

93 QUOTATIONS



Ralph Waldo Emerson

(1803-1882)

Ralph Waldo Emerson is the most influential American philosopher, starting with (1) his stirring Phi Beta Kappa oration at Harvard “The American Scholar” declaring our cultural independence from Britain, and going on to write (2) the bible of the New England Transcendentalist movement, *Nature* (1836), (3) some of the most quoted essays in the world such as “Self-Reliance,” and (4) a number of the most anthologized poems. He is an Idealist in the philosophical tradition of Plato and Plotinus and resembles his contemporaries Swedenborg and Thomas Carlyle. Because he made so many oracular pronouncements, like the Bible he can be quoted to support opposite sides of issues. As an essayist he is Romantic, intuitive and inclined to be non-linear, sometimes making him seem incoherent. As a poet he is more straightforward and clear—Neoclassical—condensing the same ideas he presents in his essays. The contradictions in his prose between rational statements and mystical insights that are paradoxical illustrate the contrast between ordinary vertical consciousness (Puritan) and holistic consciousness (Transcendental). His term for holistic consciousness is Reason, not to be confused with the 18th-century Enlightenment term Reason, which is a limited faculty of vertical consciousness. Emerson was so important and widely read in his own time that Hawthorne and Melville disagreed with him repeatedly and satirized him in their fiction. Almost every American read Emerson in high school. He is quoted on buildings. He greatly influenced later poets such as Emily Dickinson, E.A. Robinson, and Robert Frost. Emerson promoted the most seminal literary ideas of the 19th century: “Nature is the symbol of spirit”—influential to Modernists—and “Build therefore your own world”—inspirational to Existentialists and the 1960s counterculture (through Thoreau), then culminating in the solipsism of Postmodernists.

ORDER OF TOPICS: liberty, independence, American Scholar, self-reliance, idealistic Existentialism, individuation, monism, Nature, pastoralism, Puritanism, the Universal Soul, centered, Transcendental consciousness, recycling spirit, pantheism, religion, Idealism, intellect, archetypal thinking, circles, Genius, paradox, unbalanced minds, human nature, redemption, experimentation, imagination, literature, symbols, optimism, love, marriage, friends, the common, humility, society, Victorianism, government, progress, teachers, history, the Greeks, quotations, travel, intoxications, overcoming depression, compensation, old age, advice, death, immortality:

LIBERTY

God said, I am tired of kings,
I suffer them no more;
Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor....

When you strike at a king, you must kill him.

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

So nigh in grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,
The youth replies, *I can!*

For what avail the plow or sail,
Or land or life, if freedom fail?

INDEPENDENCE

Infancy conforms to nobody.

Insist on yourself; never imitate.

No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.

Nothing at last is sacred but the integrity of our own mind.

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what people think.

He is great who is what he is from Nature, and who never reminds us of others.

The great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

When each new speaker strikes a new light, emancipates us from the oppression of the last speaker to oppress us with the greatness and exclusiveness of his own thought, then yields us to another redeemer, we seem to recover our rights, to become men.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close.

The scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is *Man Thinking*. In the degenerate state, when the victim of society, he tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking.

I have now spoken of the education of the scholar by nature, by books, and by action.... The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances.

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.

A self-denial no less austere than the saint's is demanded of the scholar. He must worship truth, and forego all things for that, and choose defeat and pain, so that his treasure in thought is thereby augmented.... He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings, and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism, and recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his being is swung. [Compare "Fast Fish and Loose Fish," Chapter 89, *Moby-Dick*]

In yourself is the law of all nature...in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe... A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.

SELF-RELIANCE

Are they *my* poor?

Shallow men believe in luck.

Discontent is the want of self-reliance.

Nature suffers nothing to remain in her kingdom which cannot help itself.

Can anybody remember when the times were not hard and money not scarce?

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages.

IDEALISTIC EXISTENTIALISM

What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within?

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

Every spirit builds itself a house, and beyond its house a world, and beyond its world a heaven. Know then that the world exists for you. For you is the phenomenon perfect.

Build therefore your own world.

Hitch your wagon to a star.

INDIVIDUATION

The soul looketh steadily forwards, creating a world always before her.... The soul's advances are not made by gradation, such as can be represented by motion in a straight line, but rather by ascension of state, such as can be represented by metamorphosis... The growths of genius are of a certain total character.

MONISM

Everything is made of one hidden stuff. [Spirit]

Everything in Nature contains all the powers of Nature.

The entire system of things gets represented in every particle.... The world globes itself in a drop of dew... The true doctrine of omnipresence is that God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb. [Nature is holographic]

NATURE

In the vaunted works of Art
The master stroke is Nature's part.

Nature is the symbol of spirit.

Particular natural facts are symbols of spiritual facts.

The world is emblematic. Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind. The laws of moral nature answer to those of matter as face to face in a glass.

Nature is not fixed but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it. The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit; to pure spirit it is fluid, it is volatile, it is obedient.

To speak truly, few adults can see nature.... The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood.

Power is, in nature, the essential measure of right.

Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them.

PASTORALISM

These facts may suggest the advantage which the country-life possesses, for a powerful mind, over the artificial and curtailed life of cities.

A life in harmony with Nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final causes.

You shall have joy, or you shall have power, said God; you shall not have both.

PURITANISM

To live without duties is obscene.

Has he not a *calling* in his character?

Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Savior rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful....a thing is good only so far as it serves... [Puritan tradition of utilitarianism, Benjamin Franklin].

There is always a certain meanness in the argument of conservatism, joined with a certain superiority in its fact.

THE UNIVERSAL SOUL

O my brothers, God exists. There is a soul at the centre of nature and over the will of every man.

Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.

Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life... This universal soul he calls Reason [not the reason of the Age of Enlightenment, but a transcendent Kantian synthesis]: it is not mine,

or thine, or his, but we are its; we are its property and men. And the blue sky in which the private earth is buried, the sky with its eternal calm, and full of everlasting orbs, is the type of Reason. That which intellectually considered we call Reason, considered in relation to nature, we call Spirit. Spirit is the Creator. Spirit hath life in itself.

I am born into the great, the universal mind. I, the imperfect, adore my own Perfect. I am somehow receptive of the great soul, and thereby I do overlook the sun and the stars and feel them to be but the fair accidents and effects which change and pass.

That great nature in which we rest as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere, that Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission...

All goes to show that the soul in man is not an organ, but animates and exercises all the organs...is not a faculty but a light; is not the intellect or the will, but the master of the intellect and the will;—is the vast background of our being, in which they lie,—an immensity not possessed and that cannot be possessed. From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all. [compare Edwards, "Personal Narrative"]

CENTERED

If he have found his centre, the Deity will shine through him.

TRANSCENDENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The first effort of thought tends to relax this despotism of the senses which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it, and shows its nature aloof and, as it were, afloat.... If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen, causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God. [compare Edwards, "Personal Narrative"]

In the woods...a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period so ever of life, is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth.... In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.... Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both.

When these waves of God flow into me I no longer reckon lost time...these moments confer a sort of omnipresence and omnipotence which asks nothing of duration, but sees that the energy of the mind is commensurate with the work to be done, without time.

A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as if "blasted with excess of light." The trances of Socrates; the "union" of Plotinus; the vision of Porphyry; the conversion of Paul; the aurora of Behmen; the convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers; the illuminations of Swedenborg, are of this kind.

And no man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine.... We apprehend the absolute. As it were, for the first time, we *exist*. We become immortal, for we learn that time and space are relations of matter; that with a perception of truth or a virtuous will they have no affinity.

I cast away in this new moment all my once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain.

Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul.

The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God.

I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall.

What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.

RECYCLING SPIRIT

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

PANTHEISM

All things with which we deal, preach to us. What is a farm but mute gospel? ...A leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time, is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world.... So intimate is this Unity, that, it is easily seen, it lies under the undermost garment of Nature, and betrays its source in Universal Spirit. For it pervades thought also.

I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons.... I only wish to indicate the true position of nature in regard to man, wherein to establish man all right education tends; as the ground which to attain is the object of human life, that is, of man's connection with nature.

The Gothic church plainly originated in a rude adaptation of the forest trees, with all their boughs, to a festal or solemn arcade; as the bands around the cleft pillars still indicate the green withes that tied them.

RELIGION

The first and last lesson of religion is, "The things that are seen, are temporal; the things that are unseen, are eternal." [compare Hawthorne in "The Old Manse" and "The Artist of the Beautiful"]

Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view.

Is the teaching of Christ less effective now than it was when first his mouth was opened?

For every Stoic was a Stoic; but in Christendom where is the Christian?

The reliance on authority measures the decline of religion, the withdrawal of the soul. The position men have given to Jesus, now for many centuries of history, is a position of authority.

I like a church; I like a cowl;
I love a prophet of the soul...
Yet not for all his faith can see
Would I that cowed churchman be...
Earth proudly wears the Parthenon
As the best gem upon her zone...

IDEALISM

Whether nature enjoy a substantial existence without, or is only in the apocalypse of the mind, it is alike useful and alike venerable to me. Be it what it may, it is ideal to me so long as I cannot try the accuracy of my senses... But whilst we acquiesce entirely in the permanence of natural laws, the question of the absolute existence of nature remains open.

The advantage of the ideal theory over the popular faith is this, that it presents the world in precisely that view which is most desirable to the mind.... For seen in the light of thought, the world always is phenomenal; and virtue subordinates it to the mind. Idealism sees the world in God...as one vast picture which God paints on the instant eternity for the contemplation of the soul.

Idealism saith: matter is a phenomenon, not a substance....the mind is a part of the nature of things; the world is a divine dream, from which we may presently awake to the glories and certainties of day. Idealism is a hypothesis to account for nature by other principles than those of carpentry and chemistry.

Behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound, it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves: therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old.

There seems to be a necessity in spirit to manifest itself in material forms; and day and night, river and storm, beast and bird, acid and alkali, preexist in necessary Ideas in the mind of God. [compare Platonism]

We learn that God IS; that he is in me; and that all things are shadows of him. The idealism of Berkeley is only a crude statement of the idealism of Jesus, and that again is a crude statement of the fact that all nature is the rapid efflux of goodness executing and organizing itself.

Great men are they who see that the spiritual is stronger than any material force, that thoughts rule the world.

INTELLECT

The intellect searches out the absolute order of things as they stand in the mind of God.

It is true that the discerning intellect of the world is always greatly in advance of the creative, so that there are many competent judges of the best book, and few writers of the best books.

Intellect separates the fact considered, from *you*, from all local and personal reference, and discerns it as if it existed for its own sake.... Intellect is void of affection and sees an object as it stands in the light of science, cool and disengaged. The intellect goes out of the individual, floats over its own personality, and regards it as a fact...detects intrinsic likeness between remote things and reduces all things into a few principles.

If we consider what persons have stimulated and profited us, we shall perceive the superiority of the spontaneous or intuitive principle over the arithmetical or logical... Logic is the procession or proportionate unfolding of the intuition. All our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then a knowledge, as the plant has root, bud and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason.

In the intellect constructive, which we popularly designate by the word Genius, we observe the same balance of two elements as in intellect receptive. The constructive intellect produces thoughts, sentences, poems, plans, designs, systems. It is the generation of the mind, the marriage of thought with nature.

ARCHETYPAL THINKING

Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture. [“O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies! not the smallest atom stirs or lives on matter, but has its cunning duplicate in mind”—end Chapter LXX, *Moby-Dick*]... It is easily seen that there is nothing lucky or capricious in these analogies, but that they are constant, and pervade nature.

What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded?... The essence of genius, the essence of virtue, and the essence of life...we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom

as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin.... We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us organs of its activity and receivers of its truth.

CIRCLES

The natural world may be conceived of as a system of concentric circles.

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms in the second; and throughout nature this primary picture is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world.

St. Augustine described the nature of God as a circle whose centre was everywhere and its circumference nowhere.... One moral we have already deduced in considering the circular or compensatory character of every human action.... Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature.... The universe is fluid and volatile.

The life of man is a self-evolving circle; which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end.... There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us.

Conversation is a game of circles. In conversation we pluck up the *termini* which bound the common of silence on every side.

Whilst the eternal generation of circles proceeds, the eternal generator abides. That central life is somewhat superior to creation, superior to knowledge and thought, and contains all its circles.

O circular philosopher!

GENIUS

The same Omniscience flows into the intellect and makes what we call genius.... But genius is religious. It is a larger imbibing of the common heart. [compare Hawthorne's "magnetic chain of humanity" in "Ethan Brand" and Carl Jung's "collective unconscious"]

Genius studies the casual thought, and far back in the womb of things sees the rays parting from one orb, that diverge, ere they fall, by infinite diameters. Genius watches the monad through all his masks as he performs the metempsychosis of nature.

PARADOX

The thief steals from himself.

The martyr cannot be dishonored.

Our strength grows out of our weakness.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by statesmen and philosophers and divines.

To be great is to be misunderstood.

UNBALANCED MINDS

How wearisome the grammarian, the phrenologist, the political or religious fanatic, or indeed any possessed mortal whose balance is lost by the exaggeration of a single topic. It is incipient insanity.

HUMAN NATURE

A man is a god in ruins.

Man is the dwarf of himself. Once he was permeated and dissolved by spirit. He filled nature with his overflowing currents.

Every man is a divinity in disguise, a god playing the fool. It seems as if heaven had sent its insane angels into our world as to an asylum.

Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Always our being is descending into us from we know not whence.

The boy is a Greek; the youth, romantic; the adult, reflective.

To different minds, the same world is a hell, and a heaven.

Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual.

Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? Once inhale the upper air, being admitted to behold the absolute natures of justice and truth, and we learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the creator in the finite.

Men cease to interest us when we find their limitations. The only sin is limitation. As soon as you once come up with a man's limitations, it is all over with him.... Infinitely alluring and attractive was he to you yesterday, a great hope, a sea to swim in; now, you have found his shores, found it a pond [Walden Pond?], and you care not if you never see it again.

Every man supposes himself to be not fully understood; and if there is any truth in him, if he rests at last on the divine soul, I see not how it can be otherwise. The last chamber, the last closet, he must feel was never opened; there is always a residuum unknown, unanalyzable. That is, every man believes that he has a greater possibility.

NEED FOR REDEMPTION

Character is higher than intellect. Thinking is the function.

People wish to be settled: only insofar as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.

The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or the blank that we see when we look at nature, is in our own eye.... The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is because man is disunited with himself. [dissociation of sensibility]

Things are in the saddle, / And ride mankind.

EXPERIMENTATION

But lest I should mislead any when I have my own head and obey my whims, let me remind the reader that I am only an experimenter. Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker with no Past at my back.

IMAGINATION

The imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world.

LITERATURE

Art is a jealous mistress.

Poetry must be as new as foam, and as old as the rock.
Wit makes its own welcome, and levels all distinctions.

The perception of the comic is a tie of sympathy with other men.

Nor sequent centuries could hit / Orbit and sum of Shakespeare's wit.

The Pilgrims came to Plymouth in 1620. The plays of Shakespeare were not published until three years later. Had they been published earlier, our forefathers, or the most poetical among them, might have stayed at home to read them.

Literature is the effort of man to indemnify himself for the wrongs of his condition.

A poet in verse or prose must have a sensuous eye, but an intellectual co-perception.

Poetry teaches the enormous force of a few words, and, in proportion to the inspiration, checks loquacity.

There are two classes of poets—the poets by education and practice, these we respect; and poets by nature, these we love.

SYMBOLS

A good symbol is the best argument, and is a missionary to persuade thousands.

A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language.... But wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things. [like Thoreau, Twain, Cather, and Hemingway]

OPTIMISM

The soul refuses all limits. It affirms in man always an Optimism, never a Pessimism.

Speak the affirmative; emphasize your choice by utter ignoring of all that you reject.

LOVE

All mankind love a lover.

Love, and you shall be loved.

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

MARRIAGE

Is not marriage an open question, when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution wish to get out, and such as are out wish to get in?

In skating over thin ice our safety is in our speed.

FRIENDS

Almost all people descend to meet.

The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one.

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him, I may think aloud.

I do then with my friends as I do with my books. I would have them where I can find them, but I seldom use them.

THE COMMON

Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing.

The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.

I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into today, and you may have the antique and future worlds. [see Howells' theory of Realism]

There is a certain wisdom of humanity which is common to the greatest men with the lowest and which our ordinary education often labors to silence and obstruct.

The height of the pinnacle is determined by the breadth of the base.

HUMILITY

The less a man thinks or knows about his virtues the better we like him.

SOCIETY

The virtues of society are vices of the saint.

Fine manners need the support of fine manners in others.

I have heard with admiring submission the experience of the lady who declared that the sense of being perfectly well-dressed gives a feeling of inward tranquility which religion is powerless to bestow.

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company [Melville uses this metaphor in *Moby-Dick*], in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater.

The common experience is that the man fits himself as well as he can to the customary details of that work or trade he falls into, and tends it as a dog turns a spit. Then he is a part of the machine he moves; the man is lost.

VICTORIANISM

Men are what their mothers made them.

Beauty without grace is the hook without the bait.

GOVERNMENT

I think no virtue goes with size.

The less government we have, the better—the fewer laws, and the less confided power.

The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops—no, but the kind of man the country turns out.

PROGRESS

No greater men are now than ever were.

All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves.

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other.

Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not.

The most advanced nations are always those who navigate the most.

We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star. In our barbarous society the influence of character is in its infancy.

TEACHERS

The great distinction between teachers sacred or literary; between poets like Herbert, and poets like Pope; between philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Coleridge,—and philosophers like Locke, Paley, Mackintosh and Stewart; between men of the world who are reckoned accomplished talkers, and here and there a fervent mystic, prophesying half-insane under the infinitude of his thought, is that one class speak *from within*, or from experience as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class *from without*, as spectators merely, or perhaps as acquainted with the fact on the evidence of third persons.... Jesus speaks always from within, and in a degree that transcends all others.

The nature of these revelations is always the same; they are perceptions of the absolute law. They are solutions of the soul's own questions. They do not answer the questions which the understanding asks. The soul answers questions never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after.

If he would know what the great God speaketh, he must "go into his closet and shut the door," as Jesus said. God will not make himself manifest to cowards. He must greatly listen to himself, withdrawing himself from all the accents of other men's devotion.

HISTORY

There is properly no history; only biography.

All history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.

What appears once in the atmosphere may appear often, and it was undoubtedly the archetype of that familiar ornament.

Whence then this worship of the past?

THE GREEKS

The Grecian state is the era of the bodily nature, the perfection of the senses,—of the spiritual nature unfolded in strict unity with the body.

A person of childlike genius and inborn energy is still a Greek, and revives our love of the Muse of Hellas.

The beautiful fables of the Greeks, being proper creations of the Imagination and not of the Fancy, are universal verities. [See Coleridge for the distinction between Creative Imagination and Fancy]

Prometheus is the Jesus of the old mythology.

QUOTATIONS

I hate quotations. Tell me what you know.

By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote.

TRAVEL

All educated Americans, first or last, go to Europe.

Traveling is a fool's paradise.

INTOXICATIONS

The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves.

Dreams and drunkenness, the use of opium and alcohol are the semblance and counterfeit of this oracular genius, and hence their dangerous attraction for men. For the like reason they ask the aid of wild passions, as in gaming and war, to ape in some manner these flames and generousities of the heart.

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

People say sometimes, "See what I have overcome; see how cheerful I am; see how completely I have triumphed over these black events." Not if they still remind me of the black event,—they have not yet conquered.... True conquest is the causing the black event to fade and disappear as an early cloud of insignificant result in a history so large and advancing.

COMPENSATION

In the nature of the soul is the compensation for the inequalities of condition.

Treat men as pawns and ninepins and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heart, you shall lose your own.

Every opinion reacts on him who utters it....it is a harpoon thrown at the whale, unwinding, as it flies, a coil of cord in the boat, and, if the harpoon is not good, or not well thrown, it will go nigh to cut the steersman in twain or to sink the boat.

OLD AGE

Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit.

This old age ought not to creep on a human mind. In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred.

ADVICE

He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time.

Keep cool; it will be all one a hundred years hence.

Live with a divine unity.

DEATH

Is this too sudden a rushing from the centre to the verge of our orbit?

IMMORTALITY

The moment the doctrine of immortality is separately taught, man is already fallen. In the flowing of love, in the adoration of humility, there is no question of continuance.

The reward of a thing well done is to have done it.

