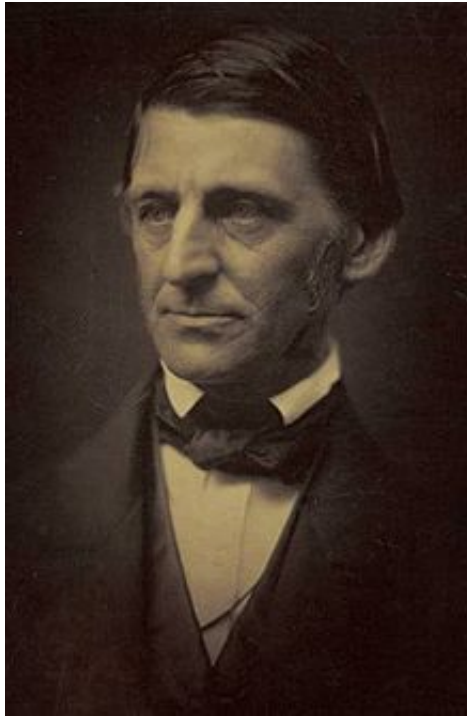


## Ralph Waldo Emerson



The [progress](#) of the [intellect](#) is to the clearer [vision](#) of causes, which neglects surface differences. To the [poet](#), to the [philosopher](#), to the [saint](#), [all](#) things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine.

**[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)** ([May 25 1803](#) – [April 27 1882](#)) was an American philosopher, essayist, and poet.



The man who renounces [himself](#), comes to himself.



He who is in [love](#) is [wise](#) and is becoming wiser, sees newly every time he looks at the object beloved, drawing from it with his [eyes](#) and his [mind](#) those [virtues](#) which it possesses.

## Contents

- Place yourself in the middle of the stream of [power](#) and [wisdom](#) which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to [truth](#), to right and a perfect contentment.

- Only the [great](#) generalizations [survive](#).

- What strength belongs to every plant and animal in nature. The tree or the brook has no duplicity, no pretentiousness, no show. It is, with all its might and main, what it is, and makes one and the same impression and effect at all times.

- The cup of life is not so shallow That we have drained the best That all the wine at once we swallow

And lees make all the rest.

- 1827 journal entry reproduced in *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (1995), p. 82
- **The man who renounces himself, comes to himself.**
  - *The Divinity College Address* (1838) : full title "An Address Delivered Before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15, 1838", given at Harvard Divinity School : as contained in *The Spiritual Emerson: Essential Writings*, Emerson, ed. David M Robinson, Beacon Press

- **The sublime is excited in me by the [great stoical](#) doctrine, Obey thyself.**
  - *The Divinity College Address* (1838)
- **Wherever a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves.**
  - *The Divinity College Address* (1838)
- None believeth in the [soul](#) of man, but only in some man or person old and departed.
  - *The Divinity College Address* (1838)
- **The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity.** The inventor did it because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's.
  - *The Divinity College Address* (1838)
- **He who is in [love](#) is [wise](#) and is becoming wiser, sees newly every time he looks at the object beloved, drawing from it with his eyes and his mind those virtues which it possesses.**
  - [Address on The Method of Nature](#) (1841)
- I fancy I need more than another to speak (rather than write), with such a formidable tendency to the lapidary style. I build my house of boulders.
  - Letter to [Thomas Carlyle](#) (30 October 1841)
- Yet a man may love a paradox, without losing either his wit or his honesty.
  - [Walter Savage Landor](#), from *The Dial*, XII (1841)
- Literature is the effort of man to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his condition.
  - *Walter Savage Landor*, from *The Dial*, XII
- There is always a certain meanness in the argument of conservatism, joined with a certain superiority in its fact.
- The two parties which divide the State, the party of Conservatism and that of Innovation are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made ... Now one, now the other gets the day, and still the fight renews itself as if for the first time, under new names and hot personalities ... Innovation is the salient energy; Conservatism the pause on the last movement.
  - The Conservative, via Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1986) p. 23

- Self-reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God.
  - [The Fugitive Slave Law](#), a lecture in New York City (7 March 1854), *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1904)
- [Slavery](#) is disheartening; but Nature is not so helpless but it can rid itself of every last wrong. But the spasms of nature are centuries and ages and will tax the faith of shortlived men. **Slowly, slowly the Avenger comes, but comes surely.** The proverbs of the nations affirm these delays, but affirm the arrival. They say, "[God](#) may consent, but not forever." The delay of the Divine Justice — this was the meaning and soul of the Greek Tragedy, — this was the soul of their religion.
  - "The Fugitive Slave Law", a lecture in New York City (7 March 1854), *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1904), p. 238
- I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "LEAVES OF GRASS." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little, to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging...

- Classics which at home are drowsily read have a strange charm in a country inn, or in the transom of a [merchant](#) brig.
- I find the Englishman to be him of all men who stands firmest in his shoes. They have in themselves what they value in their horses, — mettle and bottom.
- Solvency is maintained by means of a national debt, on the principle, "If you will not lend me the money, how can I pay you?"
  - *English Traits* (1856), reprinted in *The Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1870), p. 206 ([full text at GoogleBooks](#))
- Nothing can be preserved that is not good.
  - *In Praise of Books* (1860)
- Never read any book that is not a year old.

- If the colleges were better, if they ... had the power of imparting valuable thought, creative principles, truths which become powers, thoughts which become talents, — if they could cause that a mind not profound should become profound, — we should all rush to their gates: instead of contriving inducements to draw students, you would need to set police at the gates to keep order in the in-rushing multitude.
  - *The Celebration of Intellect* (1861)
- **Only the great [generalizations](#) survive.** The sharp words of the Declaration of Independence, lampooned then and since as 'glittering generalities,' have turned out blazing ubiquities that will burn forever and ever.
  - A lecture on 'Books' delivered in 1864; the quoted phrase 'glittering generalities' had been used by [Rufus Choate](#) to describe the declaration of the rights of man in the Preamble to the Constitution (*The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1903-4) Vol. 10, p. 88, note 1)
- A mollusk is a cheap edition [of man] with a suppression of the costlier illustrations, designed for dingy circulation, for shelving in an oyster-bank or among the seaweed.
  - *Power and Laws of Thought* (c. 1870)
- **Poetry teaches the enormous force of a few words, and, in proportion to the inspiration, checks loquacity.**
  - *Parnassus*, Preface (1874)
- There are two classes of poets — the poets by education and practice, these we respect; and poets by nature, these we love.
- What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have yet to be discovered.
  - *Fortune of the Republic* (1878)
- **I hung my verse in the wind  
Time and tide their faults will find.**
  - "The Test", as quoted in *Emerson As A Poet* (1883) by Joel Benton, p. 40
- **Sunshine cannot bleach the snow,  
Nor time unmake what poets know.**
  - "The Test", as quoted in *Emerson As A Poet* (1883) by Joel Benton, p. 40
- **Characters and talents are complementary and supplementary. The world stands by balanced antagonisms.** The more the peculiarities are pressed the better the result. The air would rot without lightning; and without the violence of direction that men have, without bigots, without men of fixed idea, no excitement, no efficiency.

**The novelist should not make any character act absurdly, but only absurdly as seen by others. For it is so in life.** Nonsense will not keep its unreason if you come into the humorist's point of view, but unhappily we find it is fast becoming sense, and we must flee again into the distance if we would laugh.

- *The Natural History of Intellect* (1893)

- **What strength belongs to every plant and animal in nature. The tree or the brook has no duplicity, no pretentiousness, no show. It is, with all its might and main, what it is, and makes one and the same impression and effect at all times.** All the thoughts of a turtle are turtles, and of a rabbit, rabbits. But a man is broken and dissipated by the giddiness of his will ; he does not throw himself into his judgments; his genius leads him one way but 't is likely his trade or politics in quite another.

- *The Natural History of Intellect* (1893)

- Every man is a new method.

- *The Natural History of Intellect* (1893)

- A mind does not receive truth as a chest receives jewels that are put into it, but as the stomach takes up food into the system. It is no longer food, but flesh, and is assimilated. The appetite and the power of digestion measure our right to knowledge. He has it who can use it. As soon as our accumulation overruns our invention or power to use, the evils of intellectual gluttony begin,— congestion of the brain, apoplexy and strangulation.

- *The Natural History of Intellect* (1893)

- **Every man I meet is in some way my superior; and in that I can learn of him.**

- As quoted in *Think*, Vol. 4-5 (1938), p. 32

- You must read [Plato](#). But you must hold him at arm's length and say, 'Plato, you have delighted and edified mankind for two thousand years. What have you to say to me?'

- I read your piece on Plato. Holmes, when you strike at a king, you must kill him.

- Said to a young [Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.](#), who had written a piece critical of Plato in response to his earlier conversation with Emerson, as reported by [Felix Frankfurter](#) in Harlan Buddington Phillips, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces* (1960), p. 59

- I regard it as the irresistible effect of the Copernican astronomy to have made the theological scheme of redemption absolutely incredible

- Quoted in Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, the Mind On Fire* (Univ. of Calif Press 1995), p. 124

- What is there in 'Paradise Lost' to elevate and astonish like Herschel or Somerville?
  - Quoted in Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson, the Mind On Fire* (Univ. of Calif Press 1995), p. 124

- **The horseman serves the horse, The neatherd serves the neat,**

**The [merchant](#) serves the purse,**

**The eater serves his meat; 'T is the day of the chattel, Web to weave, and corn to grind; Things are in the saddle,**

**And ride mankind.**

- "Ode," Complete Works (1883), vol. 9, p. 73

- **Money often costs too much.**

- *The Conduct of Life*, Chapter 3, "Wealth," p. 107

- I am not much an advocate for travelling, and I observe that men run away to other countries because they are not good in their own, and run back to their own because they pass for nothing in the new places. For the most part, only the light characters travel. Who are you that have no task to keep you at home? I have been quoted as saying captious things about travel; but I mean to do justice. .... He that does not fill a place at home, cannot abroad. He only goes there to hide his insignificance in a larger crowd. You do not think you will find anything there which you have not seen at home? The stuff of all countries is just the same. Do you suppose there is any country where they do not scald milk-pans, and swaddle the infants, and burn the brushwood, and broil the fish? What is true anywhere is true everywhere. And let him go where he will, he can only find so much beauty or worth as he carries.

- *The Conduct of Life*, Chapter 4, "Culture," p. 145

- People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character.

- *The Conduct of Life*, Chapter 6, "Worship," p. 214

- Leave this hypocritical prating about the masses. Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence, and need not to be flattered, but to be schooled. I wish not to concede anything to them, but to tame, drill, divide, and break them up, and draw individuals out of them.

- *The Conduct of Life*, Chapter 7, "Considerations by the Way," Complete Works (1883), vol. 6, p. 237

- Respect the child. Be not too much his parent. Trespass not on his solitude.

- ["Education"](#), *Lectures and biographical sketches* (1883), p.116

-  
I wish to write such rhymes as shall not suggest a restraint, but contrariwise the wildest freedom.

- **To different minds, the same world is a hell, and a heaven.**
- When a whole nation is roaring Patriotism at the top of its voice, I am fain to explore the cleanness of its hands and purity of its heart.
- The Religion that is afraid of science dishonours God and commits suicide. It acknowledges that it is not equal to the whole of truth, that it legislates, tyrannizes over a village of God's empires but is not the immutable universal law. Every influx of atheism, of skepticism is thus made useful as a mercury pill assaulting and removing a diseased religion and making way for truth.
- A sect or party is an elegant incognito devised to save a man from the vexation of thinking.
- Four snakes gliding up and down a hollow for no purpose that I could see — not to eat, not for love, but only gliding.
- We are always getting ready to live, but never living.
- **Sometimes a scream is better than a thesis.**

-  
The sky is the daily bread of the eyes.

- **Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted.**
- **I wish to write such rhymes as shall not suggest a restraint, but contrariwise the wildest freedom.**
- Children are all foreigners.
- The best effect of fine persons is felt after we have left their presence.
- Man exists for his own sake and not to add a laborer to the state.
  - Journal, 328, Nov. 15, 1839, [\[1\]](#)
- He needs no library, for he has not done thinking; no church, for he is himself a prophet; no statute book, for he hath the Lawgiver; no money, for he is value itself; no road, for he is at home where he is.

- If I made laws for Shakers or a school, I should gazette every Saturday all the words they were wont to use in reporting religious experience, as "spiritual life," "God," "soul," "cross," etc., and if they could not find new ones next week, they might remain silent.
- It is easy to live for others; everybody does. I call on you to live for yourselves.
- **You shall have joy, or you shall have power, said God; you shall not have both.**
- Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.
- The sky is the daily bread of the eyes.

-  
*Immortality.* I notice that as soon as writers broach this question they begin to quote. I hate quotation. Tell me what you know.

- **Poetry must be new as foam, and as old as the rock.**
- I owed a magnificent day to the [Bhagavad Gita](#). It was the first of books; it was as if an empire spoke to us, nothing small or unworthy, but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligence which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which exercise us.
- *Immortality.* I notice that as soon as writers broach this question they begin to quote. **I hate quotation. Tell me what you know.**
  - May 1849: This is a remark Emerson wrote referring to the unreliability of second hand testimony and worse upon the subject of immortality. It is often taken out of proper context, and has even begun appearing on the internet as "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know" or sometimes just "I hate quotations".
- Blessed are those who have no talent!
- The word *liberty* in the mouth of Mr. Webster sounds like the word *love* in the mouth of a courtesan.
  - 12 February 1851; compare the remark of [John Wilkes](#) about [Samuel Johnson](#), "*Liberty* is as ridiculous in his mouth as *Religion* in mine" (20 March 1778), quoted in *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) by [James Boswell](#).
- I trust a good deal to common fame, as we all must. If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or

church organs, than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods.

- The blazing evidence of immortality is our dissatisfaction with any other solution.
- **I have been writing & speaking what were once called novelties, for twenty five or thirty years, & have not now one disciple. Why? Not that what I said was not true; not that it has not found intelligent receivers but because it did not go from any wish in me to bring men to me, but to themselves.** I delight in driving them from me. What could I do, if they came to me? — they would interrupt and encumber me. This is my boast that I have no school & no follower. I should account it a measure of the impurity of insight, if it did not create independence.

-  
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!

- Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generation 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?
- 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.
- **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.

-  
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.

- 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.
- **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 eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God.**
- Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue.
- Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous.
- **Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.**
- We are, like Nebuchadnezzar, dethroned, bereft of reason, and eating grass like an ox.
- A man is a god in ruins.
- In this distribution of functions, the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state, he is, *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or, still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.
- **The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man.**
- The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates.
- But [genius](#) looks forward: the eyes of men are set in his forehead, not in his

hindhead: man hopes: genius creates.

- Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over influence.
- Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments.
- **Of course, he who has put forth his total strength in fit actions, has the richest return of wisdom.**
- Success treads on every right step. For the instinct is sure, that prompts him to tell his brother what he thinks. He then learns, that in going down into the secrets of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds. He learns that he who has mastered any law in his private thoughts, is master to that extent of all men whose language he speaks, and of all into whose language his own can be translated.
- **Wherever Macdonald sits, there is the head of the table.**
- The soul is subject to dollars.
- In how many churches, by how many prophets, tell me, is man made sensible that he is an infinite Soul; that the earth and heavens are passing into his mind; that he is drinking forever the soul of God?
- The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all.
- I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul.
- **Character is higher than intellect...A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think.**
- What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body; — show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly on an eternal law; and the shop, the plough, and the ledger, referred to the like cause by which light undulates and poets sing; — and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order; there is no trifle; there is no puzzle; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

- Do not yet see, that, if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him.
- **We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.**

Address to the Literary Societies of Dartmouth College (24 July 1838)

- **You will hear every day the maxims of a low prudence.** You will hear, that the first duty is to get land and money, place and name. "What is this [Truth](#) you seek? What is this [Beauty](#)?" men will ask, with derision. If, nevertheless, [God](#) have called any of you to explore truth and beauty, be bold, be firm, be true. **When you shall say, "As others do, so will I. I renounce, I am sorry for it, my early visions; I must eat the good of the land, and let learning and romantic expectations go, until a more convenient season." — then dies the man in you; then once more perish the buds of [art](#), and [poetry](#), and [science](#), as they have died already in a thousand thousand men.** The hour of that choice is the crisis of your history; and see that you hold yourself fast by the intellect. ... Bend to the persuasion which is flowing to you from every object in [Nature](#), to be its tongue to the heart of man, and to show the besotted world how passing fair is wisdom.
- **Explore, and explore, and explore. Be neither chided nor flattered out of your position of perpetual inquiry. Neither dogmatise yourself, nor accept another's dogmatism.** Why should you renounce your right to traverse the star-lit deserts of truth, for the premature comforts of an acre, house, and barn? **Truth also has its roof, and bed, and board.** Make yourself necessary to the world, and mankind will give you bread, and if not store of it, yet such as shall not take away your property in all men's possessions, in all men's affections, in art, in nature, and in [hope](#).
- **[Thought](#) is all [light](#), and publishes itself to the [universe](#). It will speak, though you were dumb, by its own miraculous organ.** It will flow out of your actions, your manners, and your face. It will bring you friendships. It will impledge you to truth by the love and expectation of generous minds. By virtue of the laws of that Nature, which is one and perfect, it shall yield every sincere good that is in the soul, to the scholar beloved of earth and heaven.
- And what fastens attention, in the intercourse of life, like any passage betraying affection between two parties? Perhaps we never saw them before, and never shall meet them again. But we see them exchange a glance, or betray a deep emotion, and we are no longer strangers. We understand them, and take the warmest interest in the development of the romance. All mankind love a lover.

- The ancestor of every action is a thought.
- Heroism feels and never reasons and therefore is always right.
- It was a high counsel that I once heard given to a young person, — "Always do what you are afraid to do."
- All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud, and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason. It is vain to hurry it. By trusting it to the end it shall ripen into truth, and you shall know why you believe.
- Do what we can, summer will have its flies: if we walk in the woods, we must feed mosquitos: if we go a-fishing, we must expect a wet coat.
- **Every revolution was first a [thought](#) in one man's mind and when the same thought occurs in another man, it is the [key](#) to that era.**
- These hints, dropped as it were from sleep and night, let us use in broad day. The student is to read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary. Thus compelled, the Muse of history will utter oracles, as never to those who do not respect themselves. **I have no expectation that any man will read history aright, who thinks that what was done in a remote age, by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day.**
- [Time](#) dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of [facts](#).
- History must be this or it is nothing. Every law which the state enacts indicates a fact in human nature; that is all. We must in ourselves see the necessary reason of every fact, — see how it could and must be.
- **There is properly no history; only biography.**
- [Nature](#) is a mutable cloud, which is always and never the same.
- Why should we make account of time, or of magnitude, or of figure? The [soul](#) knows how to play with them as a young child plays with graybeards and in churches.
- **It is the fault of our rhetoric that we cannot strongly state one fact without seeming to belie some other.**
- There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What [Plato](#) has thought, he may think; what a [saint](#)

has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can [understand](#). Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent.

- All that [Shakespeare](#) says of the king, yonder slip of a boy that reads in the corner feels to be true of himself.
- **The difference between men is in their principle of association.** Some men classify objects by color and size and other accidents of appearance; others by intrinsic likeness, or by the relation of cause and effect. **The [progress](#) of the [intellect](#) is to the clearer [vision](#) of causes, which neglects surface differences. To the [poet](#), to the [philosopher](#), to the [saint](#), [all](#) things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine.** For the eye is fastened on the life, and slights the circumstance. Every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearance.
- When the voice of a prophet out of the deeps of antiquity merely echoes to him a sentiment of his infancy, a prayer of his youth, he then pierces to the truth through all the confusion of tradition and the caricature of institutions. Rare, extravagant spirits come by us at intervals, who disclose to us new facts in nature. I see that men of God have, from time to time, walked among men and made their commission felt in the heart and soul of the commonest hearer.
- I am ashamed to see what a shallow village tale our so-called History is.
- Broader and deeper we must write our annals, from an ethical reformation, from an influx of the ever new, ever sanative conscience, if we would trulier express our central and wide-related nature, instead of this old chronology of selfishness and pride to which we have too long lent our eyes. Already that day exists for us, shines in on us at unawares, but the path of [science](#) and of letters is not the way into nature. The idiot, the Indian, the child, and unschooled farmer's boy, stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read, than the dissector or the antiquary.

[Full text online](#)

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To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius.

-  
Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

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Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

- **God will not have his work made manifest by cowards**
- **I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may.** The sentiment they instil is of more value than any thought they may contain. **To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius.** Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, — and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.
- A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. **In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty.**
- There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that **envy is ignorance**; that **imitation is suicide**; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.
- **We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents.**
- **Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.** Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so.
- **Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.** Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. **The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.**
- It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.
- **Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather**

**immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.** Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world.

- **Truth is handsomer than the affectation of love. Your goodness must have some edge to it, — else it is none.** The doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction of the doctrine of love when that pules and whines. I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door-post, *Whim*. I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation. Expect me not to show cause why I seek or why I exclude company.
- Virtues are, in the popular estimate, rather the exception than the rule. There is the man and his virtues. Men do what is called a good action, as some piece of courage or charity, much as they would pay a fine in expiation of daily non-appearance on parade. Their works are done as an apology or extenuation of their living in the world, — as invalids and the insane pay a high board. Their virtues are penances. I do not wish to expiate, but to live. My life is for itself and not for a spectacle.
- Ordinarily, every body in society reminds us of somewhat else, or of some other person. Character, reality, reminds you of nothing else; it takes place of the whole creation. The man must be so much, that he must make all circumstances indifferent. Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design; — and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. A man Caesar is born, and for ages after we have a Roman Empire. Christ is born, and millions of minds so grow and cleave to his genius, that he is confounded with virtue and the possible of man. An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man ... and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.

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These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.

- **A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.'** — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? [Pythagoras](#) was misunderstood, and [Socrates](#),

and [Jesus](#), and [Luther](#), and [Copernicus](#), and [Galileo](#), and [Newton](#), and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

- In this pleasing contrite wood-life which God allows me, let me record day by day my honest thought without prospect or retrospect, and, I cannot doubt it, it will be found symmetrical, though I mean it not and see it not. **My book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects.**
- **These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.** Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied, and it satisfies nature, in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time. This should be plain enough. Yet see what strong intellects dare not yet hear God himself, unless he speak the phraseology of I know not what [David](#), or [Jeremiah](#), or [Paul](#). We shall not always set so great a price on a few texts, on a few lives. We are like children who repeat by rote the sentences of grandames and tutors, and, as they grow older, of the men of talents and character they chance to see, — painfully recollecting the exact words they spoke; afterwards, when they come into the point of view which those had who uttered these sayings, they understand them, and are willing to let the words go; for, at any time, they can use words as good when occasion comes. If we live truly, we shall see truly. It is as easy for the strong man to be strong, as it is for the weak to be weak. When we have new perception, we shall gladly disburden the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish. When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook and the rustle of the corn.
- **You take the way from man, not to man. All persons that ever existed are its forgotten ministers.** Fear and hope are alike beneath it. There is somewhat low even in hope. In the hour of vision, there is nothing that can be called gratitude, nor properly joy. The soul raised over passion beholds identity and eternal causation, perceives the self-existence of Truth and Right, and calms itself with knowing that all things go well.

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Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree in which it enters into all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain.

- **Life only avails, not the having lived.** Power ceases in the instant of repose; it resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim.
- **Inasmuch as the soul is present, there will be power not confident but agent.** To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which relies, because it works and is. Who has more obedience than I masters me, though he should not raise his finger. Round him I must revolve by the gravitation of spirits. **We fancy it rhetoric, when we speak of eminent virtue. We do not yet see that virtue is Height, and that a man or a company of men, plastic and permeable to principles, by the law of nature must overpower and ride all cities, nations, kings, rich men, poets, who are not.**  
This is the ultimate fact which we so quickly reach on this, as on every topic, the resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE. **Self-existence is the attribute of the Supreme Cause, and it constitutes the measure of good by the degree in which it enters into all lower forms. All things real are so by so much virtue as they contain.**
- Power is in nature the essential measure of right. Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdoms which cannot help itself. The genesis and maturation of a planet, its poise and orbit, the bended tree recovering itself from the strong wind, the vital resources of every animal and vegetable, are demonstrations of the self-sufficing, and therefore self-relying soul.
- But now we are a mob. Man does not stand in awe of man, nor is his genius admonished to stay at home, to put itself in communication with the internal ocean, but it goes abroad to beg a cup of water of the urns of other men. We must go alone. **I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching.**
- **Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will.**
- It may be a question whether machinery does not encumber; whether we have not lost by refinement some energy, by a Christianity entrenched in establishments and forms, some vigor of wild virtue. For every Stoic was a Stoic; but in Christendom where is the Christian?
- **Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places.** At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican, and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions,

but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go.

- **Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.** Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now. Greatness appeals to the future. If I can be firm enough to-day to do right, and scorn eyes, I must have done so much right before as to defend me now. **Be it how it will, do right now. Always scorn appearances, and you always may. The force of character is cumulative.**
- **Character teaches above our wills.** Men imagine that they communicate their virtue or vice only by overt actions, and do not see that virtue or vice emit a breath every moment.  
**There will be an agreement in whatever variety of actions, so they be each honest and natural in their hour. For of one will, the actions will be harmonious, however unlike they seem.** These varieties are lost sight of at a little distance, at a little height of thought. One tendency unites them all. **The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks.** See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency.
- **Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities.**
- **I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me, and the heart appoints. If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions.** If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. **I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth.** Does this sound harsh to-day? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and, if we follow the truth, it will bring us out safe at last.
- **In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance, and shalt sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations.** A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. **Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.**

- The man in the street does not know a [star](#) in the [sky](#).
- Nothing can bring you [peace](#) but yourself.

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- **I think that our popular [theology](#) has gained in decorum, and not in [principle](#), over the [superstitions](#) it has displaced. But men are better than this [theology](#).** Their daily life gives it the lie. Every ingenuous and aspiring [soul](#) leaves the doctrine behind him in his own [experience](#); and **all men feel sometimes the falsehood which they cannot demonstrate. For men are wiser than they know.** That which they hear in schools and pulpits without after-thought, if said in conversation, would probably be questioned in silence. If a man dogmatize in a mixed company on Providence and the divine laws, he is answered by a silence which conveys well enough to an observer the dissatisfaction of the hearer, but his incapacity to make his own statement.
  - A statement in this passage is sometimes paraphrased: "**Men are better than their theology.**"
- **Every excess causes a defect; every defect an excess. Every sweet hath its sour; every evil its good.** Every faculty which is a receiver of pleasure has an equal penalty put on its abuse. It is to answer for its moderation with its life. For every grain of wit there is a grain of folly. For every thing you have missed, you have gained something else; and for every thing you gain, you lose something. If riches increase, they are increased that use them. If the gatherer gathers too much, nature takes out of the man what she puts into his chest; swells the estate, but kills the owner. Nature hates monopolies and exceptions.
- **The [universe](#) is represented in every one of its particles. Every thing in nature contains all the powers of nature.** Every thing is made of one hidden stuff; as the naturalist sees one type under every metamorphosis, and regards a horse as a running man, a fish as a swimming man, a bird as a flying man, a tree as a rooted man. Each new form repeats not only the main character of the type, but part for part all the details, all the aims, furtherances, hindrances, energies, and whole system of every other. Every occupation, trade, art, transaction, is a compend of the world, and a correlative of every other. Each one is an entire emblem of human life; of its good and ill, its trials, its enemies, its course and its end. And each one must somehow accommodate the whole man, and recite all his destiny.  
**The world globes itself in a drop of dew.**
- [Human labor](#), through all its forms, from the sharpening of a stake to the construction of a city or an epic, is one immense illustration of the perfect

compensation of the universe. The absolute balance of Give and Take, the doctrine that every thing has its price, — and if that price is not paid, not that thing but something else is obtained, and that it is impossible to get any thing without its price, — is not less sublime in the columns of a ledger than in the budgets of states, in the laws of light and darkness, in all the action and reaction of nature. I cannot doubt that the high laws which each man sees implicated in those processes with which he is conversant, the stern ethics which sparkle on his chisel-edge, which are measured out by his plumb and foot-rule, which stand as manifest in the footing of the shop-bill as in the history of a state, — do recommend to him his trade, and though seldom named, exalt his business to his imagination.

- **The league between [virtue](#) and [nature](#) engages all things to assume a hostile front to vice.** The beautiful laws and substances of the world persecute and whip the traitor. He finds that things are arranged for truth and benefit, but **there is no den in the wide world to hide a rogue. Commit a crime, and the earth is made of glass.** Commit a crime, and it seems as if a coat of snow fell on the ground, such as reveals in the woods the track of every partridge and fox and squirrel and mole. You cannot recall the spoken word, you cannot wipe out the foot-track, you cannot draw up the ladder, so as to leave no inlet or clew. Some damning circumstance always transpires. The laws and substances of nature — water, snow, wind, gravitation — become penalties to the thief.  
**On the other hand, the law holds with equal sureness for all right action. Love, and you shall be loved.** All love is mathematically just, as much as the two sides of an algebraic equation. The good man has absolute good, which like fire turns every thing to its own nature, so that you cannot do him any harm; but as the royal armies sent against Napoleon, when he approached, cast down their colors and from enemies became friends, so disasters of all kinds, as sickness, offence, poverty, prove benefactors: —

"Winds blow and waters roll  
Strength to the brave, and power and  
deity,

Yet in themselves are nothing."

**The good are befriended even by weakness and defect.** As no man had ever a point of pride that was not injurious to him, so no man had ever a defect that was not somewhere made useful to him.

- **Our strength grows out of our weakness.** The indignation which arms itself with secret forces does not awaken until we are pricked and stung and sorely assailed. **A great man is always willing to be little.** Whilst he sits on the cushion of advantages, he goes to sleep. When he is pushed, tormented, defeated, he

has a chance to learn something; he has been put on his wits, on his manhood; he has gained facts; learns his ignorance; is cured of the insanity of conceit; has got moderation and real skill. The wise man throws himself on the side of his assailants. It is more his interest than it is theirs to find his weak point. The wound cicatrizes and falls off from him like a dead skin, and when they would triumph, lo! he has passed on invulnerable. Blame is safer than praise. I hate to be defended in a newspaper. As long as all that is said is said against me, I feel a certain assurance of success. But as soon as honeyed words of praise are spoken for me, I feel as one that lies unprotected before his enemies. **In general, every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor.**

- **Men suffer all their life long, under the foolish superstition that they can be cheated. But it is as impossible for a man to be cheated by any one but himself, as for a thing to be and not to be at the same time.** There is a third silent party to all our bargains. The nature and soul of things takes on itself the guaranty of the fulfilment of every contract, so that honest service cannot come to loss. If you serve an ungrateful master, serve him the more. Put God in your debt. Every stroke shall be repaid. The longer the payment is withholden, the better for you; for compound interest on compound interest is the rate and usage of this exchequer.

**The history of persecution is a history of endeavours to cheat nature, to make water run up hill, to twist a rope of sand. It makes no difference whether the actors be many or one, a [tyrant](#) or a [mob](#).** A mob is a society of bodies voluntarily bereaving themselves of reason, and traversing its work. The mob is man voluntarily descending to the nature of the beast. Its fit hour of activity is night. Its actions are insane like its whole constitution. It persecutes a principle; it would whip a right; it would tar and feather justice, by inflicting fire and outrage upon the houses and persons of those who have these. It resembles the prank of boys, who run with fire-engines to put out the ruddy aurora streaming to the stars. **The inviolate spirit turns their spite against the wrongdoers. The martyr cannot be dishonored.** Every lash inflicted is a tongue of fame; every prison, a more illustrious abode; every burned book or house enlightens the world; every suppressed or expunged word reverberates through the earth from side to side. **Hours of sanity and consideration are always arriving to communities, as to individuals, when the truth is seen, and the martyrs are justified.**

Thus do all things preach the indifferency of circumstances. The man is all. Every thing has two sides, a good and an evil. Every advantage has its tax. I learn to be content. **But the doctrine of compensation is not the doctrine of indifferency.** The thoughtless say, on hearing these representations, — What boots it to do well? there is one event to good and evil; if I gain any good, I must pay for it; if I lose any good, I gain some other; all actions are indifferent.

**There is a deeper fact in the soul than compensation, to wit, its own nature.**

The soul is not a compensation, but a life. **The soul is.** Under all this running sea of circumstance, whose waters ebb and flow with perfect balance, lies the aboriginal abyss of real Being. Essence, or God, is not a relation, or a part, but the whole. Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up all relations, parts, and times within itself. Nature, truth, virtue, are the influx from thence. Vice is the absence or departure of the same.

- We feel defrauded of the retribution due to evil acts, because the criminal adheres to his vice and contumacy, and does not come to a crisis or judgment anywhere in visible nature. There is no stunning confutation of his nonsense before men and angels. **Has he therefore outwitted the [law](#)? Inasmuch as he carries the malignity and the lie with him, he so far deceases from nature.** In some manner there will be a demonstration of the wrong to the understanding also; but should we not see it, this deadly deduction makes square the eternal account.

**Neither can it be said, on the other hand, that the gain of [rectitude](#) must be bought by any loss. There is no penalty to [virtue](#); no penalty to wisdom; they are proper additions of being.** In a virtuous action, I properly *am*; in a virtuous act, I add to the world; I plant into deserts conquered from Chaos and Nothing, and see the [darkness](#) receding on the limits of the horizon. There can be no excess to [love](#); none to [knowledge](#); none to [beauty](#), when these attributes are considered in the [purest](#) sense. **The [soul](#) refuses limits, and always affirms an [Optimism](#), never a [Pessimism](#).**

His life is a progress, and not a station. His instinct is trust. **Our [instinct](#) uses "more" and "less" in application to man, of the *presence of the soul*, and not of its absence; the brave man is greater than the coward; the true, the benevolent, the wise, is more a man, and not less, than the fool and [knave](#).**

There is no tax on the good of virtue; for that is the incoming of [God](#) himself, or absolute existence, without any comparative. Material good has its tax, and if it came without desert or sweat, has no root in me, and the next wind will blow it away. **But all the good of nature is the soul's, and may be had, if paid for in nature's lawful coin, that is, by labor which the heart and the head allow.** I no longer wish to meet a good I do not earn, for example, to find a pot of buried gold, knowing that it brings with it new burdens. **I do not wish more external goods, — neither possessions, nor honors, nor powers, nor persons.** The gain is apparent; the tax is certain. But there is no tax on the knowledge that the compensation exists, and that it is not desirable to dig up treasure. **Herein I rejoice with a serene eternal peace. I contract the boundaries of possible mischief. I learn the wisdom of [St. Bernard](#), — "Nothing can work me damage except myself; the harm that I sustain I carry about with me, and never am a real sufferer but by my own fault."**

- I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new.
- Thou art to me a delicious torment.
- **The only way to have a friend is to be one.**
- Almost all people descend to meet.
- Happy is the house that shelters a friend!
- A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud.
- A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.
- Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort.
- The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one.
- I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them.
- My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me. By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one.
- In skating over thin ice our safety is in our speed.
- Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great.
- Tomorrow will be like today. Life wastes itself whilst we are preparing to live.
- **Every violation of truth is not only a sort of suicide in the liar, but is a stab at the health of human society.**

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Valor consists in the power of self-recovery.

- **Valor consists in the power of self-recovery**, so that a man cannot have his flank turned, cannot be out-generalled, but put him where you will, he stands.
- Beware when the great God lets loose a thinker on this planet.

- One man's justice is another's injustice; one man's beauty another's ugliness; one man's wisdom another's folly.
- Nature abhors the old, and old age seems the only disease; all others run into this one.
- Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.
- Circles, like the soul, are neverending and turn round and round without a stop
  - This adage had previously appeared, identically worded, in [Coleridge's](#) *The Statesman's Manual* (1816)
- **Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing.**
- **Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us, or we find it not.** The best of beauty is a finer charm than skill in surfaces, in outlines, or rules of art can ever teach, namely, a radiation from the work of art of human character, — a wonderful expression through stone, or canvas, or musical sound, of the deepest and simplest attributes of our nature, and therefore most intelligible at last to those souls which have these attributes.
- **Beauty will not come at the call of a legislature**, nor will it repeat in England or America its history in Greece. It will come, as always, unannounced, and spring up between the feet of brave and earnest men.
- For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem, — a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing.
- We are [symbols](#), and inhabit symbols.
- [Language](#) is the archives of [history](#) ... Language is fossil [poetry](#).
- Those who are esteemed umpires of taste are often persons who have acquired some knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures, and have an inclination for whatever is elegant; but if you inquire whether they are beautiful souls, and whether their own acts are like fair pictures, you learn that they are selfish and sensual.

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To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is [wisdom](#).

- Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in.
- The Indian who was laid under a curse, that the wind should not blow on him, nor

water flow to him, nor fire burn him, is a type of us all. The dearest events are summer-rain, and we the Para coats that shed every drop. Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us.

- **To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is [wisdom](#).**
- **We do what we must, and call it by the best names we can.**
- A man is a golden impossibility. The line he must walk is a hair's breadth. The wise through excess of wisdom is made a fool.
- Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them.
- The years teach much which the days never know.
- Of what use is genius, if the organ is too convex or too concave and cannot find a focal distance within the actual horizon of human life?
- Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you could look with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds of figures performing complex dramas, with tragic and comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups and downs of fate, — and meantime it is only puss and her tail. How long before our masquerade will end its noise of tambourines, laughter, and shouting, and we shall find it was a solitary performance?
- I know that the world I converse with in the city and in the farms, is not the world I think. I observe that difference, and shall observe it. One day I shall know the value and law of this discrepance. But I have not found that much was gained by manipular attempts to realize the world of thought.
- **[Dream](#) delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. [Life](#)** is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus.
- The only gift is a portion of thyself.
- Let us draw a lesson from nature, which always works by short ways. When the fruit is ripe, it falls.
- Nature is always consistent, though she feigns to contravene her own laws. She keeps her laws, and seems to transcend them. She arms and equips an animal to find its place and living in the earth, and at the same time she arms and equips another animal to destroy it.

- **Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats, and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right and a perfect contentment.**
- Every actual State is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too well. What satire on government can equal the severity of censure conveyed in the word *Politic*, which now for ages has signified *cunning*, intimating that the State is a trick?
- **The less [government](#) we have, the better, — the fewer laws, and the less confided [power](#).** The antidote to this abuse of formal Government, is, the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual.
- We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy.
- [Money](#), which represents the prose of life, and which is hardly spoken of in parlors without an apology, is, in its effects and laws, as beautiful as roses.
- **Every man is wanted and no man is wanted much.**
- **The reward of a thing well done is to have done it.**
- I am afraid the remark is too honest, and comes from the same origin as the maxim of the tyrant, "If you would rule the world quietly, you must keep it amused." I notice too, that the ground on which eminent public servants urge the claims of popular education is fear: "This country is filling up with thousands and millions of voters, and you must educate them to keep them from our throats."
- Is not every man sometimes a [radical](#) in [politics](#)? Men are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious. They are conservatives after dinner, or before taking their rest; when they are sick, or aged. In the morning, or when their intellect or their conscience has been aroused; when they hear music, or when they read poetry, they are radicals.

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[Time](#) the ruined bridge has swept  
 Down the dark stream which seaward creeps...

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 We set to-day a votive [stone](#);  
 That [memory](#) may their [deed](#) [redeem](#),  
 When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

- Each the herald is who wrote His rank, and quartered his own coat.

**There is no king nor sovereign state  
That can fix a [hero's](#) rate.**

- I saw men go up and down, In the country and the town, With this tablet on their neck,—

'[Judgement](#) and a judge we seek.'

Not to monarchs they repair, Nor to learned jurist's chair; But they hurry to their peers, To their kinsfolk and their dears; Louder than with speech they pray,—

'What am I? companion, say.'

- Each to each a looking-glass, Reflects his figure that doth pass. Every wayfarer he meets What himself declared repeats, What himself confessed records, Sentences him in his words; The form is his own corporal form,

And his thought the penal worm.

**Yet shine forever virgin minds,**

**Loved by stars and the purest winds,** Which, o'er passion throned sedate, Have not hazarded their state; Disconcert the searching spy, Rendering to a curious eye The durance of a granite ledge To those who gaze from the sea's edge.

**It is there for benefit; It is there for purging light; There for purifying storms;  
And its depths reflect all forms; It cannot parley with the mean,— Pure by  
impure is not seen. For there's no sequestered grot, Lone mountain tarn, or  
isle forgot,**

**But [Justice](#), journeying in the sphere,**

**Daily stoops to harbour there.**

- Good-bye, proud world! I'm going home:  
Thou art not my friend, and I'm not thine.
- For what are they all, in their high conceit,  
When man in the bush with God may meet?
- Nor knowest thou what argument Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent: All are  
needed by each one,

Nothing is fair or good alone.

- I wiped away the weeds and foam, And fetched my sea-born treasures home; But

the poor, unsightly, noisome things Had left their beauty on the shore

With the sun, and the sand, and the wild uproar.

- Announced by all the trumpets of the sky Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields, Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air Hides hills and woods, the river and the heaven,

And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.

- And when his hours are numbered, and the world Is all his own, retiring, as he were not, Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,

The frolic architecture of the snow.

- **Life is too short to waste The critic bite or cynic bark, Quarrel, or reprimand; 'Twill soon be dark; Up! mind thine own aim, and**

**God speed the mark!**

- For there's no rood has not a star above it; The cordial quality of pear or plum Ascends as gladly in a single tree, As in broad orchards resonant with bees; And every atom poises for itself,

And for the whole.

- But all sorts of things and weather Must be taken in together To make up a year, And a sphere.

- Talents differ; all is well and wisely put; If I cannot carry forests on my back, Neither can you crack a nut.

- **Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why This charm is wasted on the earth and sky, Tell them, dear, that, if eyes were made for seeing,**

**Then beauty is its own excuse for Being.**

- Whoso walketh in solitude, And inhabiteth the wood, Choosing light, wave, rock, and bird, Before the money-loving herd, Into that forester shall pass

From these companions power and grace.

- For nature beats in perfect tune, And rounds with rhyme her every rune, Whether she work in land or sea, Or hide underground her alchemy. Thou canst not wave

thy staff in air, Or dip thy paddle in the lake, But it carves the bow of beauty there,  
And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake.

- Olympian bards who sung Divine Ideas below, Which always find us young,  
And always keep us so.

- Give all to love; Obey thy heart; Friends, kindred, days, Estate, good fame, Plans,  
credit, and the muse;

Nothing refuse.

- Though thou loved her as thyself, As a self of purer clay, Tho' her parting dims  
the day, Stealing grace from all alive, Heartily know, When half-gods go,  
The gods arrive.

- But these young scholars who invade our hills, Bold as the engineer who fells the  
wood, And travelling often in the cut he makes, Love not the flower they pluck,  
and know it not,

And all their botany is Latin names.

- **By the rude bridge that arched the flood, Their flag to April's breeze  
unfurled, Here once the embattled farmers stood,**

**And fired the shot heard round the world.**

- **By the rude [bridge](#) that arched the flood,  
Their [flag](#) to [April's](#) breeze unfurled,  
[Here once](#) the [embattled farmers](#) stood,  
And fired [the shot heard round the world](#).**

The [foe](#) long since in [silence](#) slept;  
Alike the [conqueror](#) silent sleeps;  
And [Time](#) the ruined bridge has swept  
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,  
We set to-day a votive [stone](#);  
That [memory](#) may their [deed redeem](#),  
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

[Spirit](#), that made those [heroes dare](#),  
To [die](#), and leave their [children free](#),

Bid Time and [Nature](#) gently spare  
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

- Hast thou named all the birds without a gun;  
Loved the wood-rose, and left it on its stalk.
- Pass in, pass in, the angels say, In to the upper doors; Nor count compartments  
of the floors, But mount to Paradise

By the stairway of surprise.

- I like a church, I like a cowl, I love a prophet of the soul, And on my heart monastic  
aisles Fall like sweet strains or pensive smiles; Yet not for all his faith can see,  
Would I that cowed churchman be. Why should the vest on him allure,

Which I could not on me endure?

- Not from a vain or shallow thought  
His awful Jove young Phidias brought.
- Out from the heart of Nature rolled  
The burdens of the Bible old.
- The hand that rounded Peter's dome, And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,  
Wrought in a sad sincerity, Himself from God he could not free; He builded better  
than he knew,

The conscious stone to beauty grew.

- Earth proudly wears the Parthenon  
As the best gem upon her zone.
- The world is upheld by the veracity of good men: they make the earth  
wholesome.
- He is great who is what he is from Nature, and who never reminds us of others.
- When nature removes a great man, people explore the horizon for a successor;  
but none comes, and none will. His class is extinguished with him. In some other  
and quite different field the next man will appear.
- Every hero becomes a bore at last.
- It costs a beautiful person no exertion to paint her image on our eyes; yet how  
splendid is that benefit! It costs no more for a wise soul to convey his quality to  
other men.

- Great geniuses have the shortest biographies.
  - *Plato; or, The Philosopher*
- Things added to things, as statistics, civil history, are inventories. Things used as language are inexhaustibly attractive.
  - *Plato; or, The Philosopher*
- **Keep cool: it will be all one a hundred years hence.**
  - *Montaigne; or, The Skeptic*
- Is not marriage an open question, when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution wish to get out, and such as are out wish to get in?
  - *Montaigne; or, The Skeptic*
- Thought is the property of him who can entertain it, and of him who can adequately place it.
  - *Shakespeare; or, The Poet*
- What point of morals, of manners, of economy, of philosophy, of religion, of taste, of the conduct of life, has he not settled? What mystery has he not signified his knowledge of? What office, or function, or district of man's work, has he not remembered? What king has he not taught state, as Talma taught Napoleon? What maiden has not found him finer than her delicacy? What lover has he not outloved? What sage has he not outseen? What gentleman has he not instructed in the rudeness of his behavior?
  - *Shakespeare; or, The Poet*
- Act, if you like,—but you do it at your peril. Men's actions are too strong for them. Show me a man who has acted, and who has not been the victim and slave of his action. What they have done commits and enforces them to do the same again. The first act, which was to be an experiment, becomes a sacrament. The fiery reformer embodies his aspiration in some rite or covenant, and he and his friends cleave to the form, and lose the aspiration. The Quaker has established Quakerism, the Shaker has established his monastery and his dance; and, although each prates of spirit, there is no spirit, but repetition, which is anti-spiritual.
  - "Goethe; or, the Writer" p. 271
- In actions of enthusiasm, this drawback appears: but in those lower activities, which have no higher aim than to make us more comfortable and more cowardly, in actions of cunning, actions that steal and lie, actions that divorce the speculative from the practical faculty, and put a ban on reason and sentiment, there is nothing else but drawback and negation.

- "Goethe; or, the Writer," pp. 271-272
- The measure of action is the sentiment from which it proceeds. The greatest action may easily be one of the most private circumstance.
  - "Goethe; or, the Writer," p. 272
- How can he [today's writer] be honored, when he does not honor himself; when he loses himself in the crowd; when he is no longer the lawgiver, but the sycophant, ducking to the giddy opinion of a reckless public.
  - "Goethe; or, the Writer," p. 274

-  
The real and lasting victories are those of peace, and not of war.

- You have just dined, and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.
- Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it.
- Men are what their mothers made them.
- Whatever limits us we call Fate.
- In different hours, a man represents each of several of his ancestors, as if there were seven or eight of us rolled up in each man's skin, — seven or eight ancestors at least, — and they constitute the variety of notes for that new piece of music which his life is.
- Nature magically suits the man to his fortunes, by making these the fruit of his character.
- That what we seek we shall find; what we flee from flees from us.
- All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.
- As there is a use in medicine for poisons, so the world cannot move without rogues.
- Coal is a portable climate.
- The world is his, who has money to go over it.
- Art is a jealous mistress.
- If a man own land, the land owns him.

- You can never do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.
- I have been quoted as saying captious things about travel; but I mean to do justice. I think, there is a restlessness in our people, which argues want of character. **All educated Americans, first or last, go to Europe;** — perhaps, because it is their mental home, as the invalid habits of this country might suggest. An eminent teacher of girls said, "the idea of a girl's education, is, whatever qualifies them for going to Europe." Can we never extract this tape-worm of Europe from the brain of our countrymen?
- Solitude, the safeguard of mediocrity, is to genius the stern friend.
- The measure of a master is his success in bringing all men round to his opinion twenty years later.
- **The real and lasting victories are those of peace, and not of war.**
- We are born believing. A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples.
- The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons.
- Shallow men believe in luck, believe in circumstances...Strong men believe in cause and effect.
- People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character.
- I wish that life should not be cheap, but sacred. I wish the days to be as centuries, loaded, fragrant.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- Make yourself necessary to somebody. Do not make life hard to any.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- Conversation is an art in which a man has all mankind for his competitors, for it is that which all are practising every day while they live.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- Beauty without grace is the hook without the bait.
- Things are pretty, graceful, rich, elegant, handsome, but, until they speak to the imagination, not yet beautiful.

- If I could put my hand on the north star, would it be as beautiful? The sea is lovely, but when we bathe in it, the beauty forsakes all the near water. For the imagination and senses cannot be gratified at the same time.
- Whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves, but deal in our privacy with the last honesty and truth.
- Our chief want in life, is somebody who shall make us do what we can.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- There is always a best way of doing everything, if it be to boil an egg. Manners are the happy ways of doing things; each once a stroke of genius or of love, — now repeated and hardened into usage. They form at last a rich varnish, with which the routine of life is washed, and its details adorned.
- Fine manners need the support of fine manners in others, and this is a gift interred only by the self.
- The highest compact we can make with our fellow, is, — "Let there be truth between us two forevermore".
- 'Tis very certain that each man carries in his eye the exact indication of his rank in the immense scale of men, and we are always learning to read it. **A complete man should need no auxiliaries to his personal presence.**

["Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England" \(1867\), published in \*The Atlantic Monthly\* \(October 1883\)](#)

- **There are always two parties, the party of the Past and the party of the Future: the Establishment and the Movement.** At times the resistance is reanimated, the schism runs under the world and appears in Literature, Philosophy, Church, State and social customs.
- **The key to the period appeared to be that the mind had become aware of itself. Men grew reflective and intellectual. There was a new consciousness.** The former generations acted under the belief that a shining social prosperity was the beatitude of man, and sacrificed uniformly the citizen to the State. The modern mind believed that the nation existed for the individual, for the guardianship and education of every man. This idea, roughly written in revolutions and national movements, in the mind of the philosopher had far more precision; the individual is the world.  
**This perception is a sword such as was never drawn before. It divides and detaches bone and marrow, soul and body, yea, almost the man from himself.** It is the age of severance, of dissociation, of freedom, of analysis, of

detachment. Every man for himself. The public speaker disclaims speaking for any other; he answers only for himself. The social sentiments are weak; the sentiment of patriotism is weak; veneration is low; the natural affections feebler than they were. People grow philosophical about native land and parents and relations. There is an universal resistance to ties and ligaments once supposed essential to civil society. The new race is stiff, heady and rebellious; they are fanatics in freedom; they hate tolls, taxes, turnpikes, banks, hierarchies, governors, yea, almost laws. They have a neck of unspeakable tenderness; it winces at a hair. They rebel against theological as against political dogmas; against mediation, or saints, or any nobility in the unseen. The age tends to solitude. The association of the time is accidental and momentary and hypocritical, the detachment intrinsic and progressive. The association is for power, merely, — for means; the end being the enlargement and independency of the individual.

- The young men were born with knives in their brain, a tendency to introversion, self-dissection, anatomizing of motives.
- **God said, I am tired of kings, I suffer them no more; Up to my ear the morning brings**

### **The outrage of the poor.**

- To-day unbind the captive, So only are ye unbound; Lift up a people from the dust,  
  
Trump of their rescue, sound!
- O tenderly the haughty day Fills his blue urn with fire; One morn is in the mighty heaven,  
  
And one in our desire.
- United States! the ages plead, — Present and Past in under-song, — Go put your creed into your deed,  
  
Nor speak with double tongue.
- I think no virtue goes with size; The reason of all cowardice Is, that men are overgrown, And, to be valiant, must come down  
  
To the titmouse dimension.
- So nigh is grandeur to our dust, So near is God to man,  
  
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,

The youth replies, *I can*.

- England's genius filled all measure Of heart and soul, of strength and pleasure,  
Gave to the mind its emperor, And life was larger than before: Nor sequent  
centuries could hit Orbit and sum of Shakespeare's wit. The men who lived with  
him became

Poets, for the air was fame.

- Nor mourn the unalterable Days  
That Genius goes and Folly stays.
  - [\*In Memoriam E.B.E.\*](#), st. 9
- Fear not, then, thou child infirm,  
There's no god dare wrong a worm.
- He thought it happier to be dead,  
To die for Beauty, than live for bread.
- Wilt thou seal up the avenues of ill?  
Pay every debt as if God wrote the bill.
- Deep in the man sits fast his fate  
To mould his fortunes, mean or great.
- For the prevision is allied Unto the thing so signified; Or say, the foresight that  
awaits

Is the same Genius that creates.

- Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days, Muffled and dumb like barefoot  
dervishes, And marching single in an endless file,

Bring diadems and fagots in their hands.

- It is time to be old, To take in sail: - The god of bounds, Who sets to seas a shore,  
Came to me in his fatal rounds,

And said: 'No more!

- Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime.
- Though love repine, and reason chafe, There came a voice without reply, — "'Tis  
man's perdition to be safe,

When for the truth he ought to die."

- For what avail the plough or sail,  
Or land or life, if freedom fail?
- If the red slayer think he slays, Or if the slain think he is slain, They know not well  
the subtle ways

I keep, and pass, and turn again.

- [Brahma](#), st. 1.
- Composed in July 1856 this poem is derived from a major passage of the [Bhagavad Gita](#), one of the most popular of Hindu scriptures, and portions of it were likely a paraphrase of an existing translation. Though titled "[Brahma](#)" its expressions are actually more indicative of the Hindu concept "[Brahman](#)"
- Far or forgot to me is near; Shadow and sunlight are the same; The vanished  
gods to me appear;

And one to me are shame and fame.

- They reckon ill who leave me out; When me they fly, I am the wings; I am the  
doubter and the doubt;

And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

- In the vaunted works of Art  
The master stroke is Nature's part.
- Ever from one who comes to-morrow  
Men wait their good and truth to borrow.
- The music that can deepest reach,  
And cure all ill, is cordial speech.
- Some of your hurts you have cured, And the sharpest you still have survived, But  
what torments of grief you endured

From evils which never arrived!

- [Borrowing From the French](#)
- A ruddy drop of manly blood The surging sea outweighs, The world uncertain  
comes and goes;

The lover rooted stays.

- God may forgive sins, he said, but awkwardness has no forgiveness in heaven or  
earth.

- We boil at different degrees.
- The best university that can be recommended to a man of ideas is the gauntlet of the mobs.
- The ornament of a house is the friends who frequent it.
- The days .... come and go like muffled and veiled figures, sent from a distant friendly party; but they say nothing, and if we do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away.
- Can anybody remember when the times were not hard and money not scarce?
- A man builds a fine house; and now he has a master, and a task for life: he is to furnish, watch, show it, and keep it in repair, the rest of his days.
- Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.
- Men love to wonder, and that is the seed of our science.
  - *Works and Days* - generally misquoted as "Men love to wonder, and that is the seed of science."
- 'Tis the good reader that makes the good book; in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear.
- Don't waste yourself in rejection, nor bark against the bad, but chant the beauty of the good.
- We do not count a man's years until he has nothing else to count.
- There is no knowledge that is not power.
- Hitch your wagon to a star.
- The end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization.
- The most advanced nations are always those who navigate the most.
- The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of the cities, nor the crops - no, but the kind of man the country turns out.
- **Every genuine work of [art](#) has as much reason for being as the earth and the sun.**
- Nature paints the best part of a picture, carves the best parts of the statue, builds the best part of the house, and speaks the best part of the oration.

- A masterpiece of art has in the mind a fixed place in the chain of being, as much as a plant or a crystal.
- Consider what you have in the smallest chosen library. A company of the wisest and wittiest men that could be picked out of all civil countries, in a thousand years, have set in best order the results of their learning and wisdom. The men themselves were hid and inaccessible, solitary, impatient of interruption, fenced by etiquette; but the thought which they did not uncover to their bosom friend is here written out in transparent words to us, the strangers of another age.
- Science does not know its debt to imagination.
- Alcohol, hashish, prussic acid, strychnine are weak dilutions. The surest poison is time.
- Music is the poor man's Parnassus.
- The imagination is not a talent of some men but is the health of every man.
- **Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy.**
- I have heard with admiring submission the experience of the lady who declared "that the sense of being perfectly well-dressed gives a feeling of inward tranquility which religion is powerless to bestow".
- Don't say things. What you *are* stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.
  - *Social Aims*
  - Sometimes condensed to "What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say."
- This world belongs to the energetic.
- Every really able man, in whatever direction he work,—a man of large affairs, an inventor, a statesman, an orator, a poet, a painter,—if you talk sincerely with him, considers his work, however much admired, as far short of what it should be.
- Every artist was first an amateur.
  - *Progress of Culture* (see also: [Art](#))
- Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force, that thoughts rule the world. No hope so bright but is the beginning of its own fulfilment.
  - *Progress of Culture* Phi Beta Kappa Address (July 18, 1867)
- Shall I tell you the secret of the true scholar? It is this: Every man I meet is my

master in some point, and in that I learn of him.

- A good symbol is the best argument, and is a missionary to persuade thousands.
- Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions. No dignity, no learning, no force of character, can make any stand against good wit.
- The perception of the comic is a tie of sympathy with other men.
- **Every book is a quotation; and every house is a quotation out of all forests and mines and stone-quarries; and every man is a quotation from all his ancestors.**
- In the highest [civilization](#), the [book](#) is still the highest delight. He who has once known its satisfactions is provided with a resource against calamity.
- **Each man is a [hero](#) and an oracle to somebody.**
- The heroic cannot be the common, nor can the common be the heroic.
- The gods sell anything and to everybody at a fair price.
- Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it.
- The profit of books is according to the sensibility of the reader. **The profoundest thought or passion sleeps as in a mine until an equal mind and heart finds and publishes it.**
- **A great man quotes bravely, and will not draw on his [invention](#) when his [memory](#) serves him with a [word](#) just as good.**
- **[Genius](#) borrows nobly.** When [Shakespeare](#) is charged with debts to his authors, Landor replies: "Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon [dead](#) bodies and brought them into [life](#)".
- **By [necessity](#), by proclivity, and by [delight](#), we all [quote](#).**
- Now shall we say that only the first men were well alive, and the existing generation is invalidated and degenerate? ... A more subtle and severe criticism might suggest that some dislocation has befallen the race; that men are off their centre; that multitudes of men do not live with Nature, but behold it as exiles. People go out to look at sunrises and sunsets who do not recognize their own quietly and happily, but know that it is foreign to them. As they do by books, so they *quote* the sunset and the star, and do not make them theirs. Worse yet, they live as foreigners in the world of truth, and quote thoughts, and thus disown them. Quotation confesses inferiority.

- **We cannot overstate our debt to the [Past](#), but the [moment](#) has the supreme claim.** The Past is for us; but the sole terms on which it can become ours are its subordination to the [Present](#). **Only an inventor knows how to borrow, and every man is or should be an inventor. We must not tamper with the organic motion of the [soul](#).**
- There are many things of which a wise man might wish to be ignorant.
- To live without duties is obscene.
- There are men who astonish and delight, men who instruct and guide. Some men's words I remember so well that I must often use them to express my thought. Yes, because I perceive that we have heard the same truth, but they have heard it better.

Quotes reported in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 10th ed. (1919).

- Nor knowest thou what argument Thy life to thy neighbor's creed has lent. All are needed by each one;

Nothing is fair or good alone.

- I wiped away the weeds and foam, I fetched my sea-born treasures home; But the poor, unsightly, noisome things Had left their beauty on the shore,

With the sun and the sand and the wild uproar.

- Earth laughs in flowers to see her boastful boys Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs; Who steer the plough, but can not steer their feet

Clear of the grave.

- Good bye, proud world! I'm going home;  
Thou art not my friend; I am not thine.
- For what are they all in their high conceit,  
When man in the bush with God may meet?
- If eyes were made for seeing,  
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being.
- Things are in the saddle,  
And ride mankind.
  - *Ode*, inscribed to W. H. Channing
- Olympian bards who sung Divine ideas below, Which always find us young

And always keep us so.

- Heartily know, When half-gods go,

The gods arrive.

- Love not the flower they pluck and know it not,  
And all their botany is Latin names.

- The silent organ loudest chants  
The master's requiem.

- By the rude bridge that arched the flood, Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,  
Here once the embattled farmers stood,

And fired the shot heard round the world.

◦ *Hymn sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument*

- What potent blood hath modest May!

- And striving to be man, the worm  
Mounts through all the spires of form.

- And every man, in love or pride,  
Of his fate is ever wide.

- None shall rule but the humble,  
And none but Toil shall have.

- Oh, tenderly the haughty day  
Fills his blue urn with fire.

◦ *Ode, Concord, July 4, 1857*

- Go put your creed into your deed,  
Nor speak with double tongue.

◦ *Ode, Concord, July 4, 1857*

- So nigh is grandeur to our dust, So near is God to man, When Duty whispers low,  
Thou must,

The youth replies, I can!

- Whoever fights, whoever falls,  
Justice conquers evermore.

- Nor sequent centuries could hit

Orbit and sum of Shakespeare's wit.

- Born for success he seemed, With grace to win, with heart to hold,  
With shining gifts that took all eyes.
- Nor mourn the unalterable Days  
That Genius goes and Folly stays.
- Fear not, then, thou child infirm;  
There's no god dare wrong a worm.
- He thought it happier to be dead,  
To die for Beauty, than live for bread.
- Wilt thou seal up the avenues of ill?  
Pay every debt, as if God wrote the bill!
- Too busy with the crowded hour to fear to live or die.
- Though love repine, and reason chafe, There came a voice without reply,— "'T is  
man's perdition to be safe  
When for the truth he ought to die."
- For what avail the plough or sail,  
Or land or life, if freedom fail?
- If the red slayer think he slays, Or if the slain think he is slain, They know not well  
the subtle ways  
I keep and pass and turn again.
- Go where he will, the wise man is at home,  
His hearth the earth, his hall the azure dome.
- Seeing only what is fair, Sipping only what is sweet,  
Thou dost mock at fate and care.
- Thou animated torrid-zone.
- In the vaunted works of Art  
The master-stroke is Nature's part. 5.
- If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the  
huge world will come round to him. 6.

- *Nature, Addresses and Lectures. The American Scholar*
- The hearing ear is always found close to the speaking tongue.
- A creative economy is the fuel of magnificence.
  - *English Traits, Aristocracy*
- The manly part is to do with might and main what you can do.
  - *The Conduct of Life, Wealth*
- The alleged power to charm down insanity, or ferocity in beasts, is a power behind the eye.
  - *The Conduct of Life, Behaviour*
- Fine manners need the support of fine manners in others.
  - *The Conduct of Life, Behaviour*
- Good is a good doctor, but Bad is sometimes a better.
  - *Considerations by the Way*
- God may forgive sins, he said, but awkwardness has no forgiveness in heaven or earth.
- Raphael paints wisdom, Handel sings it, Phidias carves it, Shakespeare writes it, Wren builds it, Columbus sails it, Luther preaches it, Washington arms it, Watt mechanizes it.
  - *Society and Solitude, Art*
- Hitch your wagon to a star.
- I should as soon think of swimming across Charles River when I wish to go to Boston, as of reading all my books in originals when I have them rendered for me in my mother tongue.
- Never read any book that is not a year old.
- We do not count a man's years until he has nothing else to count.
- Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy.
  - *Letters and Social Aims, Social Aims*
- By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote.
  - *Quotation and Originality*
- The virtues of society are the vices of the saints.
- The wise through excess of wisdom is made a fool.

- In skating over thin ice our safety is our speed.
- Shallow men believe in luck.
- Heroism feels and never reasons and therefore is always right.
- The faith that stands on authority is not faith.
- God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose.
- His heart was as great as the world, but there was no room in it to hold the memory of a wrong.
- We boil at different degrees.
- Can anybody remember when the times were not hard and money not scarce?
- Self-trust is the first secret of success.
- Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it.
  - *Letters and Social Aims, Quotation and Originality*
- When Shakespeare is charged with debts to his authors, Landor replies, "Yet he was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life."
  - *Letters and Social Aims, Quotation and Originality*
- In fact, it is as difficult to appropriate the thoughts of others as it is to invent.
  - *Letters and Social Aims, Quotation and Originality*
- I see that sensible men and conscientious men all over the world were of one religion.
  - *Lectures and Biographical Sketches, The Preacher*
- There is no great and no small To the Soul that maketh all; And where it cometh, all things are;  
  
And it cometh everywhere.
- Time dissipates to shining ether the solid angularity of facts.
- Nature is a mutable cloud which is always and never the same.
- A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world.
- All mankind love a lover.

- A ruddy drop of manly blood The surging sea outweighs; The world uncertain comes and goes,

The lover rooted stays.

- Every sweet has its sour; every evil its good.
- Thou art to me a delicious torment.
- The condition which high friendship demands is ability to do without it.
- And with Cæsar to take in his hand the army, the empire, and Cleopatra, and say, "All these will I relinquish if you will show me the fountain of the Nile."
- The reward of a thing well done is to have done it.
- A nation never falls but by suicide.
  - The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and solitude

## Disputed [Edit](#)

- The next thing to saying a good thing yourself, is to quote one
  - This sentence has no known source in Emerson's works, but its general sense does closely match the tenor of Emerson's essay "Quotation and Originality", in particular the sentence "Next to the originator of a good sentence is the first quoter of it." (listed above).
  - Gow, *Foundations for Human Engineering* (1931) contains the following passage: "I have the backing of Emerson, for it was he, I believe, who said that the next thing to saying a good thing yourself, if to quote one". It is not clear whether Gow is purporting to quote Emerson *verbatim*, or merely to paraphrase his work.
- Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful; for beauty is God's handwriting—a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower, and thank God for it as a cup of blessing.
  - Though attributed to Emerson in Edwards' *A Dictionary of Thoughts* (1908), p. 37, this quote originates in *Politics for the People* (1848) by [Charles Kingsley](#).
- To laugh often and much; To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

- As soon as there is life there is danger.
  - Actually from *De l'Allemagne* (1813) by [Madame de Stael](#).
- Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door.
- *Variation*: If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he builds his house in the woods the world will make a beaten path to his door.
  - Investigations have failed to confirm this in Emerson's writings (John H. Lienhard. ["A better moustrap"](#), *Engines of our Ingenuity*). Also reported as a misattribution in Paul F. Boller, Jr., and John George, *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, & Misleading Attributions* (1989), p. 25. Note that Emerson did say, as noted above, "I trust a good deal to common fame, as we all must. If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs, than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods".
- When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.
  - Widely attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson on the internet; however, a presumably definitive source of Emerson's works at <http://www.rwe.org> fails to confirm any occurrence of this phrase across his works. This phrase is found in remarks attributed to [Charles A. Beard](#) in Arthur H. Second, "Condensed History Lesson", *Readers' Digest*, February 1941, p. 20; but the origin has not been determined. Possibly confused with a passage in "Illusions" in which Emerson discusses his experience in the "Star Chamber": "our lamps were taken from us by the guide, and extinguished or put aside, and, on looking upwards, I saw or seemed to see the night heaven thick with stars glimmering more or less brightly over our heads, and even what seemed a comet flaming among them. All the party were touched with astonishment and pleasure. Our musical friends sung with much feeling a pretty song, "The stars are in the quiet sky," &c., and I sat down on the rocky floor to enjoy the serene picture. Some crystal specks in the black ceiling high overhead, reflecting the light of a half-hid lamp, yielded this magnificent effect."
- Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.
  - Attributed to Emerson in *The Gift of Depression : Twenty-one Inspirational Stories Sharing Experience, Strength, and Hope* (2001) by John F. Brown, p. 56, no prior occurrence of this a statement has been located; it seems to be derived from one which occurs in [The Alchemist](#) (1988) by [Paulo Coelho](#), p. 22: **When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.**

- What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.
  - As [reported by Quoteinvestigator on January 11, 2011](#) the quote appeared in "Meditations in Wall Street" (1940) by Wall Street trader Henry Stanley Haskins, "a Wall Street trader with a checkered background. The phrase was misattributed because the true author's name was initially withheld. In addition, the assignment of the maxim to a more prestigious individual, e.g., Emerson or Thoreau, made it more attractive and more believable as a nugget of wisdom." Emerson made a number of similar statements — in "The American Scholar," for example, he says "Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds" — which probably increased the likelihood of misattribution.
- The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.
  - Although ascribed to Emerson in 2000 by H. Jackson' Brown Jr in his book "Life's Instructions for Wisdom, Success, and Happiness" as well as numerous on-line sources, this quote may be derived from similar statements first made by [Leo Rosten](#), including the following words delivered at the National Book Awards held in New York: "The purpose of life is not to be happy—but to matter, to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you lived at all."
- For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness.
  - No known source in Emerson's works; first found as a piece of anonymous folk-wisdom in a 1936 newspaper column:

Every minute you are angry, you lose 60 seconds of happiness.

- Junius, "[Office Cat](#)", *The Daily Freeman* [Kingston, NY] (30 December 1936), p. 6
- **So gentle that he seemed only reading to one person, and yet his voice was so distinct that it filled the room in its lowest tones.**
  - [Charles Bradlaugh](#), of Emerson's manner, as quoted in *Ralph Waldo Emerson, His Life, Writings, and Philosophy* (1881) by George Willis Cooke, p. 179
- That which struck me most, as distinguishing him from most other human beings, is [nobility](#). He is a born nobleman.
  - [Fredrika Bremer](#), *The homes of the New World: impressions of America* (1853), p. 154

- **It was a maxim with him that power is not so much shown in talent or in successful performance as in *tone*; the absolute or the victorious tone ...** He disliked limitations, and welcomed whatever promised to get rid of them, without always inquiring very closely what was left when they were removed.
  - [James Elliot Cabot](#), *A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1887)
- **He is the most original mind America has hitherto produced.**
  - [George Gilfillan](#), *A Gallery of Literary Portraits* (1845), p. 301
- He is a [perfect](#) swimmer on the [ocean](#) of modern existence. He dreads no tempest, for he is sure that calm will follow it.
  - [Herman Grimm](#), 1861 essay, as quoted in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Philosopher and Poet* (1881) by Alfred Hudson Guernsey, p. 16
- [A] great original thinker, who had his earthly abode at the opposite extremity of our village. ... People that had lighted on a new thought or a thought that they fancied new, came to Emerson, as the finder of a glittering gem hastens to a lapidary.
  - [Nathaniel Hawthorne](#), *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846)
- [N]o one has had so steady and constant, and above all so natural, a vision of what we require and what we are capable of in the way of aspiration and independence.
  - [Henry James](#), *Partial Portraits* (1888), p. 9
- He liked to taste but not to drink—least of all to become intoxicated.
  - [Henry James](#), *Partial Portraits* (1888), p. 25
- Emerson: German philosophy that in crossing the great water took some on underway.
  - [Karl Kraus](#), *Dicta and Contradicta*, J. McVity, trans. (2001), #757
- What, then, is his secret? Is it not that he out-Yankees us all? that his range includes us all? that he is equally at home with the potato-disease and original sin, with pegging shoes and the Over-soul? that, as we try all trades, so has he tried all cultures? and above all, that his [mysticism](#) gives us a counterpoise to our super-practicality?
  - [James Russell Lowell](#), *My Study Windows* (1871), "[Emerson, the Lecturer](#)"
- **There is no man living to whom, as a writer, so many of us feel and thankfully acknowledge so great an indebtedness for ennobling impulses.**
  - [James Russell Lowell](#), *My Study Windows* (1871), "Emerson, the Lecturer"
- There was a majesty about him beyond all other men I have known, and he

habitually dwelt in that ampler and diviner air to which most of us, if ever, only rise in spurts.

- Modern technics, even apart from the special arts that it fostered, had a cultural contribution to make in its own right. Just as science underlined the respect for fact, so technics emphasized the importance of function: in this domain, as Emerson pointed out, the beautiful rests on the foundation of the necessary.
  - [Lewis Mumford](#), *Technics and Civilization* (1934) Ch. 7 "Assimilation of the Machine"
- **A cheery, child-like soul, impervious to the evidence of evil.**
  - [George Santayana](#), "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy" in *University of California Chronicle*, Vol. 13 (1911), p. 366
- Emerson's prose is full of poetry, and his poems are light and air. ... His modes of expression, like his epithets, are imaginative.
  - [Edmund Clarence Stedman](#), *Poets of America* (1885), pp. 134 & 164
- We are told of his mode of preparing an essay,—of the slow-growing medley of thoughts on a topic, at last brought out and strung at random, like a child's variegated beads.
  - [Edmund Clarence Stedman](#), *Poets of America* (1885), p. 160
- He began where many poets end, seeking at once the upper air, the region of pure thought and ideality. ... Emerson was the freest and most ideal of them all, and what came to him by inheritance or prophetic forecast he gave like a victor.
  - [Edmund Clarence Stedman](#), *Poets of America* (1885), pp. 176–177
- Even when provocation was great, his [satire](#) was so gentle and genial that it warmed even its object.
  - [Charles Johnson Woodbury](#), *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1890), p. 43