

Ralph Waldo Emerson; or, Recollections of Him⁸⁶

When we are about to do or say what is repugnant to good taste we may be pardoned for quoting someone acknowledged to be authority in such matters. The greatest of Essayists, Montaigne, has said, "Not to speak roundly of a man's self implies some want of courage; a firm and lofty judgement, and one that judges soundly and surely, makes use of his own example upon all occasions as well as that of others; and gives evidence as fairly of himself as of a third person. We are to pass by these common rules of society for the sake of truth and liberty."⁸⁷

I quote this fine passage as an apology for the large quantity of egotism that will pervade my discourse upon the Sage of Concord.

⁸⁶ In *Two American Pioneers* Wyman suggests that Smith began writing this lecture in 1882, the year of Emerson's death. The first record of its completion that I have discovered is a letter from Smith's cousin Helen Campbell dated January 31, 1884, confirming the date of the lecture as February 21. The lecture was actually held on February 26, 1884 in New York City.

⁸⁷ Smith also used this quotation as an epigram to her MS autobiography, "A Human Life," which she was working on at the time she was writing the present lecture. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Wyman has included excerpts from the lecture in a separate chapter of *Selections from The Autobiography*. The present text presents the full MS for the first time, transcribed from a microfilm edition of Smith's manuscript, Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library. Thanks are due to Melissa Radja and Ellen Shepard at Northeastern Illinois University for their assistance in the preparation of this edition.

I think *the last* is always a sorrowful phrase--despairing in character like the *Never more* of Poe's raven, but when we say we have had the last oracle from the likes of Emerson, it is like closing up of the Sibylline leaves--an end to that which the eons will not reproduce.

I had already spoken in Boston, my way made easy by that eloquent modern Greek and sincere man, Wendell Phillips, whom we all mourn, and having been well received there, I felt it was a sort of break-in for audiences elsewhere; not withstanding this I certainly felt many misgivings when invited to speak to an audience made up of Mr. Emerson's admirers, acolytes and townspeople--when, therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Emerson came in from Concord to Boston, calling upon me, and inviting me to their hospitable house, I was not only gratified but made more comfortable in mind.

The evening I spoke before the Lyceum of Concord was not only a night of sleet and rain, but the ground, also was one mass of what down East people call slush, but I am sure my Lady friends will be glad to know I had a full house, and an approving auditory--I must own however that Mr. Emerson did not hear me--he was to speak the same evening before the Lyceum of Marblehead.

Before I went into the Hall where I was to speak, I was confronted by Aunt Mary Emerson, of whom Emerson speaks in the *Atlantic Monthly* of December last. Now Aunt Mary was a character held in some awe. She was a small, quick moving woman--with eyes

sharp and penetrating, not in the least like those of Miss Jelliby,⁸⁸ that could see nothing nearer than Africa; she not only looked at you, but through you. I had heard a great deal about her from friends who had been neighbors to her in Waterford, Maine, who regarded her with great respect despite her seeming eccentricities. They used to say she was more a Jew than Christian, owing to her sturdy Monotheism--but she certainly had a spiritualism akin to that of Madam Guyon.⁸⁹

We were all cloaked and ready to leave when Mrs. Emerson had the precaution to take me aside and whisper in my ear what might have seemed necessary. "Now possibly," she said, "Aunt Mary may not stay to hear your Lecture out; she has a way when not quite pleased with a speaker, to get up and go out, scattering shawl and gloves or hood all along the aisle--you need not mind it."

My subject was Womanhood, and I am happy to say Aunt Mary heard me through, and gave me her hand at the close.

I passed some weeks in the family of Mr. Emerson--much interested in Mrs. Emerson, with her weird grey eyes, and faultless repartee--she was always appropriately dressed as the

⁸⁸From Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). Her devotion to charitable causes, such as Africa, was exercised at the expense of her responsibilities to home and family.

⁸⁹Jeanne Marie Bovier de la Motte Guyon, 1648-1717. French mystic and writer, a central figure in the theological debates of 17th c. France. She advocated Quietism, an extreme passivity and indifference of the soul. She was eventually arrested and imprisoned for heresy, as Quietism tended to exclude the external world, including the mechanics of the church.

wife of a philosopher--plain black, long folds of drapery--and delicate white coif over her silver turning hair. She was stately in manner, justifying the term Queeny, by which her husband always addressed her.

In return there was a simple grace in the tender respect of this model wife. I saw sometimes the Sister-in-law of Mr. Emerson--always dressed in widow's weeds--living upon the sweet memory of a perfect marriage union with Mr. Emerson's brother, who died young. She was treated with something like worship in the family--Mr. Emerson used to say of her, "Angels must do as they will," and she certainly carried with her a heavenly presence. The Mother of Mr. Emerson, gone into the winter of life, was surrounded by all that the despairing Macbeth declared "should accompany old age--As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends," [and] found all lavished upon her by reverent children, and grandchildren.

It was indeed a model household--everything fresh as a rose, and nice as the most exacting Brownie could wish. There was the wholesome and tempting breakfast, and the long talks over the coffee, Mr. Emerson so quietly breathing out his precious aphorisms.

If a man is the head of the household, as he ought to be, a pretty fair estimate may be formed of the quality of the man, by the quality of the household, and here Mr. Emerson may be fairly regarded as a model man, a sort of family Socrates without a Xantippe.⁹⁰

Mr. Emerson was not a man to laugh any more than Edgar A. Poe was of the laughing kind. The nearest I saw him come to a laugh like other folks was at a trifle at the breakfast

⁹⁰ Socrates' shrewish wife.

table. Mrs. Emerson was on the point of pouring out the coffee, when a cat gave forth a piteous mew. "There, I have forgotten her breakfast," cried Mrs. Emerson, leaving the table in haste. She was gone but a moment, and turning to her husband she said with a smile, "Now don't tell me that somewhere off in Africa is a fly with a broken wing that I ought to look after."

"Is that the way he treats you? Is that the way he turns your sensibilities into contempt?"

I exclaimed.

"Yes, that is the way--and in just the very words!"

"Well--that is all right; what is a wife for, but to sharpen up the wits of her husband!"--to which Mr. Emerson cordially assented, with something more than a smile.

Mr. Gough, the popular speaker upon Temperance, followed the next week after my Lecture, to speak in the Lyceum course. There had been some delay in the trains and the hour had nearly arrived with no Mr. Gough--the hall was filling up, and yet no Mr. Gough. The committee waited upon me and requested me to speak either upon temperance or give a second Lecture, that entitled Manhood, which I should have done had not Mr. Gough made his appearance in due time, to my relief.⁹¹

We all went to hear the Lecture, for it was a popular subject in Concord, but we did not stay all of us to the conclusion. I have little faith in what is called oratory, believing it a belonging to a ruder age than ours. I suppose I must have shown some discontent, for while

⁹¹The phrase "to my relief" has been appended to the original manuscript in Smith's handwriting.

Mr. Gough was tearing himself to pieces, and excruciating his hearers with one of his most vivid descriptions, Mr. Emerson turned to me and asked "Do you like it?"

"No," I returned even more laconically. "Nor do I," said Mr. Emerson. "It is a debauch." Was there ever a more apposite epithet?

"There is a fire in a little room downstairs," he continued, "Ask Queenie and we will go down there and talk."

I accordingly consulted Mrs. Emerson. "Go out? No--I like it," but she presently answered, "The rest of you go--I will meet you there."

The rest of us--Aunt Mary, who had been very uneasy, and Mr. Alcott, and Mr. Thoreau, left with Mr. Emerson and me, without in the least disturbing the audience. We were a little gay over our escapade at first, and then somehow--I do not know in what way we found ourselves each from an earnest esoteric point of view discussing that often indescribable something which we call Genius--which like Beauty changes its ground as we view it from different aspects. If the gods did not lean over the battlements of Olympus to listen to us, they might have done so in approval of that singleness, reverence and aspiration like that which once upon a time in human experience throned Zeus above the gods, and caused the face of Moses to reflect the brightness of divine Law upon the heights of Mt. Sinai.

Who sat upon the tripod that night, who gave forth the oracle is neither here nor there--but that a divine afflatus, "A light that never was on sea or land" burned in that little room, and that our hearts burned within us each and all, is a never to be forgotten memory.

Imperfect, unsatisfactory as it might all have been--think you intimations half revealed here in our best moments are to sink away into utter forgetfulness in our great hereafter? I do not think it. That more perfect organization, that must arise from the ashes of this, will be able to read as a child reads its A.B.C.. That more perfect [thought]--which shall complete our finite searchings after truth. These sweet, solemn moments are the preluding notes to more august symphonies.

I can but imperfectly reproduce utterances never designed for the public eye. We spoke of the first loves of Genius so absorbing--so fatal to itself and to others--its premature experiences so deadly to its {youth}--quenching the fire of its life--till it goes out and its work is left undone.

We spoke of Goethe's first love, and the foolish adulation of Bettina⁹² -- Thorwaldson's Satire of Genius,⁹³ which is not a Cupid, but a strong-limbed sturdy boy with wings for use; and upward eye--perpetual youth--perpetual aspiration--when its fiery eye is turned earthward, when its wings falter, it is no more Genius. It is dead.

Every new-born child is a hint--a hope for Genius, for the Ideal, but the suns brighten and the beard comes, and it is but an earth child--and the Messianic promise rolls down the steps

⁹² Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859), a prominent writer of the German Romantic movement, her best known works were three volumes which purported to be records of her correspondence with Goethe. Her mother's friendship with Goethe was ended by her father's jealousy. Bettina's friendship ended some years later when Goethe disavowed her after she instigated a public fight with his wife, Christiane.

⁹³Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768-1844), a Danish sculptor.

of time waiting its great fulfillment.

When the Child of Genius comes it is a new creation--like the beauty of a Cleopatra it is compounded of the porcelain dust of the ages, and brings its own laws, its own right to be--and to do--and to go on and achieve, and conquer though its [illegible] may be in the distance, and its Austerlitz prelude a Waterloo.

The world needs it--if it breaks hearts--its own heart is bleeding; and of what moment is any heart, if incapable of this divine woe! Let the vast multitude sit and pipe with Pan on the hillside, but the the few hear the cry of an Oedipus--or the "Never more" of a Poe.

There must be Othellos and Lears, and Tassos⁹⁴ and Savonarolas,⁹⁵ and we are made to breathe deeper because of the agony of such; and every woman know and feels there is something in herself that finds expression only through Heloise, Joan of Arc, or St. Therese.

We are redeemed though the Gethsemanes of Genius--and but the world would reduce it to square and compass--and hold it down, as men place a board over the eyes of some might bovine, lest he should leap the stone wall.

⁹⁴Torquato Tasso (1544-95), epic and pastoral poet in the court of Ferrara. Byron's "The Lament of Tasso" popularized the myth of Tasso's passion for Leonora d'Este, the daughter of Duke Alphonso II, his subsequent imprisonment, and his banishment from the court.

⁹⁵ Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), Italian religious reformer and preacher. He was banned from preaching by the Pope when he refused to go to Rome to explain his claim to special revelation. He resumed preaching anyway and was eventually tried and hanged.

Genius does not come with the oil of gladness⁹⁶--its joy is born of great rifts in dark clouds that give a glimpse of what language, even the glowing language of the Apocalypse, has failed to describe.

Is Genius then in a certain sense a moral Juggernaut, rolling onward regardless of the bleeding, crushed victims that impede its way?

Genius is not designed for happiness--in one sense our Declaration of Independence has given the key note when it says amongst other rights that all men have the right to the *pursuit* of happiness--but happiness is never overtaken in the world. The Christ never implied that happiness was the thing to be even pursued, except as it is found in self-renunciation.

Genius cannot exist amidst the smooth platitudes of luxurious or even comfortable surroundings--it is meant to suggest of the possibilities--and when it hungers only for the fleshpots of Egypt or the golden calf, it is something that is not Genius, is not the Ideal.

In its loves Genius is only high when it possesses that chastity that will respect and love the icicle curded of purest snow that hangs from the temple of Diana. It does not ask for permission--it kneels to the Ideal--as too ideal for human passion. It does often cast the one, beloved in our "salad days," down the wind to prey at fortune, despoiled of the one, single, humble mite that comprised its all, for alas! Genius does not always represent the Angel side of our humanity--it has its Devil side and enjoys its pangs with a wilful delight as the

⁹⁶ See Hebrews 1:8-9: "Virtue you love as much as you hate wickedness. This is why God, your God, has annointed you with the oil of gladness, above all your rivals."

Christine of Goethe⁹⁷ and the Josephine of Napoleon testify; but it is its own and it will have its own, according to the world in which it is created. A will round itself--proportion itself, even though it be in diabolism, if that be the law of its being--it will do its own work, not yours nor mine--and in vain we may condemn.

It has its Ideal, to which it tends though Niagara thunder below. Such has been its history from the ages: we recoil from it, leave it to the great Audit. The ever resounding wheels of progress are purging the Ideals of the world--and men will grow ashamed of their idols, and at length the Ideal man will become the real man, representing the true humanity.

Enthusiasm goes with good blood. Hope is human beatitude--the seeming illusion--but the real sum and substance proclaiming an eternal benefactor.

Hope is the prophecy of fruition. The Ideal must seek the Ideal. It must not dread a revelation - it must not be deaf when the Angel speaks--it must not starve itself--nor blind itself--nor retard itself, in its search after the highest and best.

It is a small thing to Genius that it suffers want--and neglect--knows a great sorrow and dies. It has left a record needed by the world, however sorrowful like the transfigured Margaret Fuller waiting death upon that stormy coast--the ship parting its timbers beneath her.

It was in this wise we talked--the world shut out--and ever and anon came the plaudits of the crowd listening to the impassioned Gough, like an echo from another world.

At length we were joined by Mrs. Emerson and others. The next day, with a natural

⁹⁷ Goethe's wife.

curiosity, Mrs. Emerson asked what we found to talk about. Alas, when our Amber is burnt up, and gave out, there is small joy in turning over its ashes. I replied, "We talked about Genius, and self-renunciation, and aspiration--and the ideal."

"Yes, I knew you would talk about all that. I do not like the way Mr. Emerson talks about the Ideal," she said as a sort of soliloquy.

We may not like the way that our friends think and talk but there is a certain comfort in knowing their thought, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.

While I was with Mr. Emerson, I had a feeling that we did not talk a great deal--there were certainly long pauses--a word--something not quite complete--and then a saying, fresh--unexpected. He was fond of these fragments, as it were, of ideas. I can see now that a fluent converser would have been intolerable to him. He would have admired McCauley but in those "splendid flashes of silence," about which Sidney Smith speaks.

Mr. Emerson's library impressed one with a sense of dim solitude--a large room with shelves for books and a plain square table in the centre. It seemed to have no out-look. It seemed isolated--which was well--there was an aspect of solitude, an almost monastic simplicity fit for some austere anchorite--but when I saw Mr. Emerson softly move about the room, his arms not merely folded, but hugged upon his breast--his head slightly inclined leaving the introspective eyes under the brow--I understood that no out-look was needed.

Perhaps one reason why we women achieve so little in the world of thought, is because we too much covet an out-look--a bird--a pet--flowers--light streaming across some rich

drapery--touches of color here and there, and we can become great only as we embrace poverty, bare walls, eschewing grace, in taste, and tenderness--and love.

It is said "A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind," and I was certainly pleased to find some of my old familiars upon the shelf--Jacob Boehm, Erasmus, Montaigne, much used as was evident, and Swedenborg--to say nothing of inimitable old Quarles.

On the table was an old scrap book--with paragraphs written on odds and ends of paper--Sibylline leaves to be collected and arranged at some future time. I think the library did not impress one pleasantly--it had something ghostly about it--an aloofness--a concentrated monomannishness, the result of the genius that lived and breathed there.

The days passed with Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau and other Transcendentalists, were the breathings of ambrosia; the aroma lingers upon the life like remembered music. True, I sometimes felt these oracular sayings were far-fetched, and had a flavor of affectation about them, but they were full of suggestion, and were doubtless the language of those who lived more with books than with men. I certainly was not disposed to cavil at what told sometimes in my favor.

For instance Mr. Alcott went to Concord with me on the occasion of my Lecture. At the close he said--"You have given us a Lyric."

Mr. Thoreau, also that gentle Arcadian of the nineteenth century, gave me his hand gravely, and said with solemn emphasis--"You have spoken!" which good Mr. Alcott interpreted to mean "you have brought an oracle."

There was a harmless bagatelle current in Concord, which was amusing for its sly humor. It seems Mr. Emerson had been passing an evening with Mrs. Thoreau, the lady who so shocked Aunt Mary by wearing a pink ribbon upon her grey hair. After he left, Mrs. Thoreau was heard to say with sweet naivete--"How much Mr. Emerson does talk like my Henry!"

I observed in the grounds of Mr. Emerson a beautiful but incomplete structure, a rustic bower made of cedar roots, a pretty pictureseque model designed and constructed by Mr. Alcott, who had an idyllic archetype in his own mind which he wished to realise as a tribute to his friend Mr. Emerson. The architect had more than once, at some expenditure of toil and money, taken the structure to pieces from a feeling that it failed to realize his ideal of it. He told me with a look of pathos, that when Mr. Emerson was about to embark for Europe, he put fifty dollars in his hands and suggested, that it might be well to complete it with that sum, which had proved insufficient, and it is likely the rustic bower is still incomplete.

The tenderest friendship existed between Mr. Emerson and Mr. Alcott, which in thoroughness reminds me of that which sweetened the life of Montaigne, in the mutual devotion of the great essayist and Boetae. Mr. Alcott, whom Boston people call the modern Plato, is a creation so unique, so unlike anything to be expected in Yankee land, that he seems a waif from some outstanding star, or Plato himself undergoing a Pythagorean metempsychosis. Seeing the two men together it seems perfectly natural that each should dwell largely in the heart of the other, for each possessed a certain geniality, entirely removed from vulgar receptiveness or complacency, an enlarged humanity, and a generous hospitality

to the new and untried, with that unexplainable something which sets a man apart from all other men. Each characterized by the utmost purity of life and integrity of purpose, they could not fail to be friends.

There was always a force and pithiness in the conversation of Mr. Emerson which was that of a full man, with no idle words, and somehow they stick to the memory. I think I was less awed than enthused by it, and went on and said my says without hesitation-- dead to all self-consciousness--oblivious to either praise or blame. Once while I was talking in this way, Mr. Emerson suddenly arrested me by saying,

"You must come and live in Concord--and we shall have an Oracle."

Alas it is not Concord--the inspiring god must be Mr. Emerson himself. He had a way, startling to the uninitiated, of suddenly asking a question, often quite foreign to the subject in hand, which caused me to say to him once,

"You are oracular Mr. Emerson, and seek oracles."

Mrs. Carlyle was mistaken when she said Emerson owed all his ideas to her husband, though prettily, wifely.

While Mr. Emerson thus sought for oracles--he was himself sometimes suddenly and sharply questioned. A young gentleman, son of the Rev. Thomas Stone,⁹⁸ author of the best essay ever written upon War--told me that he and a growth of young students walked twelve

⁹⁸Born in 1801, Stone graduated from Bowdoin in 1820, two years after Smith's husband. As Pastor of the Congregational Church in Andover, Maine, Stone may have known the Smiths socially. His *Sermons on War* was published in Boston in 1829.

miles one cold night, to test Mr. Emerson after the manner of the Queen of Sheba, who came to question the astute Jewish Sardanapalus⁹⁹ with hard sayings.

They were hospitably received, and with all kindness, by the Sage, Amongst other difficult problems to be solved, they asked,

"Suppose a man, one cold and stormy night is crossing Charleston bridge. In his warm wrappings he scarcely feels the bite of the frosty air, when he encounters another man, half clothed, and shivering in the storm--would you say the first man ought to strip off his warm wrappings and cover the shoulders of the suffering stranger?"

After a brief pause Mr. Emerson looked up with an approving smile, and replied--

"I should think the impulse to do so, a very fine one."

I had been Lecturing in Nantucket, that little empire of hardy navigators and enterprising Quakers--the birthplace also of Lucretia Mott. The year before Mr. Emerson had lectured in the same place and like myself was entertained at the house of Capt. Edward Coffin. Just before the advent of Mr. Emerson, Mrs. Coffin told me their house had been burned down with a total loss of everything in it.

Mrs. Coffin had been dilating at some length about the misfortune when Mr. Emerson suddenly asked,

" And in all your loss, what did you feel the most sorry about?"

"Really," she replied, " I regretted most of all a pair of large china bowls, which my

⁹⁹Beseiged last king of Assyria (7th c. B.C.). For Smith, Solomon is the "Jewish Sardanapalus."

Father brought from India, and greatly praised because of their great size and beauty."

"And so you lost your bowls," responds Mr. Emerson, in his benignant voice.

I could not but laugh, and yet how it adheres to the memory, stays there like the silver cord, and golden bowl, and pitcher broken at the fountain, so quaintly presented in holy writ.¹⁰⁰

"Well, and what do you most desire in life?" he asked me unexpectedly one day.

"To see my sex ennobled," I replied.

"Have you faith in this great change which you advocate?"

"Most certainly--or I should be devoid of enthusiasm in advocating it."

"Then it will be realized," he replied.

Mr. Emerson referred to Edgarton at which place we had both lectured.

"What did you see in that barren place to interest you?"

I replied "The place was wild and desolate, which, perhaps, suited my mood--but there was one thing that interested me. I saw a white marble monument on which was inscribed the name and dates of the owner, except the precise day of his death. In full view sat the Bachelor owner, in his door way--looking as if the period of occupancy might be far amongst future possibilities. I was interested to see how the solitary man had forestalled immortality."

"He has achieved it," responded Mr. Emerson with a smile.

"Aye, and how?" I queried

¹⁰⁰See Ecclesiastes 12:6.

"He is in your memory."

An enigmatical answer half implying a compliment--at which I blushed--as coming from a man not given to stale courtesies.

One evening Mr. Emerson said to me "How do you think Boston compares with New York society?" to which I am afraid I replied almost impertinently.

"I must say I think New York far superior to Boston. If society represent humanitarian and progressive ideas, they are about equal--but it seems to me that society for genial, social purposes is almost lacking in Boston. They meet together to discuss--they utilise each other--they sound you--teach you--never enjoy you."

"You think them more utilitarian than aesthetic."

"Perhaps that is the impression made upon me--the women seem all propagandists--and the men leaders in something or other. They all seem to have a speciality, and go out to promote it. New Yorkers study at home, and go into society to please and be pleased."

"Perhaps for that reason society in New York is more shallow and the knowledge more superficial."¹⁰¹

"I have not thought so--New Yorkers have not the intense admiration for each other that Bostonians have--they are not so cliquish--they are not so pedantic. Their culture is a matter to be inferred than defined--as seen by a pervading taste and elegance of manner."

"I have thought there might be something in this manner that at once puts a stranger at his

¹⁰¹Presumably Emerson's reply.

ease," he replied.

I was fairly launched as a partisan and continued.

"New York men and women dress better--look better, and stand better. The women have a pleased elegant air--they are handsome and carry about them a harmless consciousness of the fact--which plain Margaret Fuller could never quite pardon."

Mr. Emerson bowed acquiescence and I went on, airing my vocabulary, perhaps too much.

"Does it not seem to you Mr. Emerson--that much of this display of ideas in the parlor is a sort of impertinence to a guest--and has its origin in an ignorance of what other people know? I have an idea that out of the Lecture room Hypatia must have been a most charming woman, and that when Aspasia was not teaching Pericles and Socrates and Plato eloquence, she was a most agreeable listener."¹⁰²

"Much of this is based upon a higher culture than exists as yet in general society but which is already realized by the few. The highest social companionship is in accord with the purest sense of the beautiful and true in all their aspects. Home will thus become a temple for the Muses; poetry will lend her inspiration, painting her lessons of light and color, and Sculpture infuse serenity. Repose will be the low and content the expectation.

¹⁰² Hypatia (ca. 370-415) and Aspasia (ca. 470-410 B.C.), Greek women philosophers, became models for early feminists. Hypatia is notable not only for her stature as the pre-eminent Platonic, Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosopher of Alexandria, but also for having been brutally murdered by Christian monks. A renowned rhetorician as well as a member of the elite prostitudinal sect of *hetairai*, Aspasia is credited for collaborating with Pericles in many of his orations and addresses.

This seemed to [amuse], audibly, the good and wise man.

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When Mr. Emerson gave for the first time his great Lecture, entitled "Power," I went with Mr. Emerson and Mr. Alcott into Boston to hear it, and I saw were brought into use these odds and ends of paper I had seen upon the library table. Nothing could be more simple and unpretending than Mr. Emerson's manner in the Lecture room. His voice seemed scarcely if any raised above his ordinary colloquial tone; his gestures were few--and he certainly looked like no other man I ever heard speak. Indeed, he did not as we so often hear it said of others, remind you of somebody else. He was himself only. A Sphinx if you will--a prophet--something aloof--creating a solitude.

Mr. Emerson was by no means indifferent to the impression which his ideas might make upon an audience. I sat in breathless expectation of every word uttered. His manner was so simple, so undemonstrative--so in harmony with the uttered thought! So superior to any attempts at oratory, which after all is the expression of a ruder age, as I have said, when feeling must hold the intellect in abeyance.

As Mr. Emerson, closing, came down the aisle, he was warmly greeted right and left . As he approached the bright-minded Mrs. [C] I noticed he uttered one word,

"Well?"

interrogatively, and with an almost child-like simplicity, to which she replied,

"Oh, Mr, Emerson, you made me feel so powerless--as if I could do nothing."

Mr. Emerson looked grave and turning to me, repeated the [enigmatical] monosyllable "Well?" in the same manner, to which I replied--

"In listening to you, Mr. Emerson, no achievement seemed impossible to me--as though I might remove mountains."

"Ah! that is well" he answered cordially.

Mr. Emerson was tall and slender, with long legs, which he had a way of twisting into knots when interested. The bones of the head must have been very thin--for it looked compact, and rising mostly above the orbit of the ears. His temperament [was] delicate and refined. One would speak and think of him as a piece of statuary.

Persons of culture retain the look of youth longer than the ignorant--but I found Mr. Emerson looking much younger than I had expected, and I remarked to him that he and Mr. Ripley of Brook Farm memory were amongst the youngest looking men, who were supposed to have past the dew of youth, that I had ever seen.

"Nevertheless, I must be growing old, " he replied, "for people begin to tell me I look like my relations, which is a sure sign."

This subtle remark pained me. I do not like to recognize as a fact, that the distinguishing marks of genius become obliterated by time and

"The rapt one, with the God-like forehead,"

at length becomes a goggle-eyed old man, the image of his Grandfather.

I do not think Mr. Emerson's face was an expansive one--he was too self-involved--too self-contained. It was a Sphinx which one might study in vain to read. How those old Egyptian heads tower and bewilder, above their folded animal paws!

His voice was winning and pleasing--never loud, but with some quality of distinctness. It sounded always as if coming from a distance.

In listening to his conversation I was often reminded of Montaigne, whom Mr. Emerson not only appreciated as an opponent by his critique upon the wonderful writer of essays, but who also studied him closely. I greatly dissented from Mr. E in the matter of using the thoughts of others. Having remarked of one of the Poets, that he often not only took his key note from another but absorbed his idea bodily, Mr. Emerson declined that it was allowable--saying,

"Rome, madam, Rome is built of the ruins of ancient palaces. A writer must look for the best thought, and use it wherever it is to be found."

"It seems to me that this is to justify plagiarism. If the thought is fine it should be a pleasure to refer it home to its source."

If a keen sense of the beauty in nature, a never tiring love for all hew manifold changes and features--if a warm love and fellowship with all that is pure, and ennobling; a delicate

insight of all the refinements of taste, from the perfect harmony of architecture to the torrid coloring and honey warmth of the humble bee, constitutes a Poet, Mr. Emerson most certainly was one, though he seems to me to lack flow and sustainment. Milton's saying that "to write a poem, a man must himself be a poem," holds good in the case of Mr. Emerson, who was himself one of the most exalted of characters. No one could come in contact with him without feeling an atmosphere of the utmost purity and serene harmony, a sweetness and wholesomeness allied to a divine presence. In one sense he was like Poe, who never laughed, nor did Mr. Emerson. His voice too was an intimation of "something afar--from the sphere of our sorrow"¹⁰³ as Shelley has it. He realized the "graciousness" of Montaigne when he says, "We owe Justice to men--and graciousness and benignity to other creatures" hence the serenity that breathed around him.

He was deficient in imagination and had no inventiveness--but he did not fail to lift the reader into that high atmosphere that lives above the tempest, up into the pure ether of divine thought where the constellations sing together of supernal hopes--supreme love--and untiring duty--and this is to be a Poet, though the flow of harmony may be deficient. The Diamond is the great poem of the material world, compounded of the pure dirt of eons of cosmic matter crystalized into harmony of shape, with no outstanding waste of material, so the man who

¹⁰³The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The Devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

"To : One Word is Too Often Profaned"

wrote

"Not from a vain or shallow thought
His awful Jove young Phidias wrought;
Never from lips of cunning fell
The thrilling Delphic oracle;
Out from the heart of nature rolled
The burdens of the Bible old;
The litanies of nations came,
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,
Up from the burning core below,--
The canticles of love and woe;
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."

gives us the [spring] of a condensed Miltonic utterance, the diamond, crystalized into pure light.

He had none of "the contortions of the Sibyl"--but "her inspiration" coming from a higher source than passion, lived in and through him--still, were it not for his thought, his philosophic, far-reaching for the subtle soul of things, his claim to rank as a Poet might well be disputed--as it is we feel to accept the crabbed shape in which it is hidden for the sake of the force and sweetness of the Oracle.

It is no disparagement to Emerson to intimate that he knew how to absorb and make vital in himself the sweet doctrine,

"I cannot stir but as thou please to move me,
Nor can my heart return thee love, until thou love me."

which makes clear much that seems opaque and contradictory in his writings. We have no right to be to day a facsimile of what we were yesterday when the very soul of nature is revealed to us day by day in a new aspect, and truth dares us to open our eyes to the eternal revelations of new and more beautiful thought. Hope and Receptiveness become prophets--and anticipate heavenly visions, and touch the lips with sweetness as the beer of Hybla clustered about the lips of Plato.

Emerson fully illuminated all we are seeking to learn about heredity--he was the product

of a long line, eight generations of ancestry, where pursuits had been pulpit wise--eight generations, where lives had been especially devoted to religious culture, whose equalized blood flowed rhythmically to the beautiful and true, whose proclivities were groomed in the high moralities: he had no fault to find with with his forebears--all his ancestors seem to have been well-fathered--and well-mothered. A man thus heralded into this living, breathing world has a wonderful start on the great road that leads to the Delectable Mountains. They may well be

"Creations without reproach or blot
Who do God's will and know it not."

I ventured to say to Mr. Emerson in this connection--

"Perhaps in the great evolution of thought old dogmas of vicarious suffering, and the remission of sin by the shedding of blood, may resolve themselves into this transmission of blood by heredity which is to be the ultimate redeemer."

He gave me a silent reply with his calm, mystic eyes--nothing more.

Because Heredity is to be the great idea in the future let us not forget that Genius is often found compounded of the fiery elements that spring from a fineness of almost vagabond blood that has been etherealized by some unknown [illegible], and a child is born sometimes blind to the light--seeking God and seeking Devil, and we hear an utterance that will not be

lost--that clings to something within us not to be put by, and the very soul of pity is touched at this cry of a Lavage, a Chatterton, or a Poe. Thank God the spaces of the vast universe are wide and hospitable--and human hearts represent manifold states, and respond somewhere to this great cry in the wilderness.

Mr. Emerson spoke much and often in praise of Tennyson, and was rather annoyed that I did not as highly estimate the Princess, which at that time was on everybody's lips.

"What do you think of the Raven?" he asked me suddenly.

Now when society was first electrified by that weird cry of 'Nevermore' that seemed like a voice from the confines of some remote sub-lunar concave, the poet, Mr. Charles Hoffman had read the poem to me with his fine intonation and interpreted the myth to be, Despair brooding over Genius or Idealism, and I answered by repeating this to Mr. Emerson.

"I see nothing in it," was his reply.

"To sympathize with it," I replied, "one must go out into the dark and unknown-- and there a great lurid atmosphere shapes it all into a meaning."

"I do not see it," he replied.

How could he? He with his wholesome optimism--his sweet calm philosophy that always saw the lovely, Each in All, and had never known the surgings of a blind passionate nature, nor the stress of poetry, nor the wild midnight walk under the cold moon uncertain where the next mean was to come, never assailed by cruel pens nor cruel tongues, never stood on the outskirts of being and felt that the malignant planets fought against him as they fought against

[Sisera]. How could he, to whom common sense was intensified into Genius, how could he see anything to justify a poem that strikes the life like the tolling of a Moscow bell, off, amid the despairing sweep of burning, despairing worlds?

Mr. Emerson could penetrate the mysteries of Brahma and not recoil from the everlasting silence of Nirvana, but this wail of a human soul, torn with the dismay of doubt and despair, touched him no more than the imaginary cry of these who are supposed to look forever up to the crystalline walls of heaven and are never permitted to enter. Sopped in his own sweetness and safety the jangling bells of the Raven (not out of tune and harsh) were an unknown cadence to him.

I have always regretted that in our talk Shakespeare had no representation. I do not remember that we even quoted from him, and I have a strong suspicion that the great master of the passions was distasteful to him; and yet his conversation indicated an admiration for a robust manliness, as well as courageous womanhood.

Indeed, Mr. Emerson admired a wholesome, hearty physical soundness, and did not so much recoil from even a dash of the wicked, as he did from the goody good imbecilities that so often air their impotence in the pulpit. Muscularity of mind or body was to him what it was to an ancient Greek at the Olympic games.

If I wished to sum up the characteristics of Emerson in a brief paragraph, I should say he was in the high sense a Gentleman, much as Albert Matthews describes and defines.

As a married man he was gentle and courteous, rather putting the family on their best

behaviors by the respect with which they were treated. What we consider as pertaining to the Gentleman, was that, to him and more--it became to him a moral force. If he had aches and pains or migraines nobody heard about them. If troubled with insomnia he never told about it, but came before the household fresh as the morning. Mr. Joel Benton, author of an essay on the poetry of Mr. Emerson, wrote him as an apology for not meeting him on a special occasion that he was ill at the time, to which Mr. Emerson responded emphatically, "I entreat you to be well." Indeed sickness was, to him, what it is to all sound bodied persons, something provoking disgust, a strong pulse was the element of courage, success, performance in great things. Power in the rough was as much esteemed in him as it was in Carlyle, yet in Emerson there was personally not a shadow of roughness. He could not have treated Queen as Carlyle treated the devoted Jane Walsh.¹⁰⁴ In seeing a man so entirely himself, and no other, one felt as Montaigne has said, that "'Tis an absolute, and as it were, a divine perfection for a man to know how loyally to enjoy his being." This Mr. Emerson truly realized. A man rounded to the supreme completeness of his being, self-poised, not to be tempted to do any work but his own.

One that did not seek contest, did not snuff the bottle with the heat of the war-horse, like the soldierly Wendell Phillips, but who did not fail to accept and give his testimony to all high humanitarian ideas and movements, including that of Suffrage for Women, he having stood on the same platform with myself on more than one occasion.

¹⁰⁴ Wife of Thomas Carlyle.

Underneath much of seeming passiveness, was an almost joyous hopefulness, and faith in the ultimate of good, a reverence for law, which to him confirmed an Idealism of all things; sacred, however misunderstood. Opinion was little to him, but abstract righteousness the sum and substance of religion. Reverent he was in the highest degree, a contemner of creeds, but spiritual-minded, finding a witness to the unseen and eternal in the litanies of all peoples. He never used an idle word, and when we find in the utterances of such a man,

"Himself from God he could not free" and perpetual references to Ministers and Angels from the unseen, we understand that such a soul is all filled with a loving belief, which we call religion; and in testimony of this need of faith for the soul of man, he would have quaffed the bowl of poison with the sweetness of Socrates.

Mr. Emerson was entirely unselfish, hence it was not easy to throw him from his balance by wounding his self-love.

Formerly the experiences before Lyceums and literary associations were often preceded by music and followed by prayers. On one of these occasions the Minister prayed, "O Lord after the incomprehensible nonsense to which we have listened O Lord: enlighten thy people."

Mr. Emerson listened reverently to the close, and then said to one of the deacons, "You have a very earnest, honest-minded man, for Pastor." You cannot associate anything discordant, gloomy or mean with such a man. He realizes his own definition of a Poet. "A man without impediment" and yet devoid of what Milton calls "the last infirmity of noble minds," ambition.

When Mr. Emerson, obedient to the convictions of his own mind, preached his last sermon to his admiring congregation, in which he declared himself no longer able to administer the Lord's Supper, his friends relate a touching incident which affected him even to tears. As he descended from the pulpit an old lady approached, and presenting her wrinkled hand ejaculated, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

In spring of the year, season of hope, and befitting this child of hope, he laid down his mortal robe obedient to that call, which none but himself ever heard

"A vagrant booming of the air;--

Voice of a meteor lost in day--

Such tidings from the starry sphere,

Does this elastic air convey."

Died 27 April 1882.