

RALPH WALDO EMERSON Read by David Cort
A Selection from the Essays, the Poetry, and the Journals
Selected, Recorded, and With a Critical Introduction by Samuel Charters Folkways Records FL 9758

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON Read by David Cort

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A NOTE ON THE READER

David Cort is a young actor who has appeared in many productions both in America and England. Trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, he has performed in many roles, including Oedipus Rex, Caliban, Pericles and Bottom. He has recently played off-Broadway at the Orpheum Theater and the Cinderella Theater Club. Mr. Cort may also be heard on FOLKWAYS Record FL 9741, Dear Abe Linkhorn: Satires of the Civil War.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston on May, 1803, a son of the minister of the First Unitarian Church, William Emerson. His father died when he was eight years old, leaving the family in straightened circumstances. Both his mother and an unmarried aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, were, however, determined that the sons should be given as good an education as possible, and although they often had to share a coat between them they were able to continue with their studies. After four years at the Boston Latin School Emerson entered Harvard College, which was then on the level of a modern preparatory school, at the age of fourteen. He worked his way through school, as a messenger for the President and waiting on the tables at commons, graduating in 1821. He was an ordinary student, but in the first entries in his journals, begun when he was a junior, his concern with self knowledge and his spiritual independence were already evident. For three years after his graduation he taught in the school which his brother William had established as a "finishing academy" for young women in Boston, using his salary to help put his younger brothers through college.

When he was able to give up teaching he turned, as had been expected of him, to the ministry. He entered Harvard Divinity School, and despite irregular attendance and a lack of enthusiasm for much of the course of study was able to begin his work in the church in 1826, when he was twenty-three years old. His religious views were already leading him to question much of the Christian ritual which he was called upon to administer, but in 1829 he was called as minister to the Second Unitarian Church of Boston, and was able to marry Ellen Tucker, a beautiful younger woman with whom he was deeply in love. It was to be, however, a difficult period for Emerson. His young wife had already been touched with tuberculosis and she died two years later. He became less and less able to reconcile his own views with those of his church members, and with the death of his wife it was only a matter of time before he would be compelled to leave the ministry. The break came the next year, when he decided that his religious views would not permit him to administer the rite of communion. He was never to be called to the church again, although, as Professor Hubbell has commented, in his American Life in Literature, "After 1832 Emerson gradually gave up preaching altogether as far as the pulpit was concerned. In a sense he never ceased to preach - it was in his blood - and he merely substituted for the pulpit the lecture platform and the printed page. It is important . . . (to) remember that his style is that of a lecturer rather than that of a writer. This is apparent when his prose is read aloud. . ."

With so much apparently at an end for him, and his own health giving him some concern, he decided that he needed to take some time to try to decide what his future course might be. He sailed for Europe on Christmas day, 1832, intending to talk with four British writers whose work had interested him, Landor, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle. He was able to meet all of them, and despite a disappointment in them he seemed to find a new purpose in the months that he was in Europe. Only the relationship with Carlyle was to be an enduring one.

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He found the Carlyles living in angry poverty in a lonely cottage in Craigenputtock, a village in the south of Scotland. Carlyle was struggling to achieve recognition, and Emerson's visit, evidence that Carlyle's work was beginning to have some influence, gave to him a new determination. They continued to correspond for nearly forty years, and the friendship was an important one to both men. In Liverpool, where Emerson waited the next September for the ship that was to return him to the United States, he noted in his journal,

"The comfort of meeting men of genius such as these (Landor, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle) is that they talk sincerely, they feel themselves to be so rich that they are above the meanness of pretending to knowledge which they have not, and they frankly tell you what puzzles them. But Carlyle - Carlyle is so amiable that I love him."

A year after his return, in 1834, he moved to Concord, Massachusetts, where he was to live for the rest of his life. He began delivering the lectures, on a wide variety of subjects, which were to be his principal source of livelihood, and in 1835 he married again, to Lydia Jackson, who at his suggestion changed her name to Lidian. Within a few years he had become the leading intellectual figure in America, and his life was largely one of study and lecturing until his death. His religious views had resolved into Transcendentalism, a system of belief which felt that the one overwhelming reality of existence is the Over-Soul, the spirit of God, which unifies every being with its spirit, and this gave to his thought its characteristic direction. Professor Goddard's comments on the transcendentalists in The Cambridge History of American Literature effectively describe Emerson's attitudes:

"From these central conceptions all the other teachings of the transcendentalists are derived: their doctrines of self-reliance and individualism, of the identity of moral and physical laws, of the essential unity of all religions, of the negative nature of evil; their spirit of complete tolerance and absolute optimism; their defiance of tradition and disregard for all external authority."

In his emphasis on the individual Emerson was to stimulate an entire generation of writers, and in addresses like "The American Scholar", delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge on August 31, 1837, he effectively led the American intellectual to a new consideration of himself in his relation to the European culture from which he was hesitantly turning. As a lecturer, and as a writer, he was often clumsy and obscure, but the intensity of his thought gave to nearly all of his work a vigor and strength. James Russell Lowell described him in a letter,

"Emerson's oration was more disjointed than usual, even with him. It began nowhere and ended everywhere, and yet, as always with that divine man, it left you feeling that something beautiful had passed that way - something more beautiful than anything else, like the rising and setting of the stars. Every possible criticism might have been

made on it but one - that it was not noble . . . He boggled, he lost his place, he had to put on his glasses; but it was as if a creature from some fairer world had lost his way in our fogs, and it was our fault, not his. It was chaotic, but it was all such stuff as stars are made of . . ."

His essay "Nature", published in 1836, was favorably received, and his "Essays, First Series", 1841, established his reputation securely. Although he continued to live quietly in Concord he had a steadily increasing influence on other writers and intellectuals. Young Henry Thoreau, who also lived in Concord, was so impressed with Emerson's early writing that he finally moved into the house with Emerson's family. Thoreau, however, was having emotional difficulties, and he fell in love with Lidian Emerson. He moved away from the Emerson's, but when he decided to move into the woods near Concord he asked Emerson's permission to build his small house on some land that Emerson owned near Walden Pond, outside of the small town. Emerson had the respect not only of nearly every literary figure in America, but was also widely read in England, and on two later trips he met many younger writers who had given serious attention to his work.

As he grew older Emerson's intellectual powers began to fade, but he still left with everyone who met him the impression of his sincere belief in the ultimate moral nature of man. He died on April 24, 1882, and was buried in Concord in the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

A NOTE ON EMERSON'S CONCERN WITH EXPRESSION

Samuel Charters

In his journal, late in life, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote,

"I finish this morning transcribing my old essay on Love, but I see well its inadequateness. I, cold, because I am hot -- cold at the surface only as a sort of guard and compensation for the fluid tenderness of the core -- have much more experience than I have written there, more than I will, more than I can write. In silence we must wrap much of our life, because it is too fine for speech, because also we cannot explain it to others, and because somewhat we cannot yet understand. We do not live as angels, eager to introduce each other to new perfections in our brothers and sisters, and frankly avowing our delight in each new trait of character, in the magic of each new eyebeam, but that which passes for love in the world gets official, and instead of embracing, hates all the divine traits that dare to appear in other persons. A better and holier society will mend this selfish cowardice, and we shall have brave ties of affection, not petrified by law, not dated or ordained by law to last for one year, for five years, or for life; but drawing their date' like all friendship, from itself only."

Often Emerson returned to something he had written earlier, and, as in these sentences, his concern was with what he had expressed, rather than in the artistic effectiveness of his expression. In this paragraph, jotted into the journal for his own use, is a reflection of much that went into the shaping of his art.

Art, perhaps, is a word which is difficult to use in considering Emerson's writing. He wrote extensively, his essays, travel sketches, and poetry filling numerous volumes, but his concern was almost entirely with expression, rather than with art. For him art becomes only a means, only a frame within which his thought is better displayed. As he expressed it in his essay on "The Poet": "For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem, a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own. . ." The essay on "Love" which he had been reading was an early one,

from his ESSAYS, FIRST SERIES, published in 1841, and it is not an entirely successful piece. He has not given to the subject a compelling direction, and his thought seems to stray, turning first to one side, then another, without an easily discerned meaning in the wandering step. But as he transcribes it again he doesn't concern himself with its artistic difficulties, only with the feeling that he might not have expressed the further experience that he might . . . have written there." Then he goes on to develop yet another straying thought from the same subject.

Even this, this renewed effort to clarify his attitude toward his subject, is a reflection of his attitude toward expression. Emerson used his writing to develop a concept of a higher moral life, sustained by the true nature of man himself, and he returned again and again to his theme, using his skill as an artist to overcome the diffidence, the reluctance, or the hostility of the audiences who came to the lectures which he gave everywhere in the United States, and of the readers who encountered his lectures in their printed essay form. In sentence after sentence he returns to his theme, explaining, remonstrating, cajoling, and, at his best, inspiring. If sometimes inept he is always determined, and if sometimes difficult and vague he is always in earnest.

Emerson's literary methods were perhaps clumsy, but he forced them to yield results. As Professor Hubbell has commented,

". . . Emerson's hold on the modern reader is to be explained not only by the vitality of his ideas but by his literary power. His method of composition suggests why he is at his best in brief passages. He wrote down his thoughts in his journals. From his journals he took the passages that became the heart of his lectures; from the lectures and journals grew the essays. In organization such an essay as "Self-Reliance" may be disjointed or even obscure, but the individual sentences are carefully pointed and polished. No other American has said so many fine things or made shrewder comments on life."

The description should be extended to include Emerson's poetry, and even his letters, which like his essays have the persistent concern with the expression of his ideas. Few writers have given to their work such a marked consistency. In prose and in poetry, in journal entry or in formal essay his accent is unmistakable.

If, as he wrote in his journal, he felt his essay on "Love" to be inadequate, he had made other efforts to express his ideas on the subject; and in these efforts may be seen the consistent attitude with which he regarded a subject as he related it to his larger theme. There was, throughout his work, the same intent concern with other subjects as with Love, but a few illustrations of his persistence in expression toward this subject will make his attitudes more clear. Even in the formal paragraphs of the essay he becomes for a moment personal and protests, "I have been told that in some public discourses of mine my reverence for the intellect has made me unjustly cold to the personal relations. But now I almost shrink at the remembrance of such disparaging words. . ."

Often the journal left him the freedom to express aspects of a subject which he would not have felt free to discuss in either a lecture or essay, and in an entry he notes one of love's difficulties.

"Love is necessary to the righting the estate of woman in this world. Otherwise nature itself seems to be in conspiracy against her dignity and welfare; for the cultivated, high-thoughted, beauty-loving, saintly woman finds herself unconsciously desired for her sex, and even enhancing the appetite of her savage pursuers by these fine ornaments she has piously laid on herself. . ."

Again, he notes,

"Woman hides her form from the eyes of men in our world: they cannot, she rightly thinks, be trusted. In a right state the love of one, which each man carried in his heart, should protect all women from his eyes as by an impenetrable veil of indifference. The love of one should make him indifferent to all others, or rather their protector and saintly friend, as if for her sake. But now there is in the eyes of all men a certain evil light, a vague desire which attaches them to the forms of many women, whilst their attentions fasten on some one. Their natural eye is not fixed into coincidence with their spiritual eye."

In his essay he had been less direct.

". . . The lover cannot paint his maiden to his fancy poor and solitary. Like a tree in flower, so much soft, budding, informing loveliness is society in itself. . ."

In his letters he sometimes returned to the personal note he adopted for a moment in the essay, as in this letter to Margaret Fuller, in which he refers to himself in the third person.

". . . Would you know more of his history? -- Diffident, shy, proud, having settled it long ago in his mind that he and society must always be nothing to each other -- he received with astonishment the kind regards of such as coming from the opposite quarter of the heavens he now calls his friends -- with surprise and when he dared to believe them with delight. Can one be glad of an affection which he knows not how to return? I am. Humbly grateful for every expression of tenderness -- which makes the day sweet and inspires unlimited hopes. . ."

He went on in another letter to Caroline Sturgis,

"I hate everything frugal and cowardly in friendship. That, at least should be brave and generous. When we fear the withdrawal of love from ourselves by the new relations which our companions must form, it is mere infidelity. We believe in our eyes and not in the Creator. . . But we are wiser with the next sun, and know that a true and native friend is only the extension of our own being and perceiving into other skies and societies, there learning wisdom, there

discerning spirits, and attracting our own for us, as truly as we had done hitherto in our strait enclosure. . ."

There was for Emerson also the fiery, expressive voice of poetry. He wrote poetry throughout his life, bringing to it his most intent creative powers. He had little gift for the music of poetry, and his verse is often weak and ineffectual, but he turned to it with the same determined effort with which he turned to his other writing. He forced it, as he had his essays, to yield results, and there are sudden glimpses of lyric beauty, momentary snatches of song that cast over the rest of the verse a reflection of their own glowing intensity. The poetry, in some respects, is his finest achievement. In a single phrase he is often able to express the thought of a paragraph; in a short lyric the emotional richness of an essay. In his poetic language he was to influence the young Emily Dickinson, who read his poems when still looking for a means to poetic expression. In his insistence on the integrity of thought and subject over the regularities of rhyme and metre he was to stir Walt Whitman from his work as a Brooklyn carpenter. There are long verses in which the metre is faulty, the rhyme poorly considered, like "Woodnotes"; others like "The Problem" which begin with a vivid phrase and lose themselves in the twisting thought. Even some of the more successful poems, like "Hamatreya" occasionally stumble. But there are moments of muted perfection, as in "Days", and they give to the others a new meaning and significance.

As he turned from his essay to his journal to his letters in his concern with expressing his ideas of love he also turned to poetry, and it seemed to give new strength to his attitude. If art had disappointed him, the very intensity of his concern with expressing himself seemed to bring it for a moment to his side. Of the poem he had no need to write in his journal". . . I see well its inadequateness."

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse,
Nothing refuse.

'Tis a brave master;
Let it have scope:

Follow it utterly,
Hope beyond hope:
High and more high
It dives into noon,
With wing unspent,
Untold intent;
But it is a god,
Knows its own path
And the outlets of the sky. . .

SIDE I

Band 1: From the Essay BEAUTY

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

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

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

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

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

Band 2: The Poem THE SNOWSTORM

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.
The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit
Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

Come see the north wind's masonry.
Out of an unseen quarry evermore
Furnished with tile, the fierce artificer
Curves his white bastions with projected roof
Round every windward stake, or tree, or door.
Speeding, the myriad-handed, his wild work
So fanciful, so savage, nought cares he
For number or proportion. Mockingly,
On coop or kennel he hangs Parian wreaths;
A swan-like form invests the hidden thorn;
Fills up the farmer's lane from wall to wall,
Maugre the farmer's sighs; and at the gate
A tapering turret overtops the work.
And when his hours are numbered, and the world
Is all his own, retiring, as he were not,
Leaves, when the sun appears, astonished Art
To mimic in slow structures, stone by stone,
Built in an age, the mad wind's night-work,
The frolic architecture of the snow.

Band 3: "Is this beauty to perish . . . ?" and the poem HAMATREYA

I go twice a week over Concord with Ellery, and, as we sit on the steep park at Conantum, we still have the same

regret as oft before. Is all this beauty to perish? Shall none remake this sun and wind, the sky-blue river, the river-blue sky; the yellow meadow spotted with sacks and sheets of cranberry-pickers; the red bushes; the iron-gray house with just the color of the granite rock; the paths of the thicket, in which the only engineers are the cattle grazing on yonder hill; the wide, straggling wild orchard in which Nature has deposited every possible flavor in the apples of different trees? Whole zones and climates she has concentrated into apples. We think of the old benefactors who have conquered these fields; of the old man Moore, who is just dying in these days, who has absorbed such volumes of sunshine like a huge melon or pumpkin in the sun—who has owned in every part of Concord a woodlot, until he could not find the boundaries of these, and never saw their interiors. But we say, where is he who is to save the present moment; and cause that this beauty be not lost?

The journal of one of our walks would be literature enough for a cockney—or for us, if we should be shut up in our houses—and we make no record of them. The cranberry meadow yonder is that where Darius Hubbard picked one hundred bushels in one season, worth two hundred dollars, and no labor whatever is bestowed on the crop, not so much as to mow the grass or cut down the bushes. Much more interesting is the woodlot, which yields its gentle rent of six per cent without any care or thought where the owner sleeps or travels, and fears no enemy but fire. But Ellery declares that the Railroad has proved too strong for all our farmers and has corrupted them like a war, or the incursion of another race—has made them all amateurs, given the young men an air their fathers never had; they look as if they might be railroad agents any day. We shall never see Cyrus Hubbard, or Ephraim Wheeler, or Grass-and-Oats, or Oats-and-Grass, or Barrett or Hosmer, in the next generation. These old Saxons have the look of pine trees and apple trees, and might be the sons got between the two; conscientious laborers with a science born with them from out the sap vessels of these savage sires.

HAMATREYA

Bulkeley, Hunt, Willard, Hosmer, Meriam, Flint,
Possessed the land which rendered to their toil
Hay, corn, roots, hemp, flax, apples, wool and wood.
Each of these landlords walked amidst his farm,
Saying, " 'Tis mine, my children's and my name's.
How sweet the west wind sounds in my own trees!
How graceful climb those shadows on my hill!
I fancy these pure waters and the flags
Know me, as does my dog: we sympathize;
And, I affirm, my actions smack of the soil."

Where are these men? Asleep beneath their grounds:
And strangers, fond as they, their furrows plough.
Earth laughs in flowers, to see her boastful boys
Earth-proud, proud of the earth which is not theirs;
Who steer the plough, but cannot steer their feet
Clear of the grave.

. . . go into the forest, you shall find all new and undescribed. The honking of the wild geese flying by night; the thin note of the companionable titmouse in the winter day; the fall of swarms of flies, in autumn, from combats high in the air, pattering down on the leaves like rain; the angry hiss of the wood-birds; the pine throwing out its pollen for the benefit of the next century; the turpentine exuding from the tree—and indeed any vegetation, any animation, any and all, are alike unattempted. The man who stands on the seashore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange. Whilst I

read the poets, I think that nothing new can be said about morning and evening. But when I see the daybreak I am not reminded of these Homeric, or Shakespearean, or Miltonic, or Chaucerian pictures. No, but I feel perhaps the pain of an alien world; a world not yet subdued by the thought; or I am cheered by the moist, warm, glittering, budding, melodious hour, that takes down the narrow walls of my soul, and extends its life and pulsation to the very horizon. *That* is morning, to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body, and to become as large as nature.

The noonday darkness of the American forest, the deep, echoing, aboriginal woods, where the living columns of the oak and fir tower up from the ruins of the trees of the last millenium; where, from year to year, the eagle and the crow see no intruder; the pines, bearded with savage moss, yet touched with grace by the violets at their feet; the broad, cold lowland which forms its coat of vapor with the stillness of subterranean crystallization; and where the traveller, amid the repulsive plants that are native in the swamp, thinks with pleasing terror of the distant town; this beauty, haggard and desert beauty, which the sun and the moon, the snow and the rain, repaint and vary, has never been recorded by art, yet is not indifferent to any passenger.

Band 4: "Each Age Must Write Its Own Books . . ."

Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, the act of thought, is transferred to the record. The poet chanting was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given; forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate⁴ with the world and the soul. Hence the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end which all means go to effect? 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. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates. In this action it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead:

man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his;—cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair.

On the other part, instead of being its own seer, let it receive from another mind its truth, though it were in torrents of light, without periods of solitude, inquest, and self-recovery, and a fatal disservice is done. Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence. The literature of every nation bears me witness. The English dramatic poets have Shakspearized now for two hundred years.

Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading, so it be sternly subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,—when the sun is hid and the stars withdraw their shining,—we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray, to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear, that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree, looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

It is remarkable, the character of the pleasure we derive from the best books. They impress us with the conviction that one nature wrote and the same reads. We read the verses of one of the great English poets, of Chaucer, of Marvell, of Dryden,⁵ with the most modern joy,—with a pleasure, I mean, which is in great part caused by the abstraction of all *time* from their verses. There is some awe mixed with the joy of our surprise, when this poet, who lived in some past world, two or three hundred years ago, says that which lies close to my own soul, that which I also had well-nigh thought and said. But for the evidence thence afforded to the philosophical doctrine of the identity of all minds, we should suppose some preestablished harmony, some foresight of souls that were to be, and some preparation of stores for their future wants, like the fact observed in insects, who lay up food before death for the young grub they shall never see.

Band 5: From POETRY AND IMAGINATION

Poetry will never be a simple means, as when history or philosophy is rhymed, or laureate odes on state occasions are written. Itself must be its own end, or it is nothing. The difference between poetry and stock poetry is this, that in the latter the rhythm is given and the sense adapted to it; while in the former the sense dictates the rhythm. I might even say that the rhyme is there in the theme, thought and image themselves. Ask the fact for the form. For a verse is not a vehicle to carry a sentence as a jewel is carried in a case: the verse must be alive, and inseparable from its contents, as the soul of man inspires and directs the body, and we measure the inspiration by the music. In reading prose, I am sensitive as soon as a sentence drags; but in poetry, as soon as one word drags. Ever as the thought mounts, the expression mounts. 'Tis cumulative also; the poem is made up of lines each of which fills the ear of the poet in its turn, so that mere synthesis produces a work quite superhuman.

SIDE II

Band 1: THE NONCONFORMIST - letters, and from the essay "Self Reliance"

[To the Reverend Henry Ware, Jr.] It strikes me very oddly that good and wise men at Cambridge and Boston

should think of raising me into an object of criticism. I have always been, from my very incapacity of methodical writing, "a chartered libertine," free to worship and free to rail; lucky when I could make myself understood, but never esteemed near enough to the institutions and mind of society to deserve the notice of the masters of literature and religion. I have appreciated fully the advantage of my position; for I well know that there is no scholar less willing or less able to be a polemic. I could not give account of myself, if challenged. I could not possibly give you one of the "arguments" you cruelly hint at, on which any doctrine of mine stands. For I do not know what arguments mean in reference to any expression of a thought. I delight in telling what I think, but if you ask how I dare say so, or why it is so, I am the most helpless of mortal men. I do not even see that either of these questions admits of an answer. So that, in the present droll posture of my affairs, when I see myself suddenly raised into the importance of a heretic, I am very uneasy when I advert to the supposed duties of such a personage, who is expected to make good his thesis against all comers.

I certainly shall do no such thing. I shall read what you and other good men write, as I have always done—glad when you speak my thought, and skipping the page that has nothing for me. I shall go on, just as before, seeing whatever I can, and telling what I see; and, I suppose, with the same fortune that has hitherto attended me—the joy of finding that my abler and better brothers, who work with the sympathy of society, loving and beloved, do now and then unexpectedly confirm my perceptions, and find my nonsense is only their own thought in motley.

Fear disenchant life and the world. If I have not my own respect I am an impostor, not entitled to other men's, and had better creep into my grave. I admire the sentiment of Thoreau, who said, "Nothing is so much to be feared as fear; God himself likes atheism better." For the world is a battle-ground; every principle is a war-note, and the most quiet and protected life is at any moment exposed to incidents which test your firmness. The illusion that strikes me as the masterpiece in that ring of illusions which our life is, is the timidity with which we assert our moral sentiment. We are made of it, the world is built by it, things endure as they share it; all beauty, all health, all intelligence exist by it; yet we shrink to speak of it or to range ourselves by its side. Nay, we presume strength of him or them who deny it. Cities go against it; the college goes against it, the courts snatch at any vicious form of law to rule it out; legislatures listen with appetite to declamations against it, and vote it down. Every new asserter of the right surprises us, like a man joining the church, and we hardly dare believe he is in earnest.

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather mortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, "What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?" my friend suggested, "But these impulses may be from below, not from above." I replied, "They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral

but he. I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways. If malice and vanity were the coat of philanthropy, shall that pass? If an angry bigot assumes this bountiful cause of Abolition, and comes to me with his last news from Barbadoes, why should I not say to him, "Go love thy infant; love thy wood-chopper; be good-natured and modest; have that grace; and never varnish your hard, uncharitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles off. Thy love afar is spite at home." Rough and graceless would be such greeting, but truth is handsomer than the affectation of love.

A man must consider what a blind-man's-buff is this game of conformity. If I know your sect I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation. Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us and we know not where to begin to set them right. Meantime nature is not slow to equip us in the prison-uniform of the party to which we adhere. We come to wear one cut of face and figure, and acquire by degrees the gentlest asinine expression. There is a mortifying experience in particular, which does not fail to wreak itself also in the general history; I mean "the foolish face of praise," the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease, in answer to conversation which does not interest us. The muscles, not spontaneously moved but moved by a low usurping wilfulness, grow tight about the outline of the face, with the most disagreeable sensation.

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlor. If this aversion had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs. Yet is the discontent of the multitude more formidable than that of the senate and the college. It is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated classes. Their rage is decorous and prudent, for they are timid, as being very vulnerable themselves. But when to their feminine rage the indignation of the people is added, when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment.

Band 2: ODE - inscribed to W.H. Channing

Though loath to grieve
The evil time's sole patriot,
I cannot leave
My honied thought
For the priest's cant,
Or statesman's rant.

If I refuse
My study for their politique,
Which at the best is trick,
The angry Muse
Puts confusion in my brain.

But who is he that prates
Of the culture of mankind,
Of better arts and life?
Go, blindworm, go,
Behold the famous States
Harrying Mexico
With rifle and with knife!

Or who, with accent bolder,
Dare praise the freedom-loving mountaineer?
I found by thee, O rushing Contoocook!
And in thy valleys, Agiochook!
The jackals of the Negro-holder.

The God who made New Hampshire
Taunted the lofty land
With little men;
Small bat and wren
House in the oak:
If earth-fire cleave
The upheaved land, and bury the folk,
The southern crocodile would grieve.
Virtue palter; Right is hence;
Freedom praised, but hid;
Funeral eloquence
Rattles the coffin-lid.

What boots thy zeal,
O glowing friend,
That would indignant rend
The northland from the south?
Wherefore? to what good end?
Boston Bay and Bunker Hill
Would serve things still;
Things are of the snake.

The horseman serves the horse,
The neatherd serves the neat,
The merchant serves the purse,
The eater serves his meat;
'Tis the day of the chattel,
Web to weave, and corn to grind;
Things are in the saddle,
And ride mankind.

There are two laws discrete,
Not reconciled,
Law for man, and law for thing;
The last builds town and fleet,
But it runs wild,
And doth the man unking.

'Tis fit the forest fall,
The steep be graded,
The mountain tunnelled,
The sand shaded,
The orchard planted,
The glebe tilled,
The prairie granted,
The steamer built.

Let man serve law for man;
Live for friendship, live for love,
For truth's and harmony's behoof;
The state may follow how it can,
As Olympus follows Jove.

Yet do not I implore
The wrinkled shopman to my sounding woods,
Nor bid the unwilling senator
Ask votes of thrushes in the solitudes.
Everyone to his chosen work;
Foolish hands may mix and mar;
Wise and sure the issues are.
Round they roll till dark is light,
Sex to sex, and even to odd;
The over-god
Who marries Right to Might,
Who peoples, unpeoples,
He who exterminates
Races by stronger races,
Black by white faces,
Knows to bring honey
Out of the lion;
Grafts gentlest scion
On pirate and Turk.

The Cossack eats Poland,
Like stolen fruit;
Her last noble is ruined,
Her last poet mute:
Straight, into double band
The victors divide;
Half for freedom strike and stand;
The astonished Muse finds thousands at her side.

GIVE ALL TO LOVE

Give all to love;
Obey thy heart;
Friends, kindred, days,
Estate, good-fame,
Plans, credit and the Muse,
Nothing refuse.

'Tis a brave master;
Let it have scope:
Follow it utterly,
Hope beyond hope:
High and more high
It dives into noon,
With wing unspent,
Untold intent;
But it is a god,
Knows its own path
And the outlets of the sky.

It was never for the mean;
It requireth courage stout.
Souls above doubt,
Valor unbending,
It will reward,
They shall return
More than they were,
And ever ascending.

Leave all for love;
Yet, hear me, yet,
One word more thy heart behoved,
One pulse more of firm endeavor,
Keep thee today,
Tomorrow, forever,
Free as an Arab
Of thy beloved.

Cling with life to the maid;
But when the surprise,
First vague shadow of surmise
Flits across her bosom young,
Of a joy apart from thee,
Free be she, fancy-free;
Nor thou detain her vesture's hem,
Nor the palest rose she flung
From her summer diadem.

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

life, because it is too fine for speech, because also we cannot explain it to others, and because somewhat we cannot yet understand. We do not live as angels, eager to introduce each other to new perfections in our brothers and sisters, and frankly avowing our delight in each new trait of character, in the magic of each new eyebeam, but that which passes for love in the world gets official, and instead of embracing, hates all the divine traits that dare to appear in other persons. A better and holier society will mend this selfish cowardice, and we shall have brave ties of affection, not petrified by law, not dated or ordained by law to last for one year, for five years, or for life; but drawing their date, like all friendship, from itself only.

Band 3: GIVE ALL TO LOVE - from the poetry and the journals

DAYS

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.

I finish this morning transcribing my old essay on Love, but I see well its inadequateness. I, cold because I am hot—cold at the surface only as a sort of guard and compensation for the fluid tenderness of the core—have much more experience than I have written there, more than I will, more than I can write. In silence we must wrap much of our

I think I shall never be killed by my ambition. I behold my failures and shortcomings there in writing, wherein it would give me much joy to thrive, with an equanimity which my worst enemy might be glad to see. And yet it is not that I am occupied with better things. One could well leave to others the record, who was absorbed in the life. But I have done nothing. I think the branch of the "tree of life" which headed to a bud in me, curtailed me somehow of a drop or two of sap, and so dwarfed all my florets and drupes. Yet as I tell you I am very easy in my mind, and never dream of suicide. My whole philosophy—which is very real—teaches acquiescence and optimism. Only when I see how much work is to be done, what room for a poet—for any spiritualist—in this great, intelligent, sensual, and avaricious America, I lament my fumbling fingers and stammering tongue.

We have yet had no genius in America, with tyrannous eye, which knew the value of our incomparable materials, and saw, in the barbarism and materialism of the times, another carnival of the same gods whose picture he so much admires in Homer; then in the Middle Age; then in Calvinism. Banks and tariffs, the newspaper and caucus, Methodism and Unitarianism, are flat and dull to dull people, but rest on the same foundations of wonder as the town of Troy and the temple of Delphi, and are as swiftly passing away. Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres.

One book, last summer, came out in New York, a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American—which I thought to send you; but the book throve so badly with the few to whom I showed it, and wanted good morals so much, that I never did. Yet I believe now again, I shall. It is called *Leaves of Grass*—was written and printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, New York, named Walter Whitman; and after you have looked into it, if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it.

In reading Henry Thoreau's journal, I am very sensible of the vigor of his constitution. That oaken strength which I noted whenever he walked, or worked, or surveyed woodlots, the same unhesitating hand with which a field-laborer accosts a piece of work, which I should shun as a waste of strength, Henry shows in his literary task. He has muscle, and ventures on and performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him, I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality. 'Tis as if I went into a gymnasium, and saw youths leap, climb, and swing with a force unapproachable—though their feats are only continuations of my initial grapplings and jumps.

Yesterday, May 23 [1864], we buried Hawthorne in Sleepy Hollow, in a pomp of sunshine and verdure, and gentle winds. James Freeman Clarke read the service in the church and at the grave. Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Agassiz, Hoar, Dwight, Whipple, Norton, Alcott, Hillard, Fields, Judge Thomas, and I attended the hearse as pallbearers. Franklin Pierce was with the family. The church was copiously decorated with white flowers delicately arranged. The corpse was unwillingly shown—only a few moments to this company of his friends. But it was noble

and serene in its aspect—nothing amiss—a calm and powerful head. A large company filled the church and the grounds of the cemetery. All was so bright and quiet that pain or mourning was hardly suggested, and Holmes said to me that it looked like a happy meeting.

Clarke in the church said that Hawthorne had done more justice than any other to the shades of life, shown a sympathy with the crime in our nature, and, like Jesus, was the friend of sinners.

I thought there was a tragic element in the event, that might be more fully rendered—in the painful solitude of the man, which, I suppose, could not longer be endured, and he died of it.

I have found in his death a surprise and disappointment. I thought him a greater man than any of his works betray, that there was still a great deal of work in him, and that he might one day show a purer power. Moreover, I have felt sure of him in his neighborhood, and in his necessities of sympathy and intelligence—that I could well wait his time—his unwillingness and caprice—and might one day conquer a friendship. It would have been a happiness, doubtless to both of us, to have come into habits of unrestrained intercourse. It was easy to talk with him—there were no barriers—only, he said so little, that I talked too much, and stopped only because, as he gave no indications, I feared to exceed. He showed no egotism or self-assertion, rather a humility, and, at one time, a fear that he had written himself out. One day, when I found him on the top of his hill, in the woods, he paced back the path to his house, and said, "This path is the only remembrance of me that will remain."

TERMINUS

It is time to be old,
To take in sail:—
The god of bounds,
Who sets to seas a shore,
Came to me in his fatal rounds,
And said: 'No more!
No farther shoot
Thy broad ambitious branches, and thy root.
Fancy departs: no more invent;
Contract thy firmament
To compass of a tent.
There's not enough for this and that,
Make thy option which of two;
Economize the failing river,
Not the less revere the Giver,
Leave the many and hold the few.
Timely wise accept the terms,
Soften the fall with wary foot;
A little while
Still plan and smile,
And,—fault of novel germs,—
Mature the unfallen fruit.
Curse, if thou wilt, thy sire,
Bad husbands of their fires,
Who, when they gave thee breath,
Failed to bequeath
The needful sinew stark as once,
The Baresark marrow to thy bones,
But left a legacy of ebbing veins,
Inconstant heat and nerveless reins,—
Amid the Muses, left thee deaf and dumb,
Amid the gladiators, halt and numb.'

As the bird trims her to the gale,
I trim myself to the storm of time,
I man the rudder, reef the 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.'