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A READER'S JOURNAL

Emerson Selected Journals 1841 - 1877, Vol. 2

by

Ralph Waldo Emerson

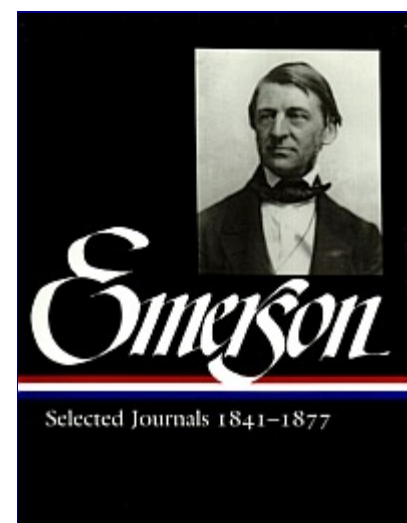
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ARJ2 Chapter: Evolution of Consciousness

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This book contains excerpts from the 16 volume Harvard edition of *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo*



Emerson. Exact dates are given for quoted passages where provided. The Harvard editor chose "to present Emerson's best and most vital writing, and to retain what was most significant biographically and historically in the journals."

My purpose in reading these two volumes was to encounter Emerson the man and writer and to witness first-hand his evolution as a thinker and a writer. This is Volume 2 of a Two Volume Set of Selected Journals of Emerson published by the Library of America. You can read my Review of Volume 1 for the years 1820 - 1842 [here](#).

What better place to start this review than with the first paragraph written by Emerson on July 6, 1841. But first consider this poem by Samuel Hoffenstein whose book of [Collected Poetry](#) I bought at the same time I bought Emerson's *Collected Essays* in September, 1958 when I explored the riches of a college bookstore for the first time.

**Little by little we subtract
Faith and Fallacy from fact
The illusory from the true
And starve upon the residue.**

These are the builders of dungeons in the air, those who remove the flesh of the fruit of life and seek in vain to find nourishment on the hollow shells left behind.

[page 1] 6 July 1841. Ah ye old ghosts! ye builders of dungeons in the air! why do I ever allow you to encroach on me a moment; a moment to win me to your hapless company? In every week there is some hour when I read my commission in every cipher of nature, and know that I was made for another office, a professor of the Joyous Science, a detector & delineator of occult harmonies & unpublished beauties, a herald of civility, nobility, learning, & wisdom; an affirmer of the One Law, yet as one who should affirm it in music or dancing, a priest of the Soul yet one who would better love to celebrate it through the beauty of health & harmonious power.

This volume covers Emerson from the age of 37 to 74, so we will encounter him in his maturing years. By the age of 37, he had planted many fruit trees and knew how to get their fruit to flourish. So he shares

with us his metaphor of the tree planter.

[page 1] 6 July 1841. How differs it with the tree planter? He too may have a rare constructive power to make poems or characters, or nations perchance but though his power be new & unique if he be starved of his needful influences, if he have no love, no book, no critic, no external call, no need or market for that faculty of his, then he may sleep through dwarfish years and die at last without fruit.

After I read Emerson's *Self-Reliance* essay as a callow youth of eighteen, I was never the same. Everything I experienced afterward took on new meaning and importance in the light of Emerson's powerful searchlight which flooded my soul.

[page 2] 6 July 1841. Every man had one or two moments of extraordinary experience, has met his soul, has thought of something which he never afterwards forgot, & which revised all his speech, & moulded all his forms of thought.

Flattery may get you ahead, but the big head gotten by the one praised often derails any new creation that day, something Emerson and any creative person will know to be true.

[page 8] 6 July 1841. When I was praised I lost my time, for instantly I turned round to look at the work I had thought slightly of, & that day I made nothing new.

Haste makes waste is a common bit of doggerel. Emerson gives us an eloquent version of its wisdom to begin his page-long essay on *Superlative*.

[page 9] 6 July 1841. The greatest wit, the most space. It is the little wit that is always in extremes & sees no alternative but revelry or daggers. Hurry is for slaves.

Readers often attribute superlative wisdom to authors. A woman at a book-signing asked Annie Dillard, "Do you think I could be a writer?" expecting Annie to be able to discern the path of the woman's life. She answered simply, "I don't know. Do you like sentences?" That was writing to Dillard, *spending time creating and polishing sentences she liked*.

I imagine Emerson to be answering a reader's similar question in this next passage:

[page 9] 6 July 1841. As your perception or sensibility is exalted, you see the genesis of my action, & of my thought, you see me in my debt & fountains, & to your eye instead of a little pond of the water of life, I am a rivulet fed by rills from every plain & height in nature & antiquity & deriving a remote origin from the foundation of all things.

We each have our own *little pond of the water of life* which we can write about and allow our readers to obtain nourishment from. If they choose to imagine some great web of tributaries feeding our writing, they will never discover nor value their own little pond of nourishment.

Where is Emerson going with these next passages? Is Pericles the strawberry and he the turnip in his botanical metaphor? Is the stamp with the starry sandals of Genius a squelch or a sparkling badge of honor?

[page 9] 6 July 1841. When you are possessed of the principle it is equally easy to make four or forty thousand applications of it. A great man will be content to have only written a letter or any the slightest composition demonstrating his perception of the reigning Idea of his time, & will leave to more mercantile men the multiplication of examples.

Genius unsettles everything. Is it fixed that after the reflective age arrives, there can be no quite rustic & united man born? Yes quite fixed. Ah this unlucky Shakespeare!

and ah this hybrid Goethe! Make a new rule, my dear, can you not? and tomorrow Genius shall stamp on it with his starry sandal.

Then it is very easy to write as Mr Pericles writes. Why, I have been reading the books he read before he wrote his Dialogue, & I have traced him in them all & know where he got the things you most admire. Yes and the turnip grows in the same soil with the strawberry; knows all the same nourishment that gets, and feeds on the very same itself; yet it is a turnip still.

When you ask a genius a question, you get questions in return, and these unanswered questions can be the nourishment that, in time, will feed either turnips or strawberries. Whether you think you grow mean (low-ranked) turnips or superlative strawberries, your results will prove your thoughts to be right.

[page 29] 11 November, 1841. No man can write anything who does not think that what he writes is for the time the history of the world, or do anything well who does not suppose his work to be of greatest importance. My work may be none but I must think it of none or I shall not do it with impunity. Whoso does what he thinks mean, is mean.

If someone is elected President of the United States who owns a lot of property, has accomplished a lot of things, has built a large business by an aptitude for command, and is not beholden to special interest groups which have driven the political agenda for decades, perhaps this person could be the scholar of which Emerson wrote back in 1841.

[page 31] 11 November, 1841. Good scholar, what are you but for hospitality to every thought of your time? Have you property, have you leisure, have you accomplishments & the eye of command, you shall be the Maecenas (Patron) of every new thought, every untried project that proceeds from good will & honest seeking. The newspapers of course will defame what is noble and what are you for but to withstand the newspapers & all the other tongues of today; you do not hold of today but of an age, as the rapt & truly great man holds of all ages or of Eternity. If you defer to the newspaper, where is the scholar?

In the days when you went directly to the bakery, if you ordered a dozen doughnuts, the baker himself would often add an extra one to a good customer's bag which led to the phrase *a baker's dozen* coming into use. It meant an extra added to please customers. In New Orleans the phrase for that special extra is *lagniappe* (lahn-yap'). Emerson used the heaped peck as a metaphor for the added resources of each of nature's creatures. Apparently no one sold a peck or a bushel (4 pecks) of produce that was level to the top of the basket, but always heaped.

[page 34] 1841. Exaggeration is a law of nature. As we have not given a peck of apples or potatoes, until we have heaped the measure, so nature sends no creature, no man into the world without adding a small excess of his proper quality.

Emerson expresses in this next passage a 21st century view of marriage, an idealized form of marriage rarely realized in his 19th century lifetime. It echoes a favorite quotation of his about friends, "We will meet as if we met not and part as if we parted not." After his wife Ellen died in 1831, Emerson married Lydia in 1834, possibly the inspiration for the last sentence.

[page 37] 1841. Plainly marriage should be a temporary relation, it should have its natural birth, climax, & decay, without violence of any kind, — violence to bind, or violence to rend. When each of two souls had exhausted the other of that good which each held for the other, they should part in the same peace in which they met, not parting from each, but drawn to new society. The new love is the balm to prevent a wound from forming where the old love was detached.

In 1841 the only type of photography was the Daguerrotype, and Emerson praised its attributes. Here we

get an on-the-spot report of this new technology.

[page 42] 1841. The Daguerrotype is good for its authenticity. No man quarrels with his shadow, nor will he with his miniature when the sun was the painter. Here is no interference and the distortions are not the blunder of an artist, but only those of motion, imperfect light, and the like.

While giving a true image, the Daguerrotype had one aspect which those of us familiar with the instant photography may not consider: the minutes-long sitting perfectly still for the plate to be exposed⁽¹⁾. It was a strain on the body and mind and here's is an on-the-spot report of Emerson sitting for the Daguerrotype image which graces the cover of the book jacket and my review [on-line](#).

[page 48] 24 October 1841. Were you ever Daguerrotyped, O immortal man? And did you look with all vigor at the lens of the camera or rather by the direction of the operator at the brass peg a little below it to give the picture the full benefit of your expanded & flashing eye? and in your zeal not to blur the image, did you keep every finger in its place with such energy that your hands became clenched as for fight or despair, & in your resolution to keep your face still, did you feel every muscle becoming every moment more rigid: the brows contracted into a Tartarean frown, and the eyes fixed as they are fixed in a fit, in madness, or in death; and when at last you are relieved of your dismal duties, did you find the curtain drawn perfectly, and the coat perfectly, & the hands true, clenched for combat, and the shape of the face & head? but unhappily the total expression escaped from the face and you held the portrait of a mask instead of a man. Could you not by grasping it very tight hold the stream of a river or of a small brook & prevent it from flowing?

When the box camera was invented with the advent of Kodak film in the early 20th century, the word *snapshot* came into existence because it was possible to take a photo without having the person hold still. It became possible to take candid shots in bright daylight of people smiling naturally and in playful motion. One can only wonder about what Emerson would have looked like in a spontaneously taken snapshot. The closest we can get is the drawing of the younger Emerson smiling on the book jacket cover of [Volume 1](#). A 19th century artist could capture the fleeting smile and draw an image of it.

Emerson admonishes us that what we try to conceal we reveal anyway, so why try to hide anything? He reminds us how his friend Jones Very explained it to him one morning.

[page 60] December, 1841. Use what language you will," he said, "you can never say anything but what you are."

Emerson advises we excuse ourselves only once for any misdeed and move on; that we not bring up the fault a second or third time: it is a worrisome habit. Each time we re-apologize, the problem we caused arises anew in the other person.

[page 61] December, 1841. It is never worthwhile to worry people with your contritions. We shed our follies & absurdities as fast as the rosebugs drop off in July & leave the apple tree which they so threatened. Nothing dies so fast as a fault & the memory of a fault. I am awkward, sour, saturnine, lumpish, pedantic, & thoroughly disagreeable & oppressive to the people around me. Yet if I am born to write a few good sentences or verses, these shall endure & my disgraces utterly perish out of memory.

It may be hard to believe for some that someone was working on a digital computer back in Emerson's time, but Charles Babbage was, and inspired Emerson's words, "Mr Babbage will presently invent a Novel-Writing Machine." Thankfully we have yet to have such a folly foisted upon us a hundred and seventy-five years later.

Emerson founded the Transcendentalist magazine *The Dial* in 1840 which was edited by Margaret Fuller for its first two years and by himself for its final two years. In the passage below he is contemplating the end of the magazine. I have often said, "If something is worth doing and you do not wish to continue doing it, find someone whose heart's delight would be to do it, or stop doing it." Apparently stopping doing it is what Emerson decided about his magazine.

[page 86] 20 March 1842. The Dial is to be sustained or ended & I must settle the question, it seems, of its life or death. I wish it to live but do not wish to be its life. Neither do I like to put it in the hands of the Humanity & Reform Men, because they trample on letters & poetry; nor in the hands of the Scholars, for they are dead & dry. I do not like the Plain Speaker so well as the Edinburg Review.

On January 28, 1842 Emerson's young son Waldo died at 6 years old. He mentions his son several times in this journal. "My music," Waldo said, "makes the thunder dance;" for it thundered when he was blowing his willow whistle. (Page 68)

[page 87, 88] 20 March 1842. Ellen asks her Grandmother "whether God can't stay alone with the angels a little awhile & let Waldo come down?"

And Amy Goodwin too thinks that "if God has to send any angel for anything to world, he had better send Waldo."

The chrysalis which he brought in with care & tenderness & gave to his Mother to keep is still alive and the most beautiful of the children of men is not here.

A few days later Emerson records this comment which contrasts the sound of a flute player with that of a man sawing wood. Perhaps he was remembering his beloved Waldo blowing on his willow flute and making the thunder dance.

[page 88] 23 March 1842. The scholar is a man of no more account in the street than another man; as the sound of a flute is not louder than the noise of a saw.

But as the tone of the flute is heard at a greater distance than the any noise, so the fame of the scholar reaches farther than the credit of the banker.

Emerson writes on page 101, "In short there ought be no such thing as Fate. As long as we use this word, it is a sign of our impotence & that we are not yet ourselves." Emerson apparently sees Fate as a preordained result and I agree with him there should be no such thing. But if you see, as I do, that Fate is a lifetime karmic goal being pursued, Fate becomes something we all have control over with every decision we make in life, when we encounter opportunities for balancing our karmic debt from previous lives, and when we avoid engendering karmic debt for future lives.

Emerson not only writes poetry, but he understands what makes good poetry, what distinguishes poets from the rhymesters & poetasters.

[page 102] 6 April 1842. The Poet should not only be able to use nature as his hieroglyphic, but should have a still higher power, namely, an adequate message to communicate; a vision fit for such a faculty. . . .

All our works which we do not understand are symbolical. . . .

We are greatly more poetic than we know; poets in our drudgery, poets in our eyes, & ears, & skin.

Two things amazed me about this next passage: One, that kids were playing baseball back in 1842. Two, that Emerson demonstrated my rule(2), Do It Right Away, Kid! so succinctly when the kids' baseball struck someone in a cart going by. Since Abner Doubleday invented baseball in the summer of 1839, the adult passenger could not have played the game as a schoolboy. Expecting the passenger to avoid a baseball in 1842 would be an anachronism equivalent to a teenager today asking his father why he didn't carry a Smartphone with him when he was in school.

[page 102] 6 April 1842. The school boys went on with their game of baseball without regard to the passenger, & the ball struck him smartly in the back. He was angry. Little cared the boys. If you had learned how to play when you was at school, they said, you would have known better than to be hit. If you did not learn then, you had better stop short where you are, & learn now. Hit him again, Dick!

For a long time I thought of life as a puzzle with an enigma on both ends. Emerson came to that puzzle and portrays it as a stairway.

[page 108] 19 April 1842. Where do we find ourselves? In a series, of which we do not know the extremes, & believe it has none. We wake & find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us up which we seem to have come; there are stairs above us many a one, they go up to heaven.

Perhaps it would be better said, "they go up to heaven knows where." Only by understanding our life as a step between two lifetimes can we comprehend the enigma of our life before birth and our life after death. Likely Emerson has reached that heavenly understanding by now, living in his time between death and a new birth.

Emerson enjoyed his solitude and expresses it dramatically in this next passage. It reminds me of how often I have felt the same way.

[page 112, 113] 1842. I think four walls one of the best of our institutions. A man comes to me, & oppresses me by his presence: he looks very large & unanswerable: I cannot dispose of him whilst he stays; he quits the room, & passes not only out of the house but, as it were, out of the horizon; he is a mere phantasm or ghost, I think of him no more. I recover my sanity, the Universe dawns on me again.

What is more important: strength or intelligence? Emerson answers the question with a knife metaphor. He advises us to "work smarter not harder".

[page 116] 11 November 1842. You must either lay to more strength or you must sharpen the edge of your knife. But wit always will be a substitute for drudgery, not for labor but for drudgery or excess of labor. For wit selects the right point wherein my stroke shall be bestowed, & so saves all the supernumerary strokes. A dim sighted man strikes with his hammer all about the nail; a good eye will hit the nail upon the head.

As will a good wit: hit the nail on the head.

Emerson remembers himself as a chubby boy rolling a hoop and spouting poetry at Latin School and looks at Time as a little grey man leading him through life, giving us a poignant reminder of the path we are each on.

[page 118, 119] 11 November 1842. But Time the little grey man has taken out of his vest pocket a great awkward house (in a corner of which I set & write of him) some acres of land, several fullgrown & several very young persons, & seated them close beside me; then he has taken that chubbiness & that hoop quite away (to be sure he has left the declamation & the poetry) and here left a long lean person threatening soon to be a little grey man, like himself.

And another poignant reminder:

[page 118, 119] 11 November 1842. Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail. If you could see with her eyes you would see her surrounded with hundreds of figures

performing complex dramas, with tragic & comic issues, long conversations, many characters, many ups & downs of fate, & meantime it is only puss & her own tail. How long before our masquerade will cease its noise of tambourines & laughter & shouting and we shall suddenly find it was all a solitary performance.

Emerson knew Jean Paul Richter through his writings and gives us amazing quotes from the great educator and author.

[page 123] 1842. Richter said, "In the great world I despise the men & their joyless joys, but I esteem the women; in them alone can one investigate the spirit of the times."

"Happy," he says, "shall he be, if one falls to his lot, upon where opened eyes & heart, the flowery earth & beaming heavens strike not in infinitesimals, but in large & towering masses; for whom the great whole is something more than a nursery or a ball room."

Naming is an interesting phenomenon, as Emerson points out in this next passage:

[page 146] 1842. Naming, yes that is the office of the newspapers of the world, these famous editors from Moses, Homer, Confucius, & so on, down to Goethe & Kant: they name what the people have already done, & the thankful people say, 'Doctor, 'tis a great comfort to know the disease whereof I die.'

I have heard that Gustav Mahler went to see a bacteria specialist in Paris who looked into his microscope and raved to Mahler about the beauty of the bacteria which finally killed him. Likely that was no comfort to Mahler.

On June 10, 1834, Emerson referred to the new invention of the rail-road as a teakettle(3). In the next passage, some 9 years later, he is riding in a larger railroad car from Philadelphia to Baltimore.

[page 150] 7 January, 1843. Here today from Philadelphia. The railroad which was but a toy-coach the other day is now a dowdy lumbering country wagon. Yet it is not prosaic, as people say, but highly poetic, this strong shuttle which shoots across the forest, swamp, rivers, & arms of the sea, binding city to city. — The Americans take to the little contrivance as if it were the cradle in which they were born.

Today it is hard to imagine a Christmas tree with 150 candles burning to light it up, but it must have been a majestic sight. Thereupon hangs a tale by Emerson.

[page 150, 151] 7 January, 1843. The Christmas tree with 150 candles on it. A poor little boy had heard how beautiful it was & longed to see one. He did not wish their tree, but wished to see it; & at a large lighted house he plucked up courage & rang the doorbell. But he was very weak & the bell did not easily ring or the children & family were too much occupied with their happy tree to hear, so that nobody came. Presently he knelt down & prayed God that he might see a Christmas tree and he saw a star & presently an angel came down to him & said, "Do you wish, dear boy, to see a Christmas tree? I will show you one." So he laid his hand on the star, & brought it near, & then went & brought a great many stars, & set a tree in the ground & filled the branches with stars. The next day's paper contained the following advertisement. "Found, on the doorstep of a large brick house in _____ Square, the dead body of a small boy, very much emaciated & dressed in rags. His death occasioned by starvation."

When we walked into an area, such as we did in Barcelona, where the tour guide had warned us about pickpockets being everywhere, that was phobia enough for us to immediately flag down a taxi to get us to our ship's dock. When I studied how to cure phobias, I learned that the experts at installing phobias were the average persons on the street, the masters were the tour guides. Phobia and Fear are the two great

killers, and few people know how to inoculate themselves from them. Emerson gives us an example of the power of Fear.

[page 153] A man going out of Constantinople met the Plague coming in, who said he was sent thither for 20,000 souls. Forty thousand persons were swept off, and when the traveler came back, he met the Plague coming out of the city. "Why did you kill Forty thousand?" he asked. "I only killed twenty," replied the Pest; "Fear killed the rest."

There are so many food avoiders now, with more being created everyday. Remember when they couldn't eat grapes from California? Next came, no kangaroo meat in hamburgers. No red dye from Mexico, no MSG, no gluten, no GMO, etc. Every year brings some new prohibitions of food from some point of the globe. Emerson knew of these even in his time.

[page 156, 157] 1843. Jock could not eat rice, because it came west, nor molasses because it came north, nor put on leathern shoes because of the method by which leather was procured, nor indeed wear a woolen coat. But Dick have him a gold eagle that he might buy wheat & rye, maple sugar & an oaken chest, and said, This gold piece, unhappy Jock! is molasses, & rice, horse hide & sheepskin.

I read a lot of books in translation and agree with Emerson: it would be as foolish of me to read Rudolf Steiner in the original German as it would be to swim the Mississippi River from my home to the French Quarter when my automobile is handy in the garage.

[page 159] 1843. I thank the translators & it is never my practice to read any Latin, Greek, German, Italian, scarcely any French book, in the original which I can procure in an English translation. I like to be beholden to the great metropolitan English speech, the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven, the Rome of nations, and I should think it in me as much folly to read all my books in originals when I have them rendered for me in my mother's speech by men who have given years to that labor, as I should to swim across Charles River when ever I wished to go to Charlestown.

During my working years I moved to the center of America, then to the West Coast, and then to the East Coast. Finally I returned home to New Orleans where I first began before I left to pursue my academic and work career. Emerson gives us this quote from the poet Edmund Waller:

[page 161] 17 August 1843. "A stag when he is hunted & near spent, always returns home."

This next passage is very familiar to me; likely I read it as a youth in Emerson's Essays.

[page 177] 19 May 1843. Every man is an impossibility until he is born. Every thing impossible until we see a success. Do it, & we quote the old Unities or scholastic rules or examples of genius, Moses or Christ to you no longer.

In a negative metaphor, Emerson presupposes the need for large National Parks, whose existence was yet a half-century away, as a way to prevent our American continent being cut up into ten acre farms.

[page 178] 20 May 1843. The life of labor does not make men, but drudges. Pleasant it is, as the habits of all poets may testify, to think of great proprietors, to reckon this grove we walk in a park of the noble, but a continent cut up into ten acre farms is not desirable to the imagination.

Each portion of a century seems to bring a new wave of immigrants to plow their way into our land and our hearts in some inimitable fashion. For Emerson, it was Irish immigrants.

[page 178] 20 May 1843. See this great shovelhanded Irish race who precede everywhere the civilization of America, & grade the road for the rest!

Emerson says in the passage below that we were not ready to fly or to touch the Moon, but in sixty years we flew and another sixty years later we sent roystering boys with Neil Armstrong to romp upon and hit a golf ball on the surface of the Moon.

[page 180] 20 May 1843. I think we are not quite yet fit for Flying Machines and therefore there will be none. When Edie comes trotting into my study I put the inkstand & watch on the high shelf, until she be a little older; and the God has put the sun & moon in plain sight & use but laid them on the high shelf where these roystering boys may not come in on some mad Saturday afternoon pull them down or burn their own fingers. So I think the air will not be granted until our beards are grown a little. The sea & iron road are safer toys for such young fingers at present. We are not ripe to be birds.

Even a good translator will at times mislead the reader no matter how careful and diligent the translation produced. On page 207 Emerson gives us a pun in Italian which translates into English, Translator is Traitor: "The Italians have a good phrase to express the injury of translations, *traduttore, traditore.*"

Do-gooders abound in every century and will attack as a miscreant anyone who does not work for their cause. Emerson had simple words for them, with which I earnestly agree:

[page 209] 31 December 1843. I say what they say concerning celibacy or money or community of goods and my only apology for not doing their work is preoccupation of mind. I have a work of my own which I know I can do with success. It would leave that undone if I should undertake with them and I do not see in myself any vigor equal to such an enterprise.

Emerson could see how the greatness of our time comes from the circadian tasks that people do in their daily work.

[page 210] 30 January 1844. The greatness of the centuries is made out of the paltriness of the days & hours. See with what motives & by what means the railroad gets built, and Texas annexed or rejected.

A year later Emerson attends debates about the annexation of Texas but was disappointed by the lack of Typhonic rage.

[page 226] 30 January 1845. In Boston to hear the debates of the Texan Convention with the hope that I might catch some sparks of the Typhonic rage. But I was unlucky in my visits to the house & heard only smooth whig speeches on moderation, &c.(4) to fill time. The poor mad people did not come.

Today, August 4, 2017, the Governor of West Virginia, a Democrat, changed his registration to Republican. Emerson could predict such a thing happening in his own time because he knew the life cycle of pumpkins.

[page 214] 30 January 1844. We fancy that men are individuals; but every pumpkin in the field goes through every point of pumpkin history. The rabid democrat, as soon as he is senator & a rich man, has ripened beyond the possibility of sincere radicalism and unless he can resist the sun he must be conservative the rest of his life.

Perhaps it is merely age which makes such a change possible.

[page 216] 30 January 1844. It was a good saying, Age gives good advice when it is no

longer able to give a bad example. By acting rashly we buy the power of talking wisely. People who know how to act are never preachers.

Emerson opened many doors for me, and I regret that I can only thank him some hundred and sixty plus years in the future. His advice to others was one he took earnestly to himself, "Be an opener of doors for such as come after thee and do not try to make the Universe a blind alley." (Page 230)

Emerson says, "He who does his own work frees a slave." (Page 235) Then he throws off sparks of the Typhonic rage he was disappointed not to hear a year later in Boston [see page 226 quote], as he swings into this tirade about the Abolitionists who wish others to give up their slaves, but insist on having others do most of their own work for them. Take away all such hypocritical anti-slavery voices and you would be left with a tiny coterie of people for your army, he points out. This is truly an amazing passage which I quote only in part.

[page 236] 30 January 1845. The world asks, do the abolitionists eat sugar? do they wear cotton? do they smoke tobacco? Are they their own servants. Have they managed to put that dubious institution of servile labor on an agreeable & thoroughly intelligible & transparent foundation? It is not possible that these purists accept the accommodations of hotels, or even of private families, on the existing profane arrangements? If they do, of course, not conscience, but mere prudence & propriety will seal their mouths on the inconsistencies of churchmen. Two tables in every house! Abolitionists at one & servants at the other! It is a calumny that you utter. There never was, I am persuaded, an asceticism so austere as theirs, from the peculiar emphasis of their testimony. The planter does not want slaves: give him money: give him a machine that will provide him with as much money as the slaves yield, & he will thankfully let them go: he does not love whips, or usurping overseers, or sulky swarthy giants creeping round his house & barns by night with lucifer matches in their hands & knives in their pockets. No; only he wants his luxury, & he will pay even this price for it. It is not possible then that the abolitionist will begin the assault on his luxury, by any other means than the abating of his own. A silent fight without war-cry or triumphant brag, then, is the new abolition of New England sifting the thronging ranks of the champions, the speakers, the poets, the editors, the subscribers, the givers, & reducing the armies to a handful of just men & women. Alas! alas! my brothers, there is never an abolitionist in New England.

In my essay, [*Art is the Process of Destruction*](#), I emphasize that true art is art going in a different direction from extant art. A true artist is one who destroys the *sameness* which exists in current art and goes in a new and unexpected direction. The dunces of today are those well-intentioned people who claim Artificial Intelligence (A. I.) will soon exceed the capabilities of human beings. Yes, they may be right, but only in one direction, only in a previously used direction, but never in an *alive* direction, one that any human artist is demonstrably capable of doing. Emerson realized that true art required a human being to create alive directions, that "Man is a torch borne in the wind." (Page 259)

[page 255] 1845. Art requires a living soul. The dunces believe, that, as it must, at any one moment, work in one direction, an automaton will do as well, or nearly; & they beseech the Artist to say, "In what direction?" "In every direction," he replies, "in any direction, or in no direction, but it must be alive."

The A. I. experts claim that you will be able to put any question to their super-computers and get an answer. Maybe so, but I agree with Emerson who says, "A great man is he who answers questions which I have not skill to put." He then points out that if a man spends a lifetime answering a question which none of his peers can ask, he isolates himself. (Page 281)

One day Emerson sees on his railroad tickets, "Good for this Trip Only" and realizes that "in all action or speech which is good, there is a benefit beyond that contemplated by the doer." He realized that an insight

of one person, when shared, is good for all the trips of those who are alive.

Every writer requires two inspirations according to Emerson.

[page 289] 1845. No wonder a writer is rare. — It requires one inspiration or transmutation of nature into thought to yield him the truth; another inspiration to write it.

One service which this age has rendered to men, is, to make the life & wisdom of every past man accessible & available to all.

Emerson would be amazed to learn that in 2017 all this shared information is instantly available on a small device anyone in the world can carry in a vest pocket.

Emerson read Swedenborg, but found a key point of objection in his writings, calling him sarcastically a King. Emerson was a preacher once, and apparently once in a row was enough for him.

[page 294, 295] 27 October 1845. As for King Swedenborg I object to his cardinal position in Morals that evils should be shunned as sins. I hate preaching. I shun evils as evils. Does he not know — Charles Lamb did, — that every poetic mind is a pagan, and to this day prefers Olympian Jove, Apollo, & the Muses & the Fates, to all the barbarous indigestion of Calvin & the Middle Ages? . . . It is the very essence of Poetry to spring like the rainbow daughter of Wonder from the invisible: to abolish the Past, & refuse all history.

And what is history but a request for more of the old?

[page 296] 1845. In fine it is very certain that the genius draws up the ladder after him when the creative age goes up to heaven, & gives way to a new, who see the works & ask vainly for a history.

Is there wisdom in history? Maybe. But not if one understands wisdom as Emerson does.

[page 296] 1845. Wisdom consists in keeping the soul liquid, or, in resisting the tendency to too rapid petrification.

[page 300] 1845. The miracles of the spirit are greater than those of the history.

Democracy can be defined as the rule of the majority, but Emerson has no love of majorities.

[page 296, 297] 1845. Majorities, the argument of fools, the strength of the weak. One should recall what Laertius records as Socrates' opinion of the common people, "that, it was as if a man should reject one piece of bad money, & accept a great sum of the same."

In this next passage Emerson asks for a leader, a Genius, which will help us in the way we are already going. Someone once said it this way, "A good leader finds out where his men are heading and gets in the front of them."

[page 299] 5 November 1845. We are candidates, we know we are, for influences more subtle & more high than those of talent & ambition. We want a leader, we want a friend whom we have not seen. In the company, & fired by the example of a god, these faculties that dream & toss in their sleep, would wake. Where is the Genius that shall marshal us the way that we were going? There is a vast residue, an open account ever.

Emerson explains how you can inventory a store and know all of its contents, but if you inventory a

human being, you'll discover the most important parts are not on the shelves.

[page 299] 5 November 1845. It is the largest part of a man that is not inventoried. He has many enumerable parts: he is social, professional, political, sectarian, literary, & of this or that set & corporation. But after the most exhausting census has been made, there remains as much more which no tongue can tell. And this remainder that which interests. This is that which the preacher & the poet & the musician speak to. This is that which the strong genius works upon; the region of destiny, of aspiration, of the unknown. Ah they have a secret persuasion that as little as they pass for in the world, they are immensely rich in expectancy & power. Nobody has ever yet dispossessed this adhesive self to arrive at any glimpse or guess of the awful (awe-full) Life that lurks under it.

The human being combines the best aspects of the lower beings of Nature and improves upon them in new ways. Yes, animals have a spine, but only in humans does the spine reach full erectness. Claim a benefit for some animal such as speed, agility, or perception and any given human can best that animal using flexibility of thought.

[page 303] 1845. Nature seems to us like a chamber lined with mirrors, & look where we will in botany, mechanics, chemistry, astronomy, the image of man comes throbbing back to us.

The State, rightly understood as a coercive bureaucracy, can be respected as one in Emerson's time would respect a cow. Offer it hay and clover, but if the cows tries to gouge you with its horns, you must put it down and replace it. So long as "State" and "Coercive" go together the State is at risk if it tries to gouge its citizens.

[page 332] 1846. The State is a poor good beast who means the best: it means friendly. A poor cow who does well by you, — do not grudge it its hay. It cannot eat bread as you can, let it have without grudge a little grass for its four stomachs. It will not stint to yield you milk from its teat. You who are a man walking cleanly on two feet will not pick a quarrel with a poor cow. Take this handful of clover & welcome. But if you go to hook me when I walk in the fields, then poor cow, I will cut your throat.

Emerson wanted to see men who had some greatness in them, not those found in public houses and society galas.

[page 334] 1846. A man of the world I wish to see, not such men as are called of the world who more properly are men of a pistareen(5), men of a quart pot, men of a wine-glass; whose report reaches about as far as the pop of champagne cork, & who are dumb as soon as they stray beyond that genial circle.

Someone might call my reading of Rudolf Steiner's works as irrelevant, and if so I might respond similar to how Emerson did in a passage called "Scholar".

[page 348] 1847. "Your reading is irrelevant." Yes, for you, but not for me. It makes no difference what I read. If it is irrelevant, I read it deeper. I read it until it is pertinent to me & mine, to nature & to the hour that now passes. A good scholar will find Aristophanes & Hafiz & Rabelais full of American history.

Emerson could turn a complaint into an opportunity, into a possibility, by his knowledge of a man's nature.

[page 349] 1847. A man complained that in his way home to dinner he had every day to pass through that long field of his neighbor's. I advised him to buy it, & it would never seem long again.

Most of my reading is non-fiction, but I like the occasional novel as a means of letting my imagination run free, to stroll in green parks, wander along paths through the forest, perhaps to an abandoned granite quarry on a Sunday afternoon. Emerson admonished his friend Thoreau for admonishing people to avoid novel reading.

[page 353] 1847. Novels, Poetry, Mythology must be well allowed for an imaginative being. You do us great wrong, Henry T., in railing at the novel reading. The novel is that allowance & frolic their imagination gets. Everything else pins it down.

Via karma over serial lifetimes, we are all like the Wandering Jew, popping up into new lands in unfamiliar climes and having to learn how one lives in a place and time like this one and that one. A man once left an apartment in a big city and drove far west to Arizona, stopping at the first store he saw on the side of the road. A robust, dark-haired man was sitting in a rocking chair and he went up to him and asked, "Is this a healthy place to live?" The man said, "Look at me. When I first came here I was bald, unable to walk, and had to be hand-fed by my family." "Wow," the man said, "and how long have you lived here?" He replied, "I was born here." And that is the lot of each of us when we arrive in a new lifetime.

Fables are often deep secrets about what goes on in each of our lives as humans.

[page 354] 1847. Longevity. The fable of the Wandering Jew is agreeable to men because they want more time & land to execute their thoughts in: — but a higher poetic use must be made of that fable. Take me as I am with my experience & transfer me to a new planet, & let me digest for its inhabitants what I could of the wisdom of this. After I have found my depth there, & assimilated what I could of the new experience, transfer me to a new scene. In each transfer I shall have acquired a new mastery of the old thoughts in which I was too much immersed, by seeing them at a distance.

Is this not our human destiny? To live out serial lives and take lessons into each new lifetime from the old. Emerson sees it so.

[page 362] 1847. Every thing teaches transition, transference, metamorphosis: therein is human power, in transference, not in creation; & therein is human destiny, not in longevity but in removal. We dive & reappear in new places.

On page 362 Emerson asks, "Will no oak rear up a mast to the clouds?" It made me wonder, "What if huge old-growth trees had not been harvested for masts and left alone to grow to today?" Might we today have no country of our own, no freedom? — Lacking masts for our ships, we would have had no navy to defend our shores. The oil underground today is our sail power, is it not? What use is it to have tall trees and oil underground if we lack freedom as a people? When new supplies of energy replace oil, we will feel foolish at the unrealized opportunities to further our nation represented by the huge reservoirs of untapped oil lying fallow beneath our sea beds forever.

Ever notice how critics tend to give criticism a bad name. They do best to follow Emerson's advice.

[page 365] 1847. Criticism should not be querulous & wasting, all knife & root puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind.

Emerson's aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, was one of his early teachers, and he collected many of her writings, such as this short piece.

[page 380] 5 September 1847. "Give us peace with our boarders," wrote MME, & when shown the misspelling, said, "it would do as it was."

This reminds of a similar misunderstanding of the word "borders" without any misspelling which I used in teaching my Effective Communication course. J. Edgar Hoover was proofing a letter his secretary had typed for him and noticed she had not allowed a large enough border around the text, so he scribbled a note to her on the typed letter saying, "Watch the Borders!" The secretary sent that notice out to all the border officers and they put all their agents on high alert!

Emerson writes on page 382, "The present moment is a boat in which I embark without fear; boat & pilot at once." The more sail you have deployed, the faster you can go. But the good steersman has a rule, "it is of no use to carry any more sail than you can steer steady." This rule comes to mind after an incident I observed last night. A large black Cadillac sped past us on a curve leading to the rise of a large bridge which I knew would have slowly moving cars due to the heavy rainstorm which had blocked traffic all over the city. We slowed and moved to the far left lane. Sure enough, the unheeding steersman paid the price for "carrying too much sail." He had slammed into the rear of a car on the rise in the right hand lane. As we passed, the steam from his smashed radiator was rising into the air and he was calling to report the accident. Good driving is like good writing as Emerson explains in the passage below:

[page 383] 5 September 1847. Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where would not go, & is only right admirable when to all its beauty & speed a subserviency to the will like that of walking is added.

In early October, 1847 Emerson set sail to England, a voyage which took 17 days at that time. After he arrived he offers us bits of conversation he either heard happen or was told about involving the great commander Wellington, the great sun-less skies of London, the great orator Macaulay, and the great giraffe.

[page 386] 30 October 1847. To a lady who wished to witness a great victory, Lord Wellington said, "Ah! Madam, a great victory is the greatest of all tragedies except one, a defeat." To an Englishman who said, "They worship the sun in your country"; the Persian Ambassador replied, "So would you if you ever saw him."

Sidney Smith said, Macaulay had improved, he has flashes of silence.

Of the giraffe, he said, that he would take cold; & think of having two yards of sore throat!

On December 4, 1847 (Page 387) Emerson writes while in England, "What a misfortune to America that she has not original names on the land but this whitewash of English names. Every name here is history." Here in New Orleans, we have a pastiche of French names which we treasure, often a palimpsest over earlier Spanish names. An Englishman asked Emerson if Americans liked to call their country *New England*, to which he likely said, no; but certainly the northeast corner of a greatly expanded America is called that today. (Page 389)

Emerson met Thomas Carlyle and offers the views he heard the great Scottish philosopher express about education in England.

[page 396] 1848. He prefers Cambridge to Oxford. But Oxford & Cambridge education indurates them, as the Styx hardened Achilles so that now they are proof; we have gone thro' all the degrees, & are case hardened against all the veracities of the universe, nor man nor God can penetrate us.

One of my must places to visit in the British Museum was the Elgin marbles, those marvelous life-sized sculptures of figures from the frieze of the Parthenon, figures that Lord Elgin risked his and his family's life, rescuing the marble figures from being pulverized into dust by the Ottoman-led (or misled) Greek peasants to make cement for their homes. Emerson reports on his visit to the Elgin marbles in 1848, and they seemed to be in the same disarray in 2009 when I viewed them on display there. The Greeks have lost their marbles, and like Humpty-Dumpty, not even the King's men can put them back together again in Greece.

[page 398] 1848. The British Museum holds the relics of ancient art, & the relics of ancient nature, in adjacent chambers. It is alike impossible to reanimate either.

The arrangement of the antique remains is surprisingly imperfect & careless, without order, or skillful disposition, or names or numbers. A warehouse of old marbles. People go to the Elgin chamber many times & at last the beauty of the whole comes to them at once like music. The figures sit like gods in heaven.

White paper is in such common use today few people understand that, in Emerson's time, the government of Paris reserved the exclusive right to use White Paper. This must be the origin of the use of the term "White Paper" for a government report giving information on some vital issue. (Page 408)

[page 419, 420] 22 April 1848. An artist spends himself, like the crayon in his hand, till he is all gone.

The Americans would sail in a steamboat built of lucifer matches, if it would go faster.

One might indeed consider a modern jetliner as a steamboat of the air, powered by the burning exhaust gas of millions of matches. Indeed Americans on jetliners reach England in 9 hours versus the 17 weeks in Emerson's time.

In our Meditation Garden we have a bench shaded by bald cypress trees which provides a peaceful and pleasant place to sit. One day I decided to move to the side of the bower a bird bath whose water could be seen from the bench. The water in the bird bath added an amazing feeling of life to the area. Emerson observed a similar thing, and called it a *rhyme to the eye*.

[page 548] 1851. I notice, in the road, that the landscape is uninteresting enough, but a little water instantly relieves the monotony. For it is no matter what objects are near it; — a grey rock, a little grass, a crab-tree, or alder-bush, a stake, — they instantly become beautiful by being reflected. It is rhyme to the eye, & explains the charm of rhyme to the ear, & suggests the deeper rhyme or translation of every natural object into its spiritual sphere.

Emerson is aboard a steamboat in on the Ohio River and comments on the waters that people along the banks drink. In Ohio only from the Ohio River, preferring it to the limestone water of its wells, in St. Louis only from the Missouri River even though the Mississippi flows along the east bank. In New Orleans, we drink all three rivers as they are well-mixed and purified by the time they arrive here. Seattle residents were upset when our river water flowing through our taps beat out their mountain stream water in a recent blind taste test. In New Orleans the taste of the water we consume is more important than adjectives like alpine, mineral, or glacial that pretentious folk might place in front of water.

[page 575] 25 May 1850. The people do not let the Ohio river go by them without using it as it runs along. The waterworks supply the city abundantly, in every street, in these dusty days, it is poured on to the pavement. The water offered you to drink is as turbid as lemonade, & of a somewhat greyer hue. Yet it is freely drunk, & the inhabitants much prefer it to the limestone water of their wells.

At St Louis only Missouri water is drunk. The waters of the two streams are kept unmixed, the Mississippi on the east bank, the Missouri on the west until 40 miles below St Louis.

My grandfather was descended from German migrants to the New Orleans area around 1721. He worked as a barber for 60 years and after he retired I asked if I might

have some of the tools he used in barbering. Among the treasures he gave me is a pair of barber scissors made by the Solingen company in Germany. I use them often to trim my own hair but only became aware of their origin in a sword-making company when I read this passage:

[page 606] 1853. At Solingen, they manufacture swords, called *eisenhauers*, which cut gunbarrels in two. (London) Examiner.

By a cosmic coincidence the great American General who figuratively cut the war barrels of the German guns in half in World War II and won the war was named Eisenhower, an English spelling of, and pronounced exactly the same, as the German word *eisenhauer*.



In this next passage, Emerson explains how Thoreau owned the fields, waters, and woods of Concord as if they were his own. As a surveyor he gained passage to many areas and could hop fences and property lines with impunity, but most of his travels were completely unseen by the owners of the properties he passed through as though he were invisible.

[page 614] 1853. Sylvan (Thoreau) could go wherever woods & waters were & no man was asked for leave. Once or twice the farmer withstood, but it was to no purpose, — he could as easily prevent the sparrows or tortoises. It was their land before it was his, & their title was precedent. He knew what was on their land, & they did not; & he sometimes brought them ostentatiously gifts of flowers or fruits or shrubs which they would gladly have paid great prices for, & did not tell them that he took them from their own woods.

Moreover the very time at which he used their land & water (for his boat glided like a trout everywhere unseen,) was in hours when they were sound asleep. Long before they were awake he went up & down to survey like a sovereign his possessions, & he passed onward, & left them before the farmer came out of doors. Indeed it was the common opinion of the boys that Mr T. made Concord.

In this next passage, Emerson gives us an insight into Thoreau and how he values the men around him.

[page 621] 1853. H. D. T. says he values only the man who goes directly to his needs, who, wanting wood, goes to the woods & brings it home; or to the river, & collects the drift, & brings it in his boat to his door, & burns it: not him who keeps shop, that he may buy wood. One is pleasing to reason & imagination; the other not.

As I read this passage over it occurred to me that my father during the first decade or so of my life was such a man. If he needed a burner to boil crawfish, he found an old water heater burner and set it into a section of a barrel he had galvanized. If he wanted wood to carve duck decoys, he went into the swamp and returned with chunks of cypress and tupelo gum. If he needed a boat, he built himself one. If he needed a net to catch crawfish, he knitted one while listening to the Friday night fights on the radio. He helped his sister's husband make sausage on Wednesday nights and brought some home for us to eat. Much of what we ate back then, he and my mom gathered from a field, hunted down, slaughtered and butchered, or fished out of the bayou. Henry would have liked Buster.

Emerson tells us on page 623 that the Sun would be lacking interest if the universe were not opaque, that "We can do nothing without the shadow." Which set me to thinking of Peter Pan who so earnestly searched for his shadow.

[page 623] 1853. Art lives & thrills in ever new use & combining of contrasts, & is digging into the dark ever more blacker Pits of night. What would painter do, or what would hero & saint, but for crucifixions & hells? And evermore in the world is this marvelous balance of beauty & disgust, magnificence & rats.

Have you ever thought of knowledge as a fountain which flows downhill? Emerson did. He was himself a wonderful font of knowledge from which I deeply drank as soon as I discovered his overflowing spring.

[page 627] 1853. I have no fear but that the reality I love will yet exist in literature. I do not go to any pope or president for my list of books. I read what I like. I learn what I do not already know. Only those above me can give me this. They also do as I, — read only such as know more than they: Thus we all depend at last on the few heads or the one head that is nearest to the stars, nearest to the fountain of all science, & knowledge runs steadily down from class to class down to the lowest people, from the highest, as water does.

What Emerson writes about in this next passage applies very well to this book of selections from his Journals. In it I have found numerous items that seemed specifically mean for me.

[page 634, 635] May 1854. A good head cannot read amiss. In every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides, hidden from all else, & unmistakably meant for his ear. No book has worth by itself; but by the relation to what you have from many other books, it weighs.

Whenever two thoughts lead to each other, Emerson values the connection, sees the connective tissue as the thread of a spider weaving together into a rich web what were else single thoughts or facts.

[page 638] 11 October 1854. I notice that I value nothing so much as the threads that spin from a thought to a fact, & from one fact to another fact, making both experiences valuable & presentable, which were insignificant before, & weaving together into rich webs all solitary observations.

Emerson pulls science down to a mere collection of nomenclature which requires a touch of magic from the soul to reveal important truths.

[page 638] 11 October 1854. I wish to know the nomenclature of botany & astronomy. But these are soulless both, as we know them; vocabularies both. Add astrology to astronomy, & 'tis somewhat. Add medicine & magic to botany, & that is something. But the English believe that by mountains of facts they can climb into the heaven of thought & truth: so the builders of Babel believed. But the method of truth is quite other, & heaven descends, when it will, to the prepared soul. We must hold our science as mere convenience, expectant of a higher method from the mind itself.

Emerson sees the magic of moving, especially the changing from one thing into another, such as small children delight in doing in their play. It is as if they were born out of the spiritual world with an innate knowledge of the book of changes and need no instruction from parents in this matter.

[page 643] 11 February 1855. For flowing is the secret of things & no wonder the children love masks, & to trick themselves in endless costumes, & be a horse, a soldier, a parson, or a bear; and, older, delight in theatricals; as, in nature, the egg is passing to a grub, the grub to a fly, and the vegetable eye to a bud, the bud to a leaf, a stem, a flower, a fruit; the children have only the instinct of their race, the instinct of the Universe, in which, *Becoming somewhat else* is the whole game of nature, & death the penalty of standing still.

'Tis not less in thought. I cannot conceive of any good in a thought which confines & stagnates. Liberty means the power to flow. To continue is to flow. Life is increasing parturition.

Please consider carefully, dear Reader, that materialist science is based on abstract logical thought, which is, yes, very useful for building machines and such, but is useless for giving birth to living beings.

Emerson admired Alcott, the father of Louisa May Alcott, knew him to be man of superior intelligence and wit, which often few observed. But if Alcott got on his high horse, Katie, Bar the Door!

[page 651] 1855. Alcott had much to say of there being more in a man than was contained in his skin; as I say, a man is as his relatedness. But I was struck with the late superiority he showed. The interlocutors were all better than he; he seemed childish & helpless, not apprehending or answering their remarks aright, they master of their weapons. But by & by, when he got upon a thought like an Indian seizing by the mane & mounting a wild horse of the desert, he overrode them all & showed such mastery & took up time & nature like a boy's marble in hand to vindicate himself.

Walt Whitman was originally a typesetter and bookbinder, and had access to pieces of printer paper called leaves (back then) upon which to write his early poems. The printers called early trial printings of rough drafts, etal, grass. When Whitman bound his raw poems, his leaves of grass, together into a book, his choice of a title for his collection of poems was obvious to him, "Leaves of Grass". Emerson loved Whitman's poems, but asked him if he could tone down the blatant sensuality and sexuality in them. Whitman chose to ignore such requests from anyone. This is the back story to Emerson writing on page 663, "Whipple said of the author of 'Leaves of Grass,' that he had every leaf but the fig leaf."

Emerson had no admiration for critics like Whipple, realizing that what the critic brings up to discuss tells us as much about the man criticized as if only his skeleton were displayed and these words were spoken, "See how desiccated and thin the man's thoughts are."

[page 694, 695] Nature does not like criticism. There is much that a wise man would not know. See how she never shows the skeleton, but covers it up, weaves her tissues & folds & integuments, the sun shall not shine on it, the eye shall not see it. Who & what are you that would lay it bare? & what a ghostly grinning fragment have you got at last, which you call a man! That is criticism.

Those who cannot construct wholes, criticize the wholes others create. The creator cares little about the details, recognizing their creation as a work in progress. "The critic with an analytic mind will not carry us far," Emerson says.

[page 698) Taking to pieces is the trade of those who cannot construct. In a healthy mind, the love of wholes, the power of generalizing, is usually joined with a keen appreciation of differences. But they are so bent on the aim & genius of the thing, that

they don't mind the surface faults. But minds of low & surface power pounce on some fault of expression, of rhetoric, or petty mis-statement of fact, and quite lose sight of the main purpose.

One cannot read the above without being reminded of White House press briefings of the new U.S. President in 2017.

Emerson did not want to bring men to him, but rather to help bring men to themselves. He was proud of having not one disciple. Here was a man who valued the long term, and eschewed the frivolities of the short term.

[page 709] I have been writing & speaking what were once called novelties, for twenty five or thirty years, & have not now one disciple. Why? Not that what I said was not true; not that it has not found intelligent receivers but because it did not go from any wish in me to bring men to me, but to themselves. I delight in driving them from me. What could I do, if they came to me? They would interrupt & encumber me.

We must each trust in our fortune, our karma, when it calls us to our task.

[page 710] I value a man's trust in his fortune, when it is a hearing of voices that call him to his task; when he is conscious of a great work laid on him to do, & that nature cannot afford to lose him until it is done.

Solitude was a luxury for me in my life; I shared one double bed with four younger brothers from my age of six to twelve. I went to college and there I found solitude, not in a room of my own, but in the library as I studied.

[page 712] "In the morning — solitude," said Pythagoras. By all means, give the youth solitude, that nature may speak to his imagination, as it does never in company; and, for the like reason, give him a chamber alone; and that was the best thing I found in College.

Emerson loved holding onto unanswered questions, even the most trivial fact gave him delight when he made a connection that answered some long-held question like, "Why was I holding this item in my memory?"

[page 731] I am a matchmaker, & delight in nothing more than in finding the husband or mate of the trivial fact I have long carried in my memory, (unable to offer any reason for the emphasis I gave it,) until now, suddenly, it shows itself as the true symbol or expressor of some abstraction.

One can feel the lifelong poverty of the woman in this quote by Emerson on page 735, "An old woman standing by the sea, said, 'she was glad to see something that there was enough of.'"

Emerson wrote a line on page 776 which begged to be written as the first line of a poem:

To Perfection

*To a perfect foot no place is slippery.
To a perfect fool every place is slippery.
To a perfect fop every act is foppery.
To a perfect union every act is unifying.*

Even Thoreau slipped once on a walk, but it was a most fortuitous slip which led him to discover a plant whose leaves contain a healing balm. I had read this passage a couple of months ago and had no idea that

this plant is commonly used to make "oil of arnica". But a couple of days ago I awoke from a dream in which the phrase "oil of arnica" stuck in my mind, and I was determined to find out about it. Yesterday I ordered a bottle of the oil which is good for sprains, headaches, one's heart, arthritic pain, weak immune system, skin rashes, among other things.

[page 799] Henry Thoreau fell in Tuckerman's Ravine, at Mount Washington, and sprained his foot. As he was in the act of getting up from his fall, he saw for the first time the leaves of *Arnica Mollis!* the exact balm for his wound.

Poems, in my opinion, must contain powerful thoughts. No amount of elegant poesy can raise common thoughts to memorable poetry. Emerson says this very well.

[page 808] *1 November, 1862.* In poetry, the charm is of course in the power of the thought which enforces beautiful expression. But the common experience is, fine language to clothe commonplace thoughts, if I may say thoughts. And the effect is, dwarfs on stilts.

Good commanders of armies know the importance of flanking tactics in major battles. Emerson claims the same virtue in making an argument.

[page 841] *13 February 1865.* The best in argument is not accosting in front the hostile premises, but the *flanking* them by a new generalization which incidentally disposes of them.

This inspired me to write this poem:

'Tis a Trick of Rhetoric

'Tis a trick of rhetoric
to eschew direct assault
and
generally attack the flanks.

If we ram our farms
with lines of pickets,
we turn to dust our paradise.

Let us count the Pleiades at dusk
Lest we mourn our fallen Star.

What are the five miracles of your lifetime, Dear Reader? Emerson gives us these five of his lifetime.

[page 894] The splendors of this age outshine all other recorded ages. In my lifetime, have been wrought five miracles, namely, 1. The Steamboat; 2. The railroad; 3. The Electric telegraph; 4. The application of the Spectroscope to astronomy; 5. The photograph: five miracles which have altered the relations of nations to each other.

I choose these five miracles of my lifetime: 1) Jet plane 2) Television 3) Digital Computers 4) Internet and 5) Google. It's hard to leave out such advances as atomic power, large-scale integration, Smartphones, space travel, air-conditioning, and self-driving automobiles, but the wheels of progress are still turning out new creations of the human mind. Most importantly, from this list of miracles I cannot omit the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson whose *Self-Reliance* Essay flamed into my life as a shooting star, lighting up a world, a new world for me, I was as tinder and his words set a match to me, starting a lifelong fire burning brightly.



----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1.

The plate was polished silver and after exposure it had to be held over steaming mercury for the image to develop.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)



Footnote 2.

Matherne's Rule [No. 7](#) is Do It Right Away, Kid!, an action demonstrated by the young boys to immediately teach the passenger how to avoid being hit again by a baseball.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)



Footnote 3.

See the teakettle quote on page 323 of [Volume I](#) of his Journal.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 3.](#)



Footnote 4.

The 27th letter of the alphabet in Emerson's time was "&" which he drew as a script "et" which means "and" in Latin. Adding the "c." makes it an abbreviation for "et cetera" — which we today mark as "etc." in our writing.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 4.](#)



Footnote 5.

An old Spanish coin in common use, but mostly devalued below its face value.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 5.](#)



