sallust. "The winds and waves," said Gibbon, "are always on the side of the ablest navigators." So are the sun and moon and all the stars of heaven. When a noble act is done—perchance in a scene of great natural beauty; when Leónidas and his three hundred martyrs consume one day in dying, and the sun and moon come each and look upon them once in the steep defile of Thermopylae; when Arnold Winkelried, in the high Alps under the shadow of the avalanche, gathers in his side a sheaf of Austrian spears to break the line for his comrades; are not these heroes entitled to add the beauty of the scene to the beauty of the deed? When the bark of Columbus nears the shore of America; before it the beach lined with savages, fleeing out of all their huts of cane; the sea behind; and the purple mountains of the Indian Archipelago around, can we separate the man from the living picture? Does not the New World clothe his form with her palm-groves and savannahs as if with drapery? Ever does natural beauty steal in like air, and envelop great actions. When Sir Harry Vane was dragged up the Tower-hill, sitting on a sled, to suffer death as the champion of the English laws, one of the multitude cried out to him, "You never sate on so glorious a seat." Charles II, to intimidate the citizens of London, caused the patriot Lord Russell to be drawn in an open coach through the principal streets of the city on his way to the scaffold. "But," his biographer says, "the multitude imagined they saw liberty and virtue sitting by his side." In private places, among sordid objects, an act of truth or heroism seems at once to draw to itself the sky as its temple, the sun as its candle. Nature stretches out her arms to embrace man, only let his thoughts be of equal greatness. Willingly does she follow his steps with the rose and the violet, and bend her lines of grandeur and grace; to the decoration of her darling child. Only let his thoughts be of equal scope, and the frame will suit the picture. A virtuous man is in unison with her works, and makes the central figure of the visible sphere. Homer, Pindar, Socrates, Phocion, associate themselves fitly in our memory with the geography and climate of Greece. The visible heavens and earth sympathize with Jesus. And in common life whosoever has seen a person of powerful character and happy genius, will have remarked how easily he took all things along with him—the persons, the opinions, and the day, and nature became ancillary to a man.

3. There is still another aspect under which the beauty of the world may be viewed, namely, as it becomes an object of the intellect. Beside the relation of things to virtue, they have a relation to thought. The intellect searches out the absolute order of things as the

stand in the mind of God, and without the colors of affection. The intellectual and the active powers seem to succeed each other, and the exclusive activity of the one generates the exclusive activity of the other. There is something unfriendly in each to the other, but they are like the alternate periods of feeding and working in animals; each prepares and will be followed by the other. Therefore does beauty, which, in relation to actions, as we have seen, comes unsought, and comes because it is unsought, remain for the apprehension and pursuit of the intellect; and then again, in its turn, of the active power. Nothing divine dies. All good is eternally reproductive. The beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation.

All men are in some degree impressed by the face of the world; some men even to delight. This love of beauty is Taste. Others have the same love in such excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is Art.

The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, a miniature. For although the works of nature are innumerable and all different, the result of the expression of them all is similar and single. Nature is a sea of forms radically alike and even unique. A leaf, a sunbeam, a landscape, the ocean, make an analogous impression on the mind. What is common to them all—that perfectness and harmony, is beauty. The standard of beauty is the entire circuit of natural forms—the totality of nature; which the Italian expressed by defining beauty “il più nell’ uno.” Nothing is quite beautiful alone; nothing beautiful in the whole. A single object is only so far beautiful as it suggests this universal grace. The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus in art does Nature work through the will of a man filled with the beauty of her first works.

The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty. This element I call an ultimate end. No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty. Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. God is the all-fair. Truth and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All. But beauty in nature is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory good. It must stand as a part, and not as yet the last or highest expression of the final cause of Nature.

#### IV

### LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE IS a third use which Nature subserves to man. Nature is the vehicle of thought, and a simple, double, and three-fold degree.

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of spirit.

1. Words are signs of natural facts. The use of natural history is to give us aid

supernatural history; the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the beings and changes of the inward creation. Every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted*; *Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression*, the crossing of a line; *supercilious*, the raising of the eyebrow. We say the *heart* to express emotion, the *head* to denote thought; and *thought* and *emotion* are words borrowed from sensible things, and now appropriated to spiritual nature. Most of the process by which this transformation is made, is hidden from us in the remote time when language was framed; but the same tendency may be daily observed in children. Children and savages use only nouns or names of things, which they convert into verbs, and apply to analogous mental acts.

2. But this origin of all words that convey a spiritual import—so conspicuous a fact in the history of language—is our least debt to nature. It is not words only that are emblematic; it is things which are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. An enraged man is a lion, a cunning man is a fox, a firm man is a rock, a learned man is a torch. A lamb is innocence; a snake is subtle spite; flowers express to us the delicate affections. Light and darkness are our familiar expression for knowledge and ignorance; and heat for love. Visible distance behind and before us, is respectively our image of memory and hope.

Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour and is not reminded of the flux of all things? Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence. Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life wherein, as in a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine. This universal soul he calls Reason: it is not mine, or thine, or his, but we are its; we are its property and men. And the blue sky in which the private earth is buried, the sky with its eternal calm, and full of everlasting orbs, is the type of Reason. That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself. And man in all ages and countries embodies it in his language as the FATHER.

It is easily seen that there is nothing lucky or capricious in these analogies, but that they are constant, and pervade nature. These are not the dreams of a few poets, here and there; but man is an analogist, and studies relations in all objects. He is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him. And neither can man be understood without these objects, nor these objects without man. All the facts in natural history taken by themselves, have no value, but are barren, like a single sex. But marry it to human history, and it is full of life. Whole floras, all Linnæus', and Buffon's volumes, are dry catalogues of facts; but the most trivial of these facts, the habit of a plant, the organs, the work, or noise of an insect, applied to the illustration of a fact in intellectual philosophy, or in any way associated to human nature, affects us in the most lively and agreeable manner. The seed of a plant—to what affecting analogies in the nature of man is that little fruit made use of, in all discourse, up to the voice of Paul, who calls the human corpse a seed—"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." The motion of the earth round its axis and round the sun, makes the day and the year. These are certain amounts of brute light and heat. But is there no intent of an analogy between man's life and the seasons? And do the seasons

gain no grandeur or pathos from that analogy? The instincts of the ant are very unimportant, considered as the ant's; but the moment a ray of relation is seen to extend from it to man, and the little drudge is seen to be a monitor, a little body with a mighty heart, then all its habits, even that said to be recently observed, that it never sleeps, become sublime.

Because of this radical correspondence between visible things and human thought, savages, who have only what is necessary, converse in figures. As we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols. The same symbols are found to make the origin of elements of all languages. It has moreover been observed, that the idioms of all languages approach each other in passages of the greatest eloquence and power. And as this is the first language, so is it the last. This immediate dependence of language upon nature, the conversion of an outward phenomenon into a type of somewhat in human life, never loses its power to affect us. It is this which gives that piquancy to the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or backwoodsman, which all men relish.

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When the simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires—the desire of riches, of pleasure, of power, and of praise—and duplicity and falsehood take place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. Hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation who for a short time believe and make others believe that they see and utter truth, who do not of themselves clothe one thought in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature.

But wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God. The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image more or less luminous arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought. Hence, good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made.

These facts may suggest the advantage which the country-life possesses, for a powerful mind, over the artificial and curtailed life of cities. We know more from nature than we can at will communicate. Its light flows into the mind evermore, and we forget its presence. The poet, the orator, bred in the woods, whose senses have been nourished by their fair and appeasing changes, year after year, without design and without heed—shall not lose the

lesson altogether, in the roar of cities or the broil of politics. Long hereafter, amidst agitation and terror in national councils—in the hour of revolution—these solemn images shall reappear in their morning lustre, as fit symbols and words of the thoughts which the passing events shall awaken. At the call of a noble sentiment, again the woods wave, the pine murmurs, the river rolls and shines, and the cattle low upon the mountains, as he saw and heard them in his infancy. And with these forms, the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands.

3. We are thus assisted by natural objects in the expression of particular meanings. But how great a language to convey such pepper-corn informations! Did it need such noble races of creatures, this profusion of forms, this host of orbs in heaven, to furnish man with the dictionary and grammar of his municipal speech? Whilst we use this grand cipher to expedite the affairs of our pot and kettle, we feel that we have not yet put it to its use, neither are we able. We are like travellers using the cinders of a volcano to roast their eggs. Whilst we see that it always stands ready to clothe what we would say, we cannot avoid the question whether the characters are not significant of themselves. Have mountains, and waves, and skies, no significance but what we consciously give them when we employ them as emblems of our thoughts? The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass. "The visible world and the relation of its parts, is the dial-plate of the invisible." The axioms of physics translate the laws of ethics. Thus, "the whole is greater than its part;" "reaction is equal to action;" "the smallest weight may be made to lift the greatest, the difference of weight being compensated by time;" and many the like propositions, which have an ethical as well as physical sense. These propositions have a much more extensive and universal sense when applied to human life, than when confined to their technical use.

In like manner, the memorable words of history and the proverbs of nations consist usually of a natural fact, selected as a picture or parable of a moral truth. Thus: A rolling stone gathers no moss; A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; A cripple in the right way will beat a racer in the wrong; Make hay while the sun shines; 'T is hard to carry a full cup even; Vinegar is the son of wine; The last ounce broke the camel's back; Long-lived trees make their roots first—and the like. In their primary sense these are trivial facts, but we repeat them for the value of their analogical import. What is true of proverbs, is true of all fables, parables and allegories.

This relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men. It appears to men, or it does not appear. When in fortunate hours we ponder this miracle, the wise man doubts if at all other times he is not blind and deaf;

"Can such things be,  
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,  
Without our special wonder?"

for the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own shines through it. It is the standing problem which has exercised the wonder and the study of every



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