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RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The American Scholar

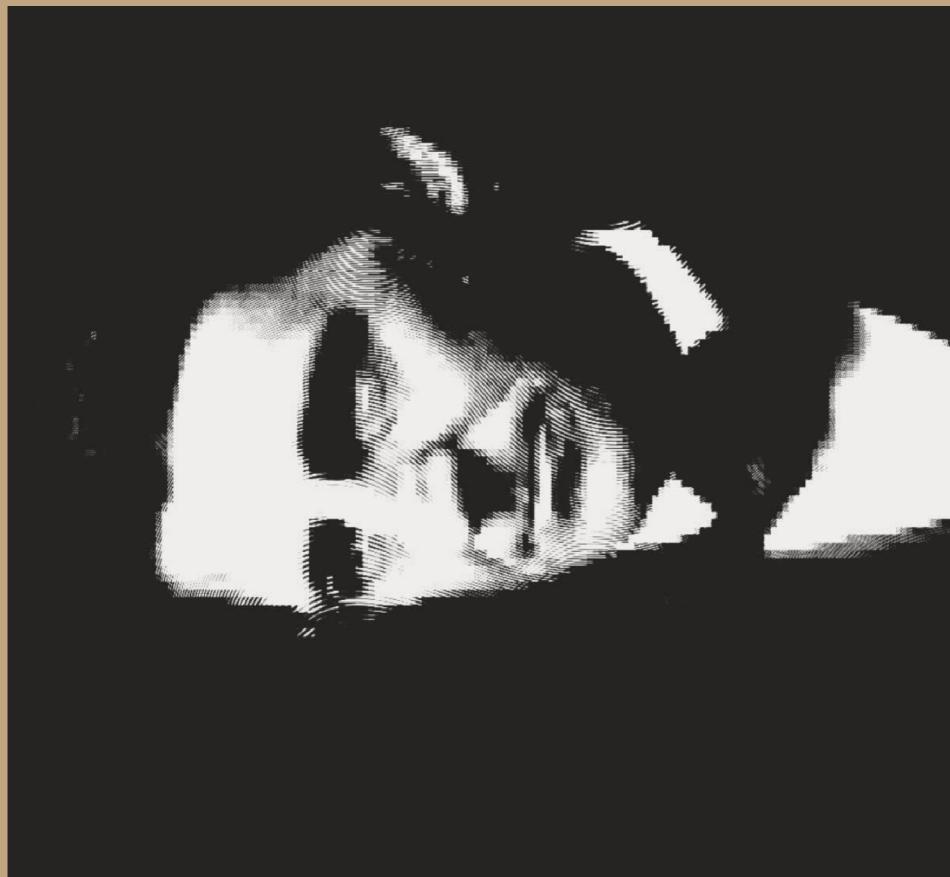
August 31, 1837

Ralph Waldo Emerson

AMERICAN ESSAYIST, LECTURER,
PHILOSOPHER, AND POET

May 25, 1803 – April 27, 1882

He led the **transcendentalist movement** of
the mid-19th century.



An Overview

TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- I. Nature
- II. Mind of the Past
 - i. Man Thinking
 - ii. Books
- III. Action

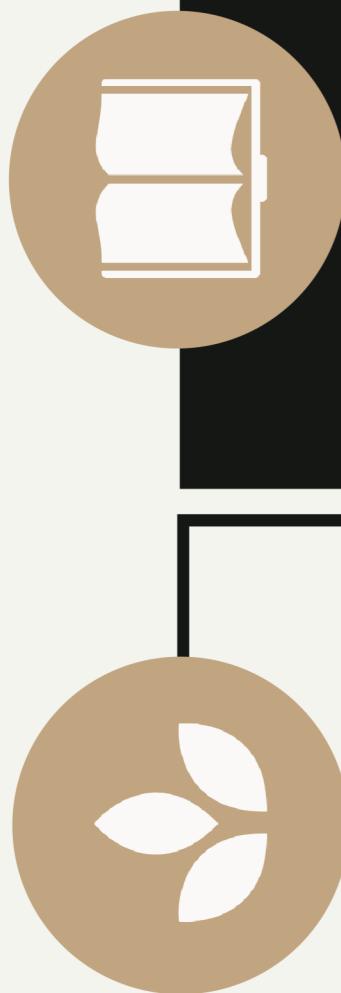
- Duties of a Scholar
- Reference to the Time and to this Country

**It is one light which beams out
of a thousand stars. It is one
soul which animates all men.**

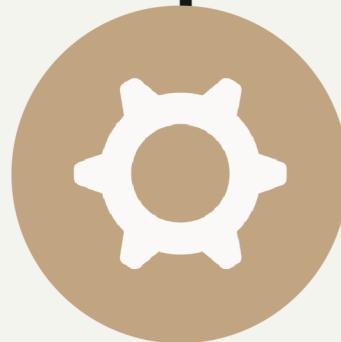
RALPH WALDO EMERSON



PRIMARY HALLMARKS



PAST KNOWLEDGE



ACTION



NATURE

REFERENCE

DUTIES

Later

WHAT IS NATURE TO HIM?

- There is never a beginning, there is never an end
- To the **inexplicable continuity** of this web of God
- But always **circular power** returning into itself
- Therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending, he never can find,—**so entire, so boundless**
- Like rays, upward, downward, **without center, without circumference**
- Classification begins
- [What is classification] these objects are **not chaotic**, and are not foreign
- But have a law which is also a **law of the human mind**

I. Nature

I. Nature

WHAT IS NATURE TO HIM?

- Nature is the **opposite of the soul**, answering to it part for part.
- Nature then becomes to him the **measure of his attainments**.
- The modern precept, "**Study nature**," become **at last one maxim**

III. Mind of the Past

- Books are the **best type of the influence** of the past
- Perhaps we shall get at the **truth**
- Learn the **amount of this influence** more conveniently,—by **considering their value alone.** [A Caveat!]
- The theory of books is **noble**
- **So neither can** - write a **book of pure thought**, that shall be as efficient, in all respects
- Each age, it is found, **must write its own books**
- The **books of an older period will not fit this.**

i. Man Thinking

Mind of the Past - **Caveat!**

- Yet hence arises a **grave mischief**
- 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**

ii. Books

What is the right use?

- Books are the **best of things**, well used; abused, among the worst
- The **one thing** in the world of value is the active soul,—the soul, free, sovereign, active
- 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
- Man hopes, Genius creates. To create,—to create,—is the proof of a divine presence
- Genius is always sufficiently the enemy of genius by over-influence
- Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments
- A fig-tree, looking on a fig-tree, becometh fruitful - Arabian proverb!

ii. Books

What is the right use?

- The human mind can be fed by **any knowledge**. [Caveat!] One must be an **inventor** to read well. There is then **creative reading** as well as **creative writing**
- When the **mind is braced by labor and invention**, the page of **whatever book we read** becomes **luminous with manifold allusion**. Every sentence is doubly **significant**, and the **sense of our author is as broad as the world**.
- The **discerning** will read, in his Plato or Shakespeare, **only that least part**,—only the authentic utterances of the oracle;—**all the rest he rejects**
- **Gowns and pecuniary foundations**, though of towns of gold, **can never countervail the least sentence or syllable of wit**
- Forget this, and our American colleges will **recede in their public importance**, whilst they **grow richer** every year.

III. Action

- Action is with the scholar **subordinate**, but it is **essential**.
Without it he is not yet man
- Inaction is **cowardice**
- There can be no scholar **without the heroic mind**
- The **preamble of thought**, the transition through which it **passes** from the **unconscious to the conscious**, is **action**
- It is **pearls and rubies** to his **discourse**. The true scholar **grudges** **every opportunity of action** passed by, as a loss of power
- **Thinking** is the **function**. **Living** is the **functionary**
- A **great soul** will be **strong to live**, as well as **strong to think**
- **Time shall teach** him that the **scholar loses no hour** which the man lives

Duties OF A SCHOLAR

- They are such as become **Man Thinking**
- They may all be **comprised in self-trust**
- The **office of the scholar** is **to cheer, to raise, and to guide men** by showing them **facts amidst appearances**
- **Long he must stammer** in his speech; **often forego the living for the dead**
- He must accept—how often!—**poverty and solitude**
- He is one who raises himself from **private considerations** and breathes and lives on **public and illustrious thoughts**
- He is the **world's eye**. He is the **world's heart**
- He is to **resist the vulgar prosperity** that retrogrades ever to **barbarism**, by preserving and communicating **heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history**

Duties OF A SCHOLAR

- Whatsoever **oracles the human heart**, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary **on the world of actions**,—these he shall receive and impart
- And whatsoever **new verdict Reason** from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and **events of to-day**,—this **he shall hear and promulgate**
- These being **his functions**, it becomes him to feel all **confidence in himself**, and to defer never to **the popular cry**
- In **silence, in steadiness, in severe abstraction, let him hold by himself**, add **observation to observation, patient of neglect, patient of reproach, and bide his own time**,—happy enough if he can **satisfy himself alone** that this **day he has seen something truly**
- Success treads on every right step
- The deeper he **dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment**, to his wonder he finds this is the most acceptable, most public and **universally true**

Duties OF A SCHOLAR

- In **self-trust** all the **virtues** are **comprehended**
- Free should the scholar be,—**free and brave**
- **Fear** always springs from **ignorance**
- It is a shame to him if his **tranquility**, amid dangerous times, arise from the **presumption** [Temporary Peace!]
- So is the danger a danger still; so is the **fear worse**. Manlike let him turn and face it. Let him look into its eye and **search its nature, inspect its origin**
- Which **lies no great way back**; he will then find in himself a **perfect comprehension of its nature and extent**
- What **deafness**, what **stone-blind custom**, what **overgrown error** you behold is there only by sufferance,—by your **sufferance**.

Duties OF A SCHOLAR

- Yes, we are the **cowed**,—we the **trustless**. It is a **mischievous notion** that we are **come late** into nature; that the **world was finished a long time ago**
 - Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind
 - They are the **kings of the world** who give the **color of their present thought to all nature and all art**
 - The **great man makes the great thing**
 - The **day is always his** who **works in it with serenity and great aims**
 - For this **self-trust**, the **reason is deeper than can be fathomed**,—darker than can be enlightened
 - Men are become of **no account**
 - In a century, in a millenium, **one or two men**; that is to say, **one or two approximations to the right state** of every man

Duties OF A SCHOLAR

- They **sun themselves** in the great man's light, and **feel it to be their own element**
- He **lives for us, and we live in him**
- Men such as they are very naturally **seek money or power**
- **Power because it is as good as money**
- For a man, **rightly viewed, comprehendeth the particular natures of all men**
- It is **one light which beams out of a thousand stars.** It is **one soul which animates all men**

Reference TO THE TIME AND TO THIS COUNTRY

- There are data for marking the genius of the **Classic**, of the **Romantic**, and now of the **Reflective** or **Philosophical age**
- Each individual passes through **all three**
- **The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective**
- I deny not, however, that **a revolution** in the **leading idea may be distinctly enough traced**
- Our age is **bewailed as the age of Introspection** [Introspection is the more usual word to express the analytic self-searching so common in these days]
- We are embarrassed with **second thoughts**. We cannot enjoy anything for **hankering to know whereof the pleasure consists**. We are **lined with eyes**. We **see with our feet**

Reference TO THE TIME AND TO THIS COUNTRY

- look upon the discontent of the **literary class** as a mere announcement of the **fact** that **they find themselves not in the state of mind of their fathers**, and **regret the coming state as untried**; as a boy dreads the water before he has learned that he can swim
- This **time**, like all times, is a very good one, if we but **know what to do with it**.
- Instead of the **sublime and beautiful**, the **near, the low, the common**, was **explored and poetized**
- The **literature of the poor**, the **feelings of the child**, the **philosophy of the street**, the **meaning of household life**, are the topics of the time [French revolution & Romanticism]
- I ask **not for the great, the remote, the romantic**. I **embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar**, the low. **Give me insight into to-day**, and you may have the antique and future worlds

Reference TO THE TIME AND TO THIS COUNTRY

- The world lies **no longer a dull miscellany** and lumber-room, but **has form and order**: there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but **one design unites and animates** the **farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench**
- Man is surprised to find that **things near** are **not less beautiful** and **wondrous than things remote**. The **near explains the far**
- The **drop is a small ocean**. A man is **related to all nature**
- Help must come from the **bosom alone**
- The scholar is that man who **must take up into himself all the ability of the time**, all the **contributions of the past**, all the **hopes of the future**
- He must be an **university of knowledges**. It is for you to **know all**; it is for you to **dare all**

Reference TO THE TIME AND TO THIS COUNTRY

- The spirit of the **American freeman** is already suspected to be **timid, imitative, tame**
- There is **no work** for any one but the **decorous and the complaisant**
- **Patience,—patience;** with the shades of all the **good and great for company;** and for solace the perspective of your own **infinite life;** and for **work the study and the communication of principles,** the making those **instincts prevalent,** the conversion of the world. [Solution]
- **We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.**
- A nation of men will for the first time **exist**, because each **believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul** which also **inspires all men.**

EMERSON
Him Nature solicits with all
her placid, all her monitory
pictures. Him the past
instructs. Him the future
invites.



EMERSON
Character is higher than
intellect.



EMERSON
Thinking is the functionary.
Living is the functionary



EMERSON
The book is perfect; as love
of the hero corrupts into
worship of his statue.



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The office of the scholar is to
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EMERSON

Thank You

FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

