

## EMERSON.

THE grasses have scarcely taken root on Emerson's grave among the pines, yet so instant and continuous has been the discussion of his genius that we already are asking Lowell's question concerning Shakspeare,—Can anything new be said of him? One thing, it seems to me, may be said at least in a new way, and as a clew to his work as a poet. While, of all his brotherhood, he is the radiant exemplar of his own statement, that in spirit "the true poet and the true philosopher are one," nevertheless, of all verse his own shows most clearly that the Method of the poet not only is not one with that of the philosopher, but is in fact directly opposed to it. The poet, as an artist, does not move in the direction which was Emerson's by instinct and selection. The Ideal philosophy scrutinizes every phase of Nature to find the originating sense, the universal soul, the pure identity; it follows Nature's trails to their common beginning, inverting her process of evolution, working back from infinite variety to the primal unity. This, too, is the spirit of the poet,—to find the soul of things. But in method he is an artist: his poetry is an art that imitates Nature's own habit. He works from unity to countless results and formations, from the pure thought to visible symbols, from the ideal to the concrete. As a poet, Emerson found himself in a state, not of distraction, but often of indecision, *between the methods of philosophy and art*. To bear this in mind is to account more readily for the peculiar beauties and deficiencies of his verse,—and thus to accept it as it is, and not without some understanding of its value.

Hermann Grimm recurs to the dispute whether our sage was a poet, a philosopher, or a prophet. The fact is that he was born with certain notes of song; he had the poet's eye and ear, and was a poet just so far as, being a philosopher, he accepted poetry as the expression of thought in its rare and prophetic moods, and just so far as, in exquisite moments, he had the mastery of this form of expression.

Emerson's prose is full of poetry, and his poems are light and air. But this statement, like so many of his own, gives only one side of a truth. His prose is just as full of everyday sense and wisdom; and something different from prose, however sublunary and imaginative, is needed to constitute a poem. His verse, often diamond-like in contrast

with the feldspar of others, at times is ill-cut and beclouded. His prose, then, is that of a wise man, plus a poet; and his verse, by turns, light and twilight, air and vapor. Yet we never feel, as in reading Wordsworth, that certain of his measures are wholly prosaic. He was so careless of ordinary standards, that few of his own craft have held his verse at its worth. It is said that his influence was chiefly, like that of Socrates, upon the sensitive and young, and such is the case with all fresh influences; but I take it that those who have fairly assimilated Emerson's poetry in their youth have been not so much born poets as born thinkers of a poetic cast. It is inevitable, and partakes of growth by exercise, that poets in youth should value a master's sound and color and form, rather than his priceless thought. They are drawn to the latter by the former, or not at all. Yet when poets, even in this day of refinement, have served their technical apprenticeship, the depth and frequent splendor of Emerson's verse grow upon them. They half suspect that he had the finest touch of all when he chose to apply it. It becomes a question whether his discords are those of an undeveloped artist, or the sudden craft of one who knows all art and can afford to be on easy terms with it. I think there is evidence on both sides;—that he had seasons when feeling and expression were in circuit, and others when the wires were down, and that he was as apt to attempt to send a message at one time as at the other. But he suggested the subtilty and swiftness of the soul's reach, even when he failed to sustain it.

I have said that of two poets, otherwise equal, the one who acquires the broadest knowledge will draw ahead of him who only studies his art, and the poet who thinks most broadly and deeply will draw ahead of all. There can be little doubt of Emerson as a thinker, or as a poet for thinkers satisfied with a deep but abstract, and not too varied, range. Yet he did not use his breadth of culture and thought to diversify the purpose, form, symbolism, of his poems. They are mostly in one key. They teach but one lesson; that, to be sure, is the first and greatest of all, but they fail to present it, after Nature's method, in many forms of living and beautiful interest,—to exemplify it in action, and thus bring it within universal sympathy. That this should be so was, I say, inevitable from the field of

Emerson's research,—that of pure rather than of applied philosophy. Thus far, however, he represents Thought in any adjustment of our poetic group, and furthermore,—his thought being independent and emancipatory,—the American conflict with superstition, with servility to inherited usage and opinion.

We shall see that he had himself a noble and comprehensive ideal of what a typical poet should be, and was aware that his own song fell short of it. Still, he called himself a poet, and the consent of the best minds has sustained him in his judgment. His prose alone, as Lowell said, showed that he was essentially a poet; another with reason declared of his spoken essays that they were "not so much lectures as grave didactic poems, theogonies," adorned with "odes" and "eclogues." Thirty years later a cool and subtle writer looks back to find them the "most poetical, the most beautiful productions of the American mind." For once the arbiters agree, except in a question akin to the dispute whether all things consist solely of spirit or solely of matter. Common opinion justified Mr. Sanborn's fine paradox that, instead of its being settled that Emerson could not write poetry, it was settled that he could write nothing else. We know his distaste for convention, his mistrust of "tinkle" and "efficacious rhymes." But his gift lifted him above his will; even while throwing out his grapnel, clinging to prose as the firm ground of his work, he rose involuntarily and with music. And it well may be that at times he wrote verse as an avowal of his nativity, and like a noble privileged to use the language of the court. Certainly he did not restrict himself to the poet's calling with the loyalty of Tennyson and Longfellow. In verse, however careful of his phrase, he was something of a rhapsodist, not apt to gloss his revelations and exhortings with the nice perfection of those others. He must be reviewed as one whose verse and parable and prophecy alike were means to an end,—that end not art, but the enfranchisement and stimulation of his people and his time. When Longfellow, the poet of graceful art and of sympathy as tender as his voice, took his departure, there went up a cry as from a sense of fireside loss. People everywhere dwelt upon the story of his life and recalled his folk-songs. Emerson glided away almost unperceived under the shadow of the popular bereavement. But soon, and still multiplying from the highest sources, tributes to his genius began to appear,—searching, studying, expounding him,—as when a grand nature, an originating force, has ceased to labor for us. This is the best of fame: to impress the selected minds, which redistribute

the effect in steadfast circles of extension. More than his associates, Emerson achieved this fame. He had the great man's intellect, which, according to Landor, "puts in motion the intellect of others." He was, besides, so rare a personage, that one who seeks to examine his writings apart from the facts and conduct of his life, needs must wander off in contemplation of the man himself. Yet anything that others can write of him is poor indeed beside a collect of his own golden sayings. He felt his work to be its own and best interpreter, and of recent authors who have justly held this feeling he doubtless was the chief.

## II.

It is not my province to take part in the discussion of Emerson's philosophy, his system or lack of system. Some notion of this, however, must affect our thoughts of him as a poet, since of all moderns he most nearly fulfilled Wordsworth's inspired prediction, uttered sixty years ago, of the approaching union of the poet and the philosopher. He deemed the higher office that of the poet,—of him who quaffs the brook that flows fast by the oracles,—yet doubtless thought himself not so well endowed with melody and passion as that his teaching should be subordinate to his song. But the latter was always the flowering of his philosophic thought, and it is essential to keep in view the basis of that pure reflection. He looked upon Nature as pregnant with Soul; for him the Spirit always moved upon the face of the waters. The incomprehensible plan was perfect: whatever is, is right. Thus far he knew, and was an optimist with reverent intent. It was in vain to ask him to assert what he did not know, to avow a creed founded upon his hopes. If a theist, with his intuition of an all-pervading life, he no less felt himself a portion of that life, and the sense of omnipresence was so clearly the dominant sense of its attributes, that to call him a theist rather than a pantheist is simply a dispute about terms; to pronounce him a Christian theist is to go beyond his own testimony. Such a writer must be judged by the concurrence of his books; they are his record, and the parol evidence of no associate can weigh against his written manifest for an instant. His writings assure us that he accepted all bibles and creeds for what good there was in them. One thing for him was "certain": "Religions are obsolete when lives do not proceed from them." He saw that "unlovely, nay frightful, is the solitude of the soul which is without God in the world;" but the creeds and dogmas of an-

thropomorphic theology were merely germinal. "Man," thus far, has "made all religions, and will yet make new and even higher faiths."

Emerson, a man of our time, while a transcendentalist, looking inward rather than to books for his wisdom, studied well the past, and earlier sages were the faculty of his school. A latter-day eclectic, he took from all literatures their best and essential. A Platonic idealist, he was not averse to the inductive method of Aristotle; he had the Alexandrian faith and ecstasy, the Epicurean zest and faculty of selection; like the Stoics, he observed morals, heroism, self-denial, and frugality. There is much in his teachings that recalls the beautiful ethics of Marcus Aurelius, and the words of Epictetus, as reported by Arrian. His spiritual leanings never stinted his regard of men and manners. He kept a sure eye on the world; he was not only a philosopher, but the paragon of gentlemen, with something more than the Oriental, the Grecian, or the Gallic, tact. He relished to the full the brave distinctions, the portraiture and tests of Plutarch, and found the best of all good company in the worldly wise, the cheery and comfortable Montaigne. One may almost say that he refined and digested what was good in all philosophies, and nothing more. He would get hold of Swedenborg, the mystic, yet not be Swedenborg exclusively, nor imitate the rhetoric of the Sophists, the pride of the Cynics. From all he learned what each confesses in the end,—the limitations of inquiry,—that the Finite cannot measure, though it may feel, the Infinite. No more would he formulate a philosophy, but within it he could recognize nature, art, taste, morals, laws, religion, and the chance of immortality. When it was said that he had no new system, he thought that he needed none, and was skeptical of classification.

It appears that he found the key to his own nature in Plato, being an idealist first of all. His intuitive faculty was so determined, that ideality and mysticism gave him the surest promise of realities; his own intellect satisfied him of the power of intellect. Plainly hearing an interior voice, he had no doubt that other men were similarly monished. Plato, the guide of his youth, remained his type of philosopher and man. To Plato's works alone should Omar's saying of the Koran be applied: "Burn the libraries, for their value is in this book." Nowhere else was there such a range of speculation. "Out of Plato come all things." And thus he held to the last. "Of Plato," he said, years afterward, "I hesitate to speak, lest there should

be no end. \* \* \* Why should not young men be educated on this book? It would suffice for the tuition of the race." Yet Emerson's philosophy was a greater advance from Neo-Platonism than the Alexandrians were able to make upon the lines indicated by their elemental master. In personal life and bearing, Plotinus, with whom our poet seems to have been most in sympathy, was very closely his prototype. There is first to be noted the curious resemblance between the eclectic, investigating Alexandrian age and our present time; and secondly, it is Plotinus of whom we are told that "He lived at the same time with himself and with others, and the inward activity of his spirit only ceased during his hours of sleep. \* \* \* His written style was close, pregnant, and richer in thought than in words, yet enthusiastic, and always pointing to the main object. He was more eloquent in his oral communications, and was said to be very clever in finding the appropriate word, even if he failed in accuracy on the whole. Besides this, the beauty of his person was increased when discoursing; his countenance was lighted up with genius." Taylor's translation of selections from the Works of Plotinus, published in London, 1834, must have fallen into Emerson's hands, and I am satisfied of their impression upon his mind. As one examines the lives and writings of the two men, the likeness is still more notable, especially with respect to their views of fate, will, ethics, the "higher law," the analysis of the beautiful, and in the ardor with which young students, and many of the elderly and wise, listened to their respective teachings. Emerson was a Plotinus reanimate after the lapse of sixteen centuries of Christianity. He has now, like the Neo-Platonist, "led back the Divine principle within 'him' to the God who is all in all."

To the great thinkers of the past, the New England teacher, without fear or boasting, well might feel himself allied. The accepted great, free of the ordinary bounds of place and time, recognize one another across the vague, like stars of the prime magnitude in the open night. Emerson knew the haps and signs of genius: "Whenever we find a man higher by a whole head than any of his contemporaries, it is sure to come in doubt what are his real works." We cannot say "What is master, and what school." "As for their borrowings and adaptings, they know how to borrow. \* \* \* A great man is one of the affinities, who takes of everything." But they are not above the law of perfect life; virtue, simplicity, absolute sincerity, these are their photosphere. "Live as on a mountain. Let men see, let them know, a real man,

who lives as he was meant to live." To this Roman standard the New Englander subjoined the shrewd, kindly wisdom of his stock and region. He was eminent among those whose common sense is the most telling point to be made against Locke's negation of innate ideas,—whose judgment is so apt that, granting Locke's theory, it can be accounted for only by the modern theory of ideas prenatal and inherited. His written wisdom is more effective than Montaigne's, being less dependent on citations. He knew by instinct what our novelists learn from observation and experience; or is it that they study chiefly their own time and neighborhood, while he sat aloof and with the ages? Thus strong in equipment, sound in heart, and lofty of intellect, we find him revered by his pupils, and without a living peer in the faculty of elevating the purpose of those who listened to his buoyant words. We must confess that a differentiation between master and school, and between members of the school, after awhile became manifest. That such a process was inevitable is plain, when Emerson's transcendental and self-reliant laws of conduct are kept in mind.

One may say, in illustration, that his philosophical method bears to the inductive or empirical a relation similar to that between the poetry of self-expression and the poetry of æsthetic creation,—a relation of the subjective to the objective. The former kind of verse often is the more spontaneous, since it has its birth in the human need for utterance. It is the cry of adolescence and femininity, the resource of sensitive natures in which emotion outvies the sense of external beauty or power. It was the voice of Shakspeare's youth, nor was it ever quieted throughout the restless careers of Byron, Heine, and De Musset. But we accept as the great works of the poets their intellectual and objective creations, wherein the artist has gone beyond his own joy and pain, his narrow intro-vision, to observe, combine, transfigure, the outer world of nature and life. Such the epics, idols, dramas, of the masters. When subjective poetry is the yield of a lofty nature, or of an ideal and rapturous womanhood like Mrs. Browning's, it is a boon and revelation to us all; but when, as too often, it is the spring-rise of a purling, commonplace streamlet, its egotism grows pitiful and repulsive. This lesson has been learned, and now our minor poets, in their fear of it, strive to give pleasure to our sense of the beautiful, and work as artists,—though somewhat too delicately,—rather than to pose as exceptional beings, "among men, but not of them."

As with the subjective poets, so with many

of the transcendental acolytes. The force of Emerson lay in the depth and clearness of his intentions. He gave us the revelation and prophecy of a man among millions. Such a teacher aids the self-development of noble minds; his chief peril is that of nurturing a weaker class that cannot follow where he leads. Some of its enthusiasts will scarcely fail to set too high a value upon their personal impulses. They "still revere," but forget to "still suspect" themselves "in lowliness of heart." For the rest, the down-East instinct is advisory and homiletic; New Englanders are prone to teach, and slower to be taught. Emerson, however, grew to be their superior man, the one to whom all agreed to listen, and from whom all quote. His example, also, has somewhat advanced the art of listening, in which he was so perfect, with forward head and bright, expectant visage. His inculcations were of freedom, of the self-guidance that learns to unlearn and bears away from tradition; yet this, too, will breed false liberty of conceit in minor votaries, whose inward light may do well enough for themselves, yet not suffice for the light of the world. Hence the public, accepting Emerson, has been less tolerant of more than one Emersonian, with his *ego, et rex meus*. After all is said, we must see that our transcendentalists were a zealous, aspiring band of seekers after the true, the beautiful, and the good; what they have lacked in deference they have made up in earnestness and spirituality. There have been exquisite natures among them, upon whom, as indeed upon the genius of his people far and wide, the tonic effect of Emerson's life and precept has been immeasurable. Goethe's declaration of himself that he had been "to the Germans in general, and to the young German poets in particular, their liberator," may, with perfect truth, be applied to Emerson, and to a generation that has thriven on his word. He has taught his countrymen the worth of virtue, wisdom, courage,—above all, to fashion life upon a self-reliant pattern, obeying the dictates of their own souls.

### III.

RECOGNIZING Emerson's high mood as that of a most original poet, I wish chiefly to consider his relations to poetry and the poetic art. His imaginative essays are not poems. Speech is not song; the rarest mosaic lacks the soul of the canvas swept by the brush. The credentials that he presented from time to time, and mostly in that dawn when poets sing if ever, are few and fragment-

ary, but they will suffice. They are the trophies, the wreaths and golden vessels, the *spolia opima*, which he set before the shrine of the goddess. They are the avowal of a rare spirit that there are things which cannot be rendered in prose; that Poetry claims a finer art, a supream utterance, for her service, and that she alone can stamp the coins and bronzes which carry to the future the likeness of her viceroy.

In his verse, Emerson's spiritual philosophy and laws of conduct appear again, but transfigured. Always the idea of Soul, central and pervading, of which Nature's forms are but the created symbols. As in his early discourse he recognized two entities, Nature and the Soul, so to the last he believed Art to be simply the union of Nature with man's will—Thought symbolizing itself through Nature's aid. Thought, sheer ideality, was his sovereign; he was utterly trustful of its guidance. The law of poetic beauty depends on the beauty of the thought, which, perforce, assumes the fittest, and therefore most charming, mode of expression. The key to art is the eternal fitness of things; this is the sure test and solvent. Over and again he asserted his conviction: "Great thoughts insure musical expression. Every word should be the right word. \* \* \* The Imagination wakened brings its own language, and that is always musical. \* \* \* Whatever language the poet uses, the secret of tone is at the heart of the poem." He cites Möller, who taught that the building which was fitted accurately to answer its end would turn out to be beautiful, though beauty had not been intended. (The enforced beauty of even the rudest sailing craft always has seemed to me the most striking illustration of this truth.) In fine, Emerson sees all forms of art symbolizing but one Reason, not one mind, but The Mind that made the world. He refers "all production at last to an aboriginal Power." It is easy to discern that from the first he recognized "the motion and the spirit," which to Wordsworth were revealed only by the discipline of years; but his song went beyond the range of landscape and peasant, touching upon the verities of life and thought. "Brahma" is the presentation of the truth manifest to the oldest and most eastern East, and beyond which the West can never go. How strange that these quatrains could have seemed strange! They reveal the light of Asia, but no less the thought of Plato—who said that in all nations certain minds dwell on the "fundamental Unity," and "lose all being in one Being." Everywhere one stuff, under all forms, this the woven symbolism of the universal Soul, the only reality, the single and subdivided Identity that alone can "keep

and pass and turn again," that is at once the doubter and the doubt, the slayer and the slain, light and shadow, the hither and the yon. Love is but the affinity of its portions, the desire for reunion, the knowledge of soul by soul, to which the eyes of lovers are but windows. Art is the handiwork of the soul, with materials created by itself, building better than it knows, the bloom of attraction and necessity.

Thus far the theory of Emerson's song. It does not follow that he composed upon a theory. At times I think him the first of our lyric poets, his turns are so wild and unexpected. And he was never commonplace, even when writing for occasions. His verse changes unawares from a certain tension and angularity that were congenital, to an ethereal, unhampered freedom, the poetic soul in full glow, the inner music loosed and set at large. Margaret Fuller wrote that his poems were "mostly philosophical, which is not the truest kind of poetry." But this depends upon the measure of its didacticism. Emerson made philosophical poetry imaginative, elevating, and thus gave new evidence that the poet's realm is unbounded. If he sought first principles, he looked within himself for them, and thus portrays himself, not only the penetrative thinker, but the living man, the citizen, the New England villager, whose symbols are drawn from the actual woods and hills of a neighborhood. Certainly he went to rural nature for his vigor, his imagery and adornments. An impassioned sense of its beauty made him the reverse of the traditional descriptive poet. Most poetry of nature justly is termed didactic; most philosophical verse the same. Miss Fuller failed to make distinctions. All feel what didacticism signifies, but let us try to formulate it.

Didacticism is the gospel of half-truths. Its senses are torpid; it fails to catch and convey the soul of truth, which is beauty. Truth shorn of its beauty is tedious and not poetical. We weary of didactic verse, therefore, not because of its truth, but because of its self-delusive falsehood. It flourishes with a dull and prosaic generation. The true poet, as Mrs. Browning saw, is your only truth-teller, because he gives the truth complete in beauty or not at all.

Emerson doubts his power to capture the very truth of nature. Its essence—its beauty—is so elusive; it flees and leaves but a corpse behind; it is the pearly glint of the shells among the bubbles of the latest wave:

"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."

But such poems as the "Forerunners" show how closely he moved, after all, upon the trail of the evading sprite. He seemed, by the first intention, and with an exact precision of grace and aptness, to put in phrases what he saw and felt,—and he saw and felt so much more than others! He had the aboriginal eye, and the civilized sensibility; he caught both the external and the scientific truth of natural things, and their poetic charm withal. As he triumphed over the untruthfulness of the mere verse-maker, and the dullness of the moralist, his instant, sure, yet airy transcripts gave his poems of nature a quality without a counterpart. Some of his measures had at least the flutter of the twig whence the bird has just flown. He did not quite fail of that music music-born,

"—a melody born of melody,  
Which melts the world into a sea.  
Toil could never compass it;  
Art its hight could never hit."

He infused his meditations with the sheen of Day itself,—of

"—one of the charmed days  
When the genius of God doth flow,  
The wind may alter twenty ways,  
A tempest cannot blow;  
It may blow north, it still is warm;  
Or south, it still is clear;  
Or east, it smells like a clover-farm;  
Or west, no thunder fear."

He returns with delight to Nature's blending of her laws of beauty and use, perceiving that she

— "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."

"Woodnotes" is full of lyrical ecstasy and lightsome turns and graces. To assimilate such a poem of nature, or "The Problem," that masterpiece of religion and art, is to feed on holy dew, and to comprehend how the neophytes who were bred upon it find the manna of noontide somewhat rank and in-nutritious. "May-Day" is less lyrical, more plainly descriptive of the growth and meaning of the Spring, but not in any part didactic. It is the record of the poet's training, a match to Wordsworth's portrayal of his subjective communing with nature in youth; its spirit is the same with Lowell's woodland joyousness, one of child-like and unquestioning zest. Finally, this poet's scenic joinery is so true, so mortised with the one apt word,

as where he says that the wings of Time are, "*pie'd* with morning and with night," and the one last word or phrase is so unlooked for, that, as I say, we scarcely know whether all this comes by grace of instinct, or with search and artistic forethought. It seems "the first fine careless rapture"; the labor, which results in the truth of Tennyson's landscape and the pathos of Longfellow's, may be there, but is not to be detected, and in these touches, if not otherwise, he excelled his compeers. His generalizations pertain to the unseen world; viewing the actual, he puts its strength and fineness alike into a line or epithet. He was born with an unrivaled faculty of selection. Monadnoc is the "constant giver," the Titan that "heeds his sky-affairs"; the tiny humming-bee a "voyager of light and noon," a "yellow-breeched philosopher," and again an "animated torrid zone"; the defiant titmouse, an "atom in full breath." For a snow-storm, or the ocean, he uses his broader brush, but once only and well. His minute truth and sense of values are held in honor by his pupils Whitman and Burroughs, our poetic familiars of the field, and by all to whom the seasonable marvels of the pastoral year are not unwelcome or unknown.

Thus keenly Emerson's instinct responded to the beauty of Nature. I have hinted that her secure laws were the chief promoters of his imagination. It coursed along her hidden ways. In this he antedated Tennyson, and was less didactic than Goethe and kindred predecessors. His foresight gave spurs to the intellect of Tyndall and other investigators,—to their ideal faculty, without which no explorer moves from post to outpost of discovery. Correlatively, each wonder-breeding point attained by the experimentalists was also occupied by our eager and learned thinker from the moment of its certainty. Each certainty gave him joy; reasoning *a priori* from his sense of a spiritual Force, the seer anticipated the truths demonstrated by the inductive workers, and expected the demonstration. Even in "The Sphinx," the first poem of his first collection, the conservation of force, the evolution from the primordial atom, are made to subserve his mystical faith in a broad Identity. Here, thirty years before Tennyson made his most compact expression of the central truth,—

"Flower in the crannied wall \* \* \*  
Little flower—but if I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is."

Emerson had put it in this wise :

"Thorough a thousand voices  
Spoke the universal dame:  
'Who telleth one of my meanings,  
Is master of all I am.'"

The reference, in "Bacchus," to the ascent of life from form to form, still remains incomparable for terseness and poetic illumination:

"— I, drinking this,  
Shall hear far Chaos talk with me;  
Kings unborn shall walk with me;  
And the poor grass shall plot and plan  
What it will do when it is man."

And in "Woodnotes" he discoursed of

"— the genesis of things,  
Of tendency through endless ages,  
Of star-dust and star-pilgrimages,  
Of rounded worlds, of space and time,  
Of the old flood's subsiding slime;"

but always thinks of the universal Soul as the only reality,—of creation's process as simply the metamorphosis which

"Melts things that be to things that seem,  
And solid nature to a dream."

Even in the pathetic "Threnody" he stays his anguish with faith in the beneficence of Law. With more passion and less method than afterward gave form to "In Memoriam," he declared that the "mysteries of Nature's heart" were "past the blasphemies of grief." He saw

"— the genius of the whole,  
Ascendant in the primal soul,  
Beckon it when to go and come."

Such a poet was not like to go backward. The "Song of Nature" is his pæan to her verities, still more clearly manifest in his riper years. This superb series of quatrains, cumulative as thunder-heads and fired with lyric glory, will lend its light to whatsoever the poetry of the future has in reserve for us.

It should be noted that Emerson's vision of the sublime in scientific discovery increased his distaste for mere style, and moved him to contentment with the readiest mode of expression. It tempered his eulogy of "Art," and made him draw this contrast: "Nature transcends all moods of thought, and its secret we do not yet find. But a gallery stands at the mercy of our moods, and there is a moment when it becomes frivolous. I do not wonder that Newton, with an attention habitually engaged on the paths of planets and suns, should have wondered what the Earl of Pembroke found to admire in 'stone dolls.'"

Right here we observe (deferring matters of construction) that our seer's limitations as

a poet are indicated by his dependence on out-door nature, and by his failure to utilize those higher symbols of the prime Intelligence which comprise the living, acting, suffering world of man. With a certain pride of reserve, that did not lessen his beautiful deference to individuals, he proclaimed "the advantage which the country life possesses for a powerful mind over the artificial and curtailed life of cities." He justified solitude by saying that great men, from Plato to Wordsworth, did not live in a crowd, but descended into it from time to time as benefactors. Above all he declared—"I am by nature a poet, and therefore must live in the country." But here a Goethe, or De Musset, or Browning might rejoice: "And I am a poet, and need the focal life of the town." If man be the paragon of life on this globe, his works and passions the rarest symbols of the life unseen, then the profoundest study is mankind. Emerson's theorem was a restriction of the poet's liberties. One can name great poets who would have been greater but for the trammels of their seclusion. I believe that Emerson's came from self-knowledge. He kept his range with incomparable tact and philosophy. Poets of a wider franchise—with Shakspeare at their front—have found that genius gains most from Nature during that formative period when one reads her heart, if ever, and that afterward he may safely leave her, as a child his mother, to return from time to time, but still to do his part among the ranks of men.

Emerson makes light of travel for pleasure and observation, but ever more closely would observe the ways of the inanimate world. Yet what are man's works but the works of Nature by one remove? To one poet is given the ear to comprehend the murmur of the forest, to another the sense that times the heart-beats of humanity. Few have had Emerson's inward eye, but it is well that some have not been restricted to it. He clung by attraction, no less than by circumstance, to "a society in which introspection," as Mr. James has shrewdly written, "thanks to the want of other entertainment, played almost the part of a social resource." His verse, in fact, is almost wholly void of the epic and dramatic elements which inform the world's great works of art. Action, characterization, specific sympathy, and passion are wanting in his song. His voice comes "like a falling star" from a skyey dome of pure abstraction. Once or twice, some little picture from life,—a gypsy girl, a scarcely outlined friend or loved one,—but otherwise no personage in his works except, it may be, the poet himself, the Saadi of his introspective song: even

that wise and joyous bard restored in fragments, suggested rather than portrayed. Emerson would be the "best bard, because the wisest," if the wisdom of his song illustrated itself in living types. He knew the human world, none better, and generalized the sum of its attainments,—was gracious, shrewd, and calm,—but could not hold up the mirror and show us to ourselves. He was that unique songster, a poet of fire and vision, quite above the moralist, yet neither to be classed as objective or subjective; he perceived the source of all passion and wisdom, yet rendered neither the hearts of others nor his own. His love poetry is eulogized, but wants the vital grip wherewith his "Concord Fight" and "Boston Hymn" fasten on our sense of manhood and patriotism. It chants of Love, not of the beloved; its flame is pure and general as moon-light and as high-removed. "All mankind love a lover," and it is not enough to discourse upon the philosophy of "Love," "Experience," "Power," "Friendship." Emerson's "Bacchus" must press for him

"—wine, but wine which never grew  
In the belly of the grape."

His deepest yearnings are expressed in that passionate outburst,—the momentary human wail over his dead child,—and in the human sense of lost companionship when he tells us,

"In the long sunny afternoon,  
The plain was full of ghosts."

Oftener he moves apart; his blood is ichor, not our own; his thoughts are with the firmament. We reverence his vocation, and know ourselves unfitted for it. He touches life more nearly in passages that have the acuteness, the practical wisdom of his prose works and days; but these are not his testimonials as a poet. His laying on of hands was more potent; a transmitted heat has gone abroad through the ministry of his disciples, who practice as he preached, and sometimes transcend both his preaching and his practice. All the same, the originator of a force is greater than others who add four-fold to its momentum. They are never so manifestly his pupils as when they are "scarifying" and "sounding and exploring" him, "reporting where they touch bottom and where not," on ground of their own, but with a pleasant mockery of the master's word and wont. There was a semblance between the poets Emerson and Rossetti, first, in the small amount of their lyrical work, and again in the positive influence which each exerted upon his pupils. In quality the Concord seer, and the English

poet who was at once the most spiritual and sensuous of his own school, were wholly unlike. Rossetti was touched with white fire, but dreamed of souls that meet and glow when disembodied. The spirits of his beatified thrill with human passion. Our seer brought something of heaven to earth, while Rossetti yearned to carry life through death to heaven.

The technical features of Emerson's verse correspond to our idea of its meaning. In fact, his view of personal culture also applied to his metrical style. "Manners are not to be directly cultivated. That is frivolous; leave it to children. \* \* \* We must look at the mark, not at the arrow, and perhaps the best rule is Lord Bacon's,—that to attain good forms one only needs not to despise them." Delicate and adroit artisans, in whose eyes poetry is solely a piece of design, may find the awkwardness of Emerson's verse a bar to right comprehension of its frequent beauty and universal purpose. I am not sure but one must be of the poet's own country and breeding to look quite down his vistas and by-paths: for every American has something of Emerson in him, and the secret of the land was in the poet,—the same Americanism that Whitman sees in the farmer, the deck-hand, the snag-toothed hostler, atoning with its humanities for their sins past and present, as for the sins of Harte's gamblers and diggers of the gulch. It may be, too, that other conditions are needed to open the ear to the melody, and to shut out the discords, of Emerson's song. The melody is there, and though the range be narrow, is various within itself. The charm is that of new-world and native wood-notes wild. Not seldom a lyrical phrase is the more taking for its halt,—helped out, like the poet's own speech, by the half-stammer and pause that were wont to precede the rarest or weightiest word of all. The true artist has somewhat to say, and would make his art say it; a curious workman may fail of the spirit of art. One tires, moreover, of artificers who through long lives merely repeat and perfect their method. A few sure lines, bits of essential matter, and, as elder races know, you have the features of a subject,—all that is absolutely valuable and to be expressed.

Among the followers of any art there are those whose compositions are effective in the mass, their treatment broad, the beauty pervasive; again, those who with small constructive feeling are rich in detail, and whose work is interspersed with fine and original touches; lastly, the complete artists, in whom, however vivid their originality and great their special beauties, the general design is always kept in hand. Emerson never felt the strength of



proportion that compels the races to whom art is a religion and a law. He has given many a pang to lovers of the beautiful, who have endured his irreverence by allowing for his supposed disabilities. He satisfied his conscience in the same easy way, declaring that he was from his "very incapacity of mechanical writing" a "chartered libertine." But his speech bewrayeth him. Who sounds one perfect chord can sound again. His greater efforts in verse, as in prose, show that he chose to deprecate the constructive faculty lest it might limit his ease and freedom. And his instinct of personality, not without a pride of its own, made him a nonconformist. 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. But I do not find that his best essays read backward as well as forward; I suspect an art beneath their loose arrangement, and I see at times the proof of continuous heat. His early critic declared that he had not "written one good work, if such a work be one where the whole commands more attention than the parts." But again we see that she too rarely qualified her oracles. At that time he had written poems of which the whole and the parts were at least justly related masterpieces,—lyrical masterpieces, of course, not epic or dramatic; of such were the "Threnody" and "Woodnotes," to which was afterward added the "May-Day." Breadth and proportion, in a less degree, mark "The Problem," "Monadnock," "Merlin," and a few other pieces. But working similarly he falls short in the labored dithyrambic, "Initial, Dæmonic, and Celestial Love." He was formal enough in youth, before he struck out for himself, and at the age of eleven, judging from his practice-work, was as precocious as Bryant or Poe. But he soon gave up construction, putting a trade-mark upon his verse, and trusting that freedom would lead to something new. So many precious sayings enrich his more sustained poems as to make us include him at times with the complete artists. Certainly, both in these and in the unique bits so characteristic that they are the poet himself,—"Terminus," "Character," "Manners," "Nature," etc.,—he ranks with the foremost of the second class, poets eminent for special graces, values, sudden meteors of thought. In that gift for "saying things," so notable in Pope and Tennyson, he is the chief of American poets. From what other bard have so many original lines and phrases passed into literature,—coins that do not wear out, of standard value, bright and current gold? It is worth while, for the mere effect,

to group some of them together, and especially those which, appearing in his first book forty years ago, long since became a constituent part of our literary thought and expression:

"'Tis the law of bush and stone,  
Each can only take his own."

"The thoughts that he shall think  
Shall not be forms of stars, but stars,  
Nor pictures pale, but Jove and Mars."

"Hast thou named all the birds without a gun?  
Loved the wood-rose and left it on its stalk?"

"Heartily know,  
When half-gods go  
The gods arrive."

"What is excellent,  
As God lives, is permanent;  
Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain."

"Born for the future, to the future lost."

"Not for all his faith can see  
Would I that cowed churchman be."

"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  
\* \* \* \* \*  
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;  
And Morning opes with haste her lids,  
To gaze upon the Pyramids."

"One accent of the Holy Ghost  
The heedless world hath never lost."

"Or ever the wild Time coined itself  
Into calendar months and days."

"Set not thy foot on graves."

"Good-bye, proud world! I'm going home."

"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."

"Leave all thy pedant lore apart,  
God hid the whole world in thy heart."

"And conscious Law is King of kings."

"— Mount to paradise  
By the stairway of surprise."

"Here once the embattled farmers stood,  
And fired the shot heard round the world."

"Great is the art,  
Great be the manners, of the bard."

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

Verses from Emerson's later poems,— which came at rare intervals, after the public had learned to seek for the sweet kernel in every nut that fell from his tree,—are scarcely less familiarized and put to use :

"Deep in the man sits fast his fate  
To mold his fortunes mean or great :  
Unknown to Cromwell as to me  
Was Cromwell's measure or degree."

"O tenderly the haughty day  
Fills his blue urn with fire!"

"I hung my verses in the wind,  
Time and tide their faults may find ;  
All were winnowed through and through,  
Five lines lasted sound and true."

"Winters know  
Easily to shed the snow,  
And the untaught Spring is wise  
In cowslips and anemones."

"It is time to be old,  
To take in sail,—

\* \* \* \* \*  
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime :  
'Lowly faithful, banish fear,  
Right onward drive unharmed ;  
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,  
And every wave is charmed.'"

"He spoke, and words more soft than rain  
Brought the Age of Gold again ;  
His action won such reverence sweet  
As hid all measure of the feat."

The poet's rhythm and gift of compression made verse like the foregoing a kind of ambrosial pemmican, easily carried for spiritual sustenance. Phrases in his prose, which have become more current, move in foot-beats, such as,— "Hitch your wagon to a star," "Nature is loved by what is best in us," and "The hues of sunset make life great." He thought rhythm indispensable, and rhyme most efficacious, as the curators of poetic thought. "Every good poem I know I recall by its rhythm also."

Popular instinct, recognized by those who compile our anthologies, forbid an author to be great in more than one way. These editors go to Emerson for point and wisdom, and too seldom for his truth to nature and his strictly poetic charm. Yet who excels him in quality? That Margaret Fuller had a fine ear, and an independent one, is proved by her admission that "in melody, in subtlety of thought and expression," he took the highest rank. He often captures us with absolute beauty, the poetry that poets love,— the lilt and melody of Shelley (whose vagueness irked him) joined to precision of thought and outline. Poe might have envied "Uriel" his lutings of the spangled heaven ; he could not have read "Woodnotes," or he would

have found something kindred in the bard who said,

"Quit thy friends as the dead in doom,  
And build to them a final tomb ;  
Let the starred shade that nightly falls  
Still celebrate their funerals,  
And the bell of beetle and of bee  
Knell their melodious memory."

Emerson "listened to the undersong," but rejoiced no less in the "divine ideas below" of the Olympian bards,

"Which always find us young  
And always keep us so."

His modes of expression, like his epithets, are imaginative. The snow is "the north-wind's masonry;" feeling and thought are scarcely deeper than his speech ; he puts in words the "tumultuous privacy of storm," or the "sweet varieties of chance." With what high ecstasy of pain he calls upon the deep-eyed boy, the hyacinthine boy, of his marvelous "Threnody"! Time confirms the first impression that this is the most spontaneous, the most elevating, of lyrical elegies,— that it transcends even the divine verse of Bishop King's invocation to his entombed wife. How abrupt, how exquisitely ideal, the opening phrase! Afterward, and throughout, the pure spirit of poetry rarefied by the passion of its theme : the departed child is the superangelic symbol of the beauty, the excellence, that shall be when time ripens and the harmonies of nature are revealed,— when life is no longer a dream within a dream. Read the "Threnody" anew. What grace! What Æolian music, what yearning! What prophecy and exaltation! See how emotion becomes the soul of art. Or is it that true passion cannot but express itself in verse at once simple and sensuous, thus meeting all the cardinal points of Milton's law?

One readily perceives that "Merlin" conveys Emerson's spirited conception of the art and manners of the bard. His should be no trivial harp :

"No jingling serenader's art,  
Nor tinkle of piano strings ;

\* \* \* \* \*  
The kingly bard  
Must smite the cords rudely and hard,  
As with hammer or with mace ;

\* \* \* \* \*  
He shall not his brain encumber  
With the coil of rhythm and number ;  
But leaving rule and pale forethought,  
He shall aye climb  
For his rhyme."

Thus fearlessly should a poet compel the Muse, and even to a broader liberty of song one, at least, of Emerson's listeners, pushed

with deliberate zeal. Walt Whitman was stimulated by this teaching, and by the rugged example of Carlyle, to follow resolutely the method which suited his bent and project; and Emerson's "Mithridates," we may say, is at once the key-note and best defense of Whitman's untrammelled, all-heralding philosophy. The descriptive truth, the lusty Americanism, of the democratic chanter took hold upon the master's expectant heart. A later modification of the first welcome, and the omission of the new songs from "Parnassus," had no bearing upon the question of their morals or method; Emerson was moved solely by his taste,—and New England taste has a supreme dislike of the unsavory. The world, even the Concord world, is not wholly given over to prudery. It has little dread, nowadays, of the voluptuous in art, ancient or modern. But to those of Puritan stock cleanliness is even more than godliness. There is no "fair perdition" tempting us in the "Song of Myself" and the "Children of Adam." But here are things which, whether vessels of honor or dishonor, one does not care to have before him too often or too publicly, and which were unattractive to the pure and temperate seer, whose race had so long inhabited the clean-swept keeping-rooms of the land of mountain breezes and transparent streams. The matter was one of artistic taste and of the inclinations of Emerson's nature, rather than of prudery or censorship.

As for his own style, Emerson was impressed in youth by the free-hand manner of the early dramatists, whom he read with avidity. He soon formed his characteristic measure, varying with "sixes," "sevens," and "eights," resembling Ben Jonson's lyrical style, but even more like that of Milton, Marvell, and other worthies of the Protectorate. In spirit and imagery, in blithe dithyrambic wisdom, he gained much from his favorite Orientals—Saadi and Hafiz. One stately and various measure he rarely essayed, but showed that it was well suited to his genius. In "Muskuetaquid" and "Sea-shore" we see the aptness of his ear and hand for blank verse. The little poem of "Days," imitated from the antique, is unmatched, outside of Landor, for compression and self-poise:

"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.  
To each they offer gifts after his will,  
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.  
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,  
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily  
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day  
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,  
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn."

We could wish that Emerson had written more blank verse,—a measure suited to express his highest thought and imagination. Probably, however, he said all that he had to say in verse of any kind. He was not one to add a single line for the sake of a more liberal product.

He is thought to have begun so near the top that there was little left to climb. None of his verse is more pregnant than that which came in the first glow, but the later poems are free from those grotesque sayings which illustrate the fact that humor and a lively sense of the absurd often are of slow development in the brain of an earnest thinker. There was, it must be owned, a tinge of provincial arrogance, and there were expressions little less than ludicrous, in his early defiance of usage. He was too sincere a personage to resort to the grotesque as a means of drawing attention. Of him, the leader, this at least could not be suspected. Years afterward he revised his poems, as if to avoid even the appearance of affectation. On the whole, it is as well that he left "The Sphinx" unchanged; that remarkable poem is a fair gauge of its author's traits. The opening is strongly lyrical and impressive. The close is the flower of poesy and thought. The general tone is quaint and mystical. Certain passages, however, like that beginning "The fiend that man harries," are curiously awkward, and mar the effect of an original, almost an epochal, poem. This would not be admitted by the old-fashioned Emersonian,—never, by any chance, a poet pure and simple,—who makes it a point of faith to defend the very passages where the master nods. Just so the thick-and-thin Browningite, who testifies his adoration by counting the *m's* and *n's* of the great dramatist's volumes, and who, also, never is a poet pure and simple, celebrates Mr. Browning's least poetic experiments as his masterpieces. I think that the weakness of "transcendental" art is as fairly manifest in Emerson's first and chief collection of verse as were its felicities,—the former belonging to the school, the latter to the seer's own genius. Poe, to whom poetry was solely an expression of beauty, was irritated to a degree not to be explained by contempt for all things East. He extolled quaintness, and justly detested obscurity. He was prejudiced against the merits of such poets as Channing and Cranch by their prophetic bearing, which he berated soundly as an effort to set up as poets "of *unusual* depth and *very* remarkable powers of mind." Admitting the grace of one, he said that it was "laughable to see that the transcendental poets, if beguiled for a minute or two into

respectable English and common-sense, are always sure to remember their cue just as they get to the end of their song, and round off with a bit of doggerel." Their thought was the "cant of thought," in adopting which "the cant of phraseology is adopted at the same time." This was serviceable criticism, *et ab hoste*, though Poe's lack of moral, and keenness of artistic, sense made him too sure of the insincerity of those who place conviction above expression. And Mr. James sees that Emerson's philosophy was "drunk in by a great many fine moral appetites with a sense of intoxication." The seer himself was intoxicated at times, and spoke, like the hasheesh-eaters, with what then seemed to him music and sanity. In a more reflecting season he excluded from his select edition certain pieces from which too many had taken their cues,—for example, the "Ode" to W. H. Channing, "The World-Soul," and "Tact." The Ode begins finely with a manner caught from Ben Jonson's ode "To Himself," and we can ill spare one passage ("The God who made New Hampshire"); but was it the future compiler of "Parnassus" who preceded this with laughter-stirring rhymes, and shortly avowed that "Things are of the snake," and again that "Things are in the saddle, And ride mankind?" Well, he lived to feel that to poets, "of all men, the severest criticism is due," and that "Poetry requires that splendor of expression which carries with it the proof of great thoughts."

But the forte of bardlings is the foible of a bard. Emerson became his own censor, and did wisely and well. We have seen that his art, even now, upon its constructive side, must often seem defective,—unsatisfactory to those whose love of proportion is a moral instinct. Many poets and critics will feel it so. The student of Emerson learns that he, too, moved upon their plane but would not be confined to it. More than other men, he found himself a vassal of the unwritten law, whether his impulse lifted him above, or sent him below, the plane of artistic expression. If he could not sustain the concert-pitch of his voice at his best, he certainly knew what is perfection, and said of art much that should be said. He was not, he did not wish to be, primarily an artist: he borrowed Art's aid for his lofty uses, and held her at her worth. His essay on Art would be pronounced sound by a Goethe or a Lessing, though such men probe less deep for the secret principle of things, and deal more fealty with the exterior. Elsewhere he insists that we must "disabuse us of our superstitious associations with place and time, with number and size.

\* \* \* Where the heart is, there the muses, there the gods sojourn. \* \* \* A great man makes his climate genial in the imagination of man, and its air the beloved element of all delicate spirits." And again (like Arnold) he speaks of the modernness of all good books: "What is well done, I feel as if I did; what is ill done, I reckon not of." He revised his prose less carefully, for republication, than his verse, and doubtless felt surer of it. He himself would have been the first to declare, as to the discordant and grotesque portions of his verse or prose, that the thought was proportionately defective,—not strong and pure enough to insure the beauty of the art which was its expression. Above all he knew, he confessed, that it is the first duty of a poet to express his thoughts naturally, counting among "the traits common to all works of the highest art,—that they are universally intelligible, that they restore to us the simplest states of mind." This was his own canon. Where he failed of it, he might not surely know; where he knew, there he rebuked himself. He struck out, in his self-distrust, many things of value to those who loved his verse. We dwell with profit on the fact that he retained so little that should be stricken out.

## IV.

It is but a foolish surmise whether Emerson's prose or verse will endure the longer, for they are of the same stuff, warp and woof, and his ideality crosses and recrosses each, so that either is cloth-of-gold. Of whichever a reader may first lay hold, he will be led to examine the whole fabric of the author's work. Few writers, any one of whose essays, met with for the first time, seems more like a revelation! It will not be, I think, until that time when all his prose has passed into a large book, such as the volume we call *Montaigne*, that its full strength and importance can be felt. In certain respects it dwarfs other modern writing, and places him among the great essayists. These are not the efforts of a reviewer of books or affairs, but chapters on the simplest, the greatest, the immemorial topics, those that lie at the base of life and wisdom: such as Love, Experience, Character, Manners, Fate, Power, Worship—lastly, Nature herself, and Art her ideal counterpart. If to treat great themes worthily is a mark of greatness, the chooser of such themes begins with the instinct of great design. Bacon's elementary essays excepted, there are none in English of which it can be more truly averred that there is nothing superfluous in them. Compare them with the rest in theme

and method. Carlyle, outside of "Sartor Resartus" and "Hero-Worship," usually reviews books, histories, individuals, at extreme length, and with dramatic comment and analysis. Emerson treats of the principles behind all history, and his laconic phrases are the very honey-cells of thought. There are let-downs and surplusage even in Landor. Throughout Emerson's writings each word is of value; they are the discourse of one who has digested all the worthy books, and who gives us their results, with latter-day discoveries of his own. He is the citizen of a new world, observing other realms and eras from an unrestricted point of view.

The intent of our essayist is the highest, and by no means that of writing for the exercise or glory of authorship. "Fatal," he declares, "to the man of letters is the lust of display. \* \* \* A mistake of the main end to which they labor is incidental to literary men, who, dealing with the organ of language \* \* \* learn to enjoy the pride of playing with this splendid engine, but rob it of its almightiness by failing to work with it." He estimates books at their worth. They "are for nothing but to inspire. 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."

Thus the thought of Style, it may be, should enter into the mind of neither writer or reader. Style makes itself, and Emerson's is the apothegmatic style of one bent upon uttering his immediate thoughts,—hence strong in sentences, and only by chance suited to the formation of an essay. Each sentence is an idea, an epigram, or an image, or a flash of spiritual light. His letters to Carlyle show that he was at one time caught by the manner of the author whose character, at least, seemed of the most import to him. This was but a passing trace. When he was fresh from the schools, his essays were structural and orderly, but more abstract than in latter years. During his mature and haply less spiritual period, had he cared to write a history, the English would have been pure English, the narrative racy and vigorous. Portions of the "English Traits" make this plain. Since De Foe, where have we found anything more idiomatic than his account of Wordsworth delivering a sonnet?

"This recitation was so unlooked for and surprising,—he, the old Wordsworth, standing apart, and reciting to me in a garden-walk, like a schoolboy declaiming,—that I at first was near to laugh; but recollecting myself, that I had come thus far to see a poet, and he was chanting poems to me, I saw that he was right and I was wrong, and gladly gave myself up to hear."

Note also his account of an ocean voyage. For charm of landscape-painting, take such a passage as that, in the second essay on Nature, beginning: "There are days which occur in this climate." But terseness is the distinctive feature of his style. "Men," he says, "descend to meet." "We are all discerners of spirits." "He [a traveler] carries ruins to ruins." No one has compressed more sternly the pith of his discourse.

No poet, let us at once add, has written prose and shown more incontestably his special attribute. Emerson's whole argument is poetic, if that work is poetic which reaches its aim through the analogies of things, and whose quick similitudes have the heat, the light, the actinism, of the day-beam, and of which the language is rhythmic without degeneracy,—clearly the language of prose, always kept from weakness by the thought which it conveys. No man's writing was more truly his speech, and no man's speech so rhythmic: "There are Muses in the woods to-day, and whispers to be heard in the breezes"; and again, "Hawthorne rides well his horse of the night." As he spoke, so he wrote: "Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous"; "The conscious ship hears all the praise"; of young idealists, "The tough world had its revenge the moment they put the horses of the sun to plough in its furrow"; of Experience, "was it Boscovich who found out that bodies never come in contact? Well, souls never touch their objects. An innavigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at and converse with." In the same essay,— "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 of Love's world, with the cadences of Ecclesiastes,— "When the day was not long enough, but the night, too, must be consumed. \* \* \* When the moonlight was a pleasing fever, and the stars were letters, and the flowers ciphers, and the air was coined into song; when all business seemed impertinence, all the men and women running to and fro in the streets mere pictures." But to show the poetry of Emerson's prose is to give the whole of it; these essays are of the few which make us tolerate the conceit of "prose poems." Their persistent recourse to imagery and metaphor, their suggestions of the secret relations of things, at

\* "Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity."  
Shelley's "Adonais."

times have subjected them to the charge of being obscure. The fault was not in the wine:

"Hast thou a drunken soul?  
Thy bane is in thy shallow skull, not in my silver  
bowl!"

In mature years the essayist pays more regard to life about him, to the world as it is; he is more equatorial, less polar and remote. His insight betrays itself in everyday wisdom. He is the shrewd, the benignant, the sagacious, Emerson, writing with pleasant aptitude, like Hesiod or Virgil, of domestic routine, and again of the Conduct of Life, of Manners, Behavior, Prudence, Grace. This is in the philosophic order of progress, from the first principles to the application of them. Some of his followers, however, take him to task, unwilling that the master should venture beyond the glory of his cloud. As for his unique treatises upon Behavior, it was natural that he should be led to think upon that topic, since in gentle bearing, in his sweetness, persuasiveness, and charm of smile and voice, he was not excelled by any personage of our time, and what he said of it is of more value than the sayings of those who think such a matter beneath his regard. His views of civic duty and concerning the welfare of the Republic are the best rejoinder to his early strictures upon Homer and Shakspeare for the temporal and local features of their master-works. As a critic he was ever expectant, on the lookout for something good and new, and sometimes found the one good thing in a man or work and valued it unduly. When he made a complete examination, as in his chapter on Margaret Fuller, he excelled as a critic and delineator. "Parnassus" is not judicial, but oddly made up of his own likings, yet the best rules of criticism are to be found in its preface. With the exception of "English Traits," he published no long treatise upon a single theme. His general essays and lectures, however, constitute a treatise upon Man and Nature, and of themselves would serve as America's adequate contribution to the English literature of his period. We are told of an unprinted series of his essays that may be grouped as a book on the Natural History of the Intellect. Should these see the light, it would be curious to compare them with the work of some professional logician—with the standard treatise of President Porter, for instance—upon a similar theme. Much in quantity may yet be added to Emerson's literary remains. But it will not differ in quality; we have had the gist of it: for he was a writer who, though his essays were the fruit of a prolonged life, never wrote himself out.

Often an author has gained repute by one or two original works, while his ordinary efforts, if not devoted to learned or scientific research, have been commonplace. The flame of Emerson's intellect never fades or flickers, and never irks us. It burns with elemental light, neither of artifice nor of occasion, serene as that of a star, and with an added power to heat the distance which receives it.

## v.

IN summing up the traits of Emerson one almost ceases to be critical, lest the highest praise may not be quite undue. More than when Bion died, the glades and towns lament him, for he left no heir to the Muse which he taught his pupils. In certain respects he was our most typical poet, having the finest intuition and a living faith in it,—and because there was a sure intellect behind his verse, and because his influence affected not simply the tastes and emotions, but at last the very spirit, of his countrymen. He began where many poets end, seeking at once the upper air, the region of pure thought and ideality. His speech was wisdom, and his poesy its exhalation. When he failed in either, it seemed to be through excess of divining. His triumphs were full of promise for those who dare to do their best. He was as far above Carlyle as the affairs of the soul and universe are above those of the contemporary, or even the historic, world. His problem, like that of Archimedes, was more than the taking of cities and clash of arms. The poet is unperturbed by temporal distractions; yet poets and dreamers, concerned with the ideal, share in the world's battle equally with men of action and practical life. Only, while the latter fight on the ground, the idealists, like the dauntless ghosts of the Huns and Romans, lift the contest to the air. 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. He strove not to define the creeds, but to stimulate the intellect and purpose of those who are to make the future. If poetry be that which shapes and elevates, his own was poetry indeed. To know the heart of New England you must hear the songs of his compeers; but listening to those of Emerson, the east and west have yielded to the current of its soul.

The supreme poet will be not alone a seer, but also a persistent artist of the beautiful. Of those who come before the time for such a poet is ripe, Longfellow on the whole has done the most to foster the culture of poetry among us as a liberal art. Emerson has given

us thought, the habit of thinking, the will to think for ourselves. He drained the vats of politics and philosophy, for our use, of all that was sweet and fructifying, and taught his people, seeing their vital needs, "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control." He set chief value upon those primitive laws which are the only sure basis of national law and letters. And as a poet, his verse was the sublimation of his rarest mood, that changed as water into cloud, catching the first beams of sunrise on its broken edges, yet not without dark and vaguely blending spots between. Emerson and Longfellow came at the parting of the ways. They are of the very few whom we now recognize as the true founders of an American literature. No successors with more original art and higher imagination can labor to more purpose. If the arrow hits its mark, the aim was at the bowstring; the river strengthens and broadens, but the sands of gold wash down from near its source.

Not a few are content with that poetry which returns again and again to its primal conceptions, yet suggests infinite pathways and always inspires,—the poetry of a hermitage whose Lar is Nature, and whose well-spring flows with clear and shining Thought. To such,—who care less for sustained flights of objective song, who can withdraw themselves from passion and dramatic life, who gladly accept isolated cadences and scattered, though exquisite, strains of melody in lieu of symphonic music "wandering on as loth to die,"—Emerson will seem the most precious of our native poets. He will not satisfy those who look for the soul incarnate in sensuous

and passionate being. Such readers, with Professor Dowden, find him the type of the New World transcendentalist, the creature of the drying American climate, one "whose nervous energy has been exalted," so "that he loves light better than warmth." He is not the minstrel for those who would study men in action and suffering, rather than as heirs to knowledge and the raptured mind. He is not a warrior, lover, recounter, dramatist, but an evangel and seer. The greatest poet must be all in one, and I have said that Emerson was among the foremost to avow it. Modern singers poorly satisfy him, being meager of design, and failing to guide and console. Wordsworth was an exception, yet he had "written longer than he was inspired." Tennyson, with all his tune and color, "climbs no mount of vision." Even Shakspeare was too traditional, though one learns from him that "tradition supplies a better fable than any invention can." In face of the greatest he felt that "the world still wants its poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle with Shakspeare the player, nor shall grope in graves with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act with equal inspiration." Thus clearly he conceived of the poet's office, and equally was he assured that he himself was not, and could not be, the perfect musician. He chose the part of the forerunner and inspirer, and when the true poet shall come to America, it will be because such an one as Emerson has gone before him and prepared the way for his song, his vision, and his recognition.

*Edmund C. Stedman.*



### FORSAKEN.

I WATCH the budding lilac leaves  
This March with jealous eye:  
The birds all past me fly  
Nor stay to build beneath my eaves.

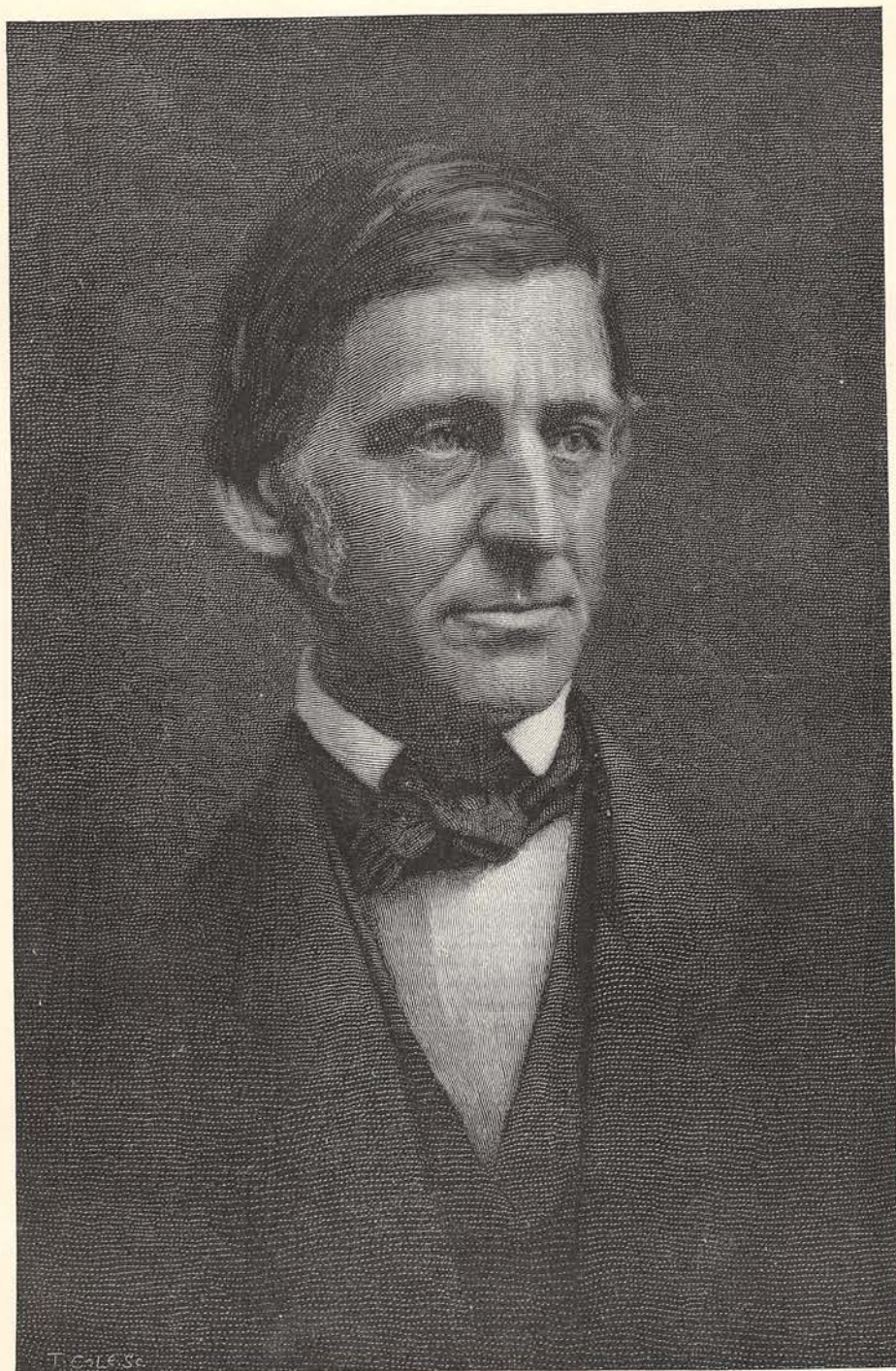
This time last year it was not so—  
Then was cheery chirp and twitter  
About a pretty sitter  
Under my roof-tree brown and low.

A stir of little wings quite near,  
And trills of tender song,  
That still would wake a throng  
Of happy thoughts my heart to cheer.

Their last year's nest hangs from the eaves  
All ragged and forlorn,  
Half from the rafter torn,  
Inside, for birds, some withered leaves.

The lilac tree is in full leaf,  
I watch and wait in vain,  
They will not come again—  
Who told the birds about my grief?

*E. A. M.*



R. Waldo Emerson