EMERSON'S THEORY OF LEARNING

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EMERSON'S THEORY OF LEARNING

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CHAPTER I

EMERSON'S INTEREST IN EDUCATION

For the first time in its history, the nation is in competition with a potential or actual enemy, not only on the basis of military might, but on the level of the relative dynamism of the competing systems. The outcome of such a "total" conflict may well determine the future way of life of all mankind. Victory would seem to go to that system having the greater organic vitality at its core. Since the continuation, growth, and expansion of any human organization must ultimately depend on the effective education of its youth, it appears that this inner vitality rests in large part upon a dynamic and consistent theory and practice of education. In view of the present crisis, many have felt it necessary to re-examine American education to determine its strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, it is beneficial, if not essential, to re-evaluate earlier attempts to define and develop a comprehensive theory of education. One such attempt deserving of consideration is that advanced by the philosopher-essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose journals, lectures, and essays reveal a life-long interest in education.
A reference to Emerson's journals offers proof of the interest Emerson maintained in education throughout his life. As early as 1831, Emerson writes,

The things which are taught children are not an education, but the means of education. The grammar and geography and writing do not train up the child in the way it should go, but may be used in the service of the devil.

Education is the drawing out of the soul.¹

That his interest in education is still vital in 1870, thirty-nine years later, is seen in his comments about the curriculum of the school: "It really appears that the Latin and Greek continue to be forced in education just as chignons must be worn, in spite of the disgust against both, for fashion."² During the years between these two widely separated dates, Emerson's active role as teacher, chairman of school committees, college lecturer, and member of the Board of Overseers of Harvard College provides conclusive evidence of his interest in education.³

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, edited by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (10 vols.; New York, 1909-1914), II, 412 (hereafter cited as Journals).

²Journals, X, 338-339.

Emerson's general views on education are broad, liberal, and "modern." He feels that it is the responsibility and moral obligation of the state to educate all its youth, but he is concerned about the narrow aims, limited offerings, and restricted methods on all levels of education from the elementary to the university. Education, he asserts, should be free, comprehensive, and individual-centered; its object, to teach one how to live.

Emerson feels that it is the duty of the state to promote free education, for education destroys the limitations of man and diminishes the differences between men:

Let the states say, "We have not the fertile prairie, the prolific Southern sun, the gold of California, the copper of Michigan, the coal of Pennsylvania and the oil"; but this one point of plain duty we have - to educate every soul. Every native and every foreign child that is cast on our coast shall be taught, at the public cost, the rudiments of knowledge, and at last the ripest results of art and science.4

But Emerson also feels that the aim education then had as its goal was wrong. The child was being educated to conform to a preconceived pattern - a doctor, accountant, lawyer, or engineer - to follow in his father's career. The individual nature of the child was being overlooked in his education. The correct purpose of education, as Emerson sees it, is to educate the child to become a moral man.

The child should first be taught to respect his individual nature, for by discovering, trusting, and developing himself, he gains a deeper understanding of all men, of the world, and of universal values:

The great object of Education should be commensurate with the object of life. It should be a moral one; to teach self-trust; to inspire the youthful man with an interest in himself; with a curiosity touching his own nature; to acquaint him with the resources of his mind, and to teach him that there is all his strength, and to inflame him with a piety towards the Grand Mind in which he lives. Thus would education conspire with the Divine Providence. A man is a little thing whilst he works for and by himself, but, when he gives voice to the rules of love and justice, is godlike, his word is current in all countries; and all men, though his enemies, are made his friends and obey it as their own. 5

In brief, the object of education is to teach one to live.

Emerson believes that the scope of education should be broad enough to encourage the fullest development of man's potentialities, that it should stimulate the innate powers of the mind to expand organically; for the expanding, inquiring mind will itself suggest what further subjects to present to it. Emerson wants a man's knowledge to be broad enough to include more than one area of learning, to comprehend more than one class of topics, to appreciate more than one aspect of life.

5 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," Lectures and Biographical Sketches, Vol. X of The Centenary Edition of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, 12 vols., edited by Edward Waldo Emerson (New York, 1903-1921), p. 135. (All subsequent references to Emerson's essays that are taken from this edition will be abbreviated as Works.)
Is it not manifest that our academic institutions should have a wider scope; that they should not be timid and keep the ruts of the last generation, but that wise men thinking for themselves and heartily seeking the good of mankind, and counting the cost of innovation, should dare to arouse the young to a just and heroic life; that the moral nature should be addressed in the school-room, and children should be treated as the high-born candidates of truth and virtue?\(^6\)

Similarly, Emerson believes that the duty of the university is to proportion its subject matter, to balance the curriculum.

Language, Rhetoric, Logic, Ethics, Intellectual Philosophy, Poetry, Natural History, Civil History, Political Economy, Technology, Chemistry, Agriculture, Literary History . . . All these may rightly enter into the curriculum . . . But it were to hurt the University if any one of these should absorb a disproportionate share of time.

Such an education teaches a man how to live and enables him to rise above the daily circumstances of life that tend to pull his mind down to their level of existence.

The vulgar man is the victim of the circumstance. In the stage-coach, he is not man, but a tedious echo of each new accident of the journey, absorbed in the heat, in the cold, in the bad horses, in the fret of a crowded carriage. In the rain, he can think of nothing but that he wishes it would stop; in the drought, he waits till the rains fall; in debt, he postpones his being until his note is paid; in dull company, until the company is gone; and never rallies himself to sink the circumstance and these encroaching trifles into their proper nothingness before the energies, the sweetness, the riches, the aspiration of a human mind.\(^8\)

\(^6\)"Education," Works, X, 151; see also Journals, II, 246.

\(^7\)Journals, X, 38-39.

\(^8\)Journals, V, 441-442.
Emerson's specific views on education, however, are of more interest and value, for beginning with a personal concern for a practical means of self-education, he develops through a series of journal entries the fundamentals of a theory of learning which later, in the essays, is to include a thorough analysis of the laws of the mind, the sources of learning experiences, the method of learning and instruction, and the role, duty, and reward of the scholar. Though there are frequent references to education and related subjects in his later journals, and though education serves as a recurrent theme in his lectures, it is in the published essays that his theory of education is most fully revealed.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is two-fold: it is (1) to show Emerson's development of a consistent and fully formed theory of education which may well have value for the present time, and (2) to analyze the main aspects of this theory in detail for a better understanding of Emerson's thought.

The method of research used was to collect and analyze all pertinent references to Emerson's theory of education from his journals, lectures, and published essays and to correlate them according to subject. In presenting the theory, this study treats each major division of his thought separately and in detail for convenience, clarity, and ease of comprehension. Since Emerson's theory of learning is founded upon certain laws that he believes govern the development, powers, and
activities of the mind, these laws are identified and established for the reader in the opening chapters. There follows a discussion of Emerson's views on the sources of learning for the mind. Using the laws of the mind and the sources of learning as a basis, Emerson's method of learning and instruction is analyzed. Emerson's whole theory of education culminates logically and naturally in his over-all view of the role, duty, and reward of the scholar. In a final chapter, the individually treated portions are summarized and joined to reveal the "perfect" whole—a consistently developed, complete, and, for its time, advanced theory of learning.

for this study, there are three primary sources that are essential to understanding Emerson's theory of learning: "The Natural History of the Intellect," which discloses the organization and laws of the mind; "Education," which presents the problems involved in learning; and "The American Scholar," which deals with the duty of a scholar and his role in society.

Secondary sources and previous studies have been found to be of slight value. Though several writers have noted and commented on various aspects of Emerson's interest in education, none have fully analyzed the complete body of his thought on education. There are several articles which deserve notice for their treatment of Emerson and education. One which points out the importance of the individual in Emerson's theory of education, a point which receives expanded treatment in this paper, is "A Study of Emerson's Philosophy of Education" by Virginia Wayman. Another study done by Philip Magnus, "Emerson's Thoughts on Education," stresses the importance of Emerson's thoughts on the contemporary system of education. However, these studies and others point out only various aspects of Emerson's thought without showing the entire theory as it develops from "how one learns" to "what one must do with what he has learned." The purpose

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of this paper is to view the whole of Emerson's theory of learning rather than express only one of its aspects.

Emerson's theory of learning is of importance because its principles apply to today's world and tomorrow's. The components of his theory are fundamental enough to withstand the change of time. His laws of the mind will be true as long as the mind exists; the sources of learning he enumerates will be available as long as the world lasts; his method of learning and instruction, based upon patterns found in nature, will change only when nature changes its pattern; the duty of the scholar, as Emerson states it, will be the same in the future as it is at this time.

Primary in the study of Emerson's theory of education is the understanding of his laws of the mind which direct the learning process. To be able to increase his natural potential, it is necessary for man to have a knowledge of these laws and to know how his mind is governed. He must become familiar with the mechanism to be able to operate the machine effectively. The following chapter presents the various stages of the development of the mind and the laws that direct it.
CHAPTER II

THE LAWS OF THE MIND

In showing the completeness of the theory of education that Emerson works out, an analysis of the development, powers, and laws of the mind, as stated by Emerson, particularly in "The Natural History of the Intellect," must be presented as a foundation for understanding his expanded theory. By supplementing the expression of his ideas in "The Natural History of the Intellect" with journal entries and references to the topic in his other essays and lectures, it is possible to present his theory of the mind. In his lecture-essay, "The Natural History of the Intellect," Emerson emphasizes the importance of the study of the mind:

My belief in the use of a course on philosophy is that the student shall learn to appreciate the miracle of the mind; shall learn its subtle but immense power, or shall begin to learn it; shall come to know that in seeing and in no tradition he must find what truth is . . . .

Thus Emerson himself justifies such a review of his study of the mind as will be made at this time.

Generally, Emerson's world view is the view held by many thinkers, such as Plato, Wordsworth, Blake, and Carlyle. This theory is that creation existed first in the Mind of God as the realm of the spiritual or the invisible world, the shadow of which is reflected in the existence of the material or the natural world. Emerson speaks of this reflection when he says, "... intellect is primary; nature secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in the intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature." Therefore, the idealists believe that the visible or the material world stands as a symbol of the invisible world. Every material object in the visible world is but the physical manifestation of the ideal in the invisible world. The material world can display only the effects that are caused in the invisible world; it can obey only the laws that are formed in the other world. Emerson reaffirms his belief in the intellect's primal position when he states:

I believe in the existence of the material world as the expression of the spiritual or the real, and in the impenetrable mystery which hides (and hides through absolute transparency) the mental nature, I await the insight which our advancing knowledge of material laws shall furnish.

"I await the insight which our advancing knowledge of material laws shall furnish;" this statement is the key to Emerson's views on the development of the mind. Although the mind first existed in the invisible

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world among the prototypes of the material world, birth into the material world has taken it away from familiarity with the true objects. The only way that it can regain association with the invisible world is to study the symbols of this world that surround it in nature. Thus Emerson states his dependence on nature to teach him or to "remind" him of the actual world. Although the mind existed first in the spiritual world, according to idealistic thinkers, it uses the material world to recall the truths that it will find in returning to that spiritual world.

Emerson feels that in the process of regaining these truths, the mind develops through three levels of learning. The first level is that on which the instinct plays the major role. The mind on this level does not attempt to learn, and what knowledge or impressions it receives, it receives passively. At this stage, matter does not exist to the mind in individual characteristics, for the mind has not yet distinguished itself as an individual being. Yet learning does take place. The instinct stores up impressions, but it does not do so consciously; it allows the material world to impress itself on the unconscious mind, but it does nothing constructive with the impressions made. The instinct may be called a potential; it is much like a massive but shapeless giant who has the strength to perform difficult feats but who has no arms, legs or eyes to work with.4

4Ibid., p 35.
The second level in mental development is that on which the senses play the most important role. The mind, at this point of development, becomes aware of the individuality of material objects that surround it; through the senses it discovers that the world is constructed of a multiplicity of these individual entities and that they fit together to form groups, which combine to form still larger groups. The sensual mind finds that everything belongs to some pattern in nature, that every hose has some hydrant to attach itself to. The mind at this level also becomes conscious of certain repeated effects in the natural world that seem governed by specific laws; it recognizes the cycle of growth and decay as the effects that are caused by certain laws of nature. The sensual mind discovers harmony established among the diversified objects and concludes that there is a law that causes these apparently different aspects to appear as one harmonious unity. It sees the effect of the law, but it cannot find the cause of it.

It is on the third level, that of perceptive intelligence, that the mind is able to determine the causes of the effects seen in the material world. Perceptive intelligence uses the knowledge it has gained from its sensual observations to achieve an insight into the spiritual or invisible world, for "Every object in Nature is a word to signify some fact in the mind." 5 Emerson believes that the mind can find its own method of organization in nature's organization.

5 Ibid., p. 5.
And as mind, our mind, or minds like ours, reappears to us in our study of Nature, Nature being everywhere formed after a method which we can well understand, and all parts, to the most remote, allied or explicable, — therefore our own organization is a perpetual key, and a well-ordered mind brings to the study of every new fact or class of facts a certain divination of that which it shall find. 6

Thus a first view of nature shows a material world that appears to be composed of individual objects. There is a single flower, one insect, a solitary bird. But a more detailed view reveals that these individuals are all related to groups; they do not stand alone in the material world:

"...all parts, to the most remote, [are] allied or explicable..."

Emerson believes, furthermore, that the perceptive intelligence finds within the mind an organization similar to that of nature. There are many thoughts created in the mind, each of some value. However, their real value is discovered when they, like nature's parts, combine and work together for one purpose. The creative genius recognizes the potential for combination that thoughts have and allows them to unite and produce greater action than they could produce singly.

There is no solitary flower and no solitary thought. It comes single like a foreign traveler, — but find out its name, and it is related to a powerful and numerous family. Wonderful is their working and relation each to each. We hold them, as lanterns to light each other and our present design. Every new thought modifies, interprets old problems. The retrospective value of each new thought is immense, like a torch applied to a long train of gunpowder. To be isolated is to be sick, and in so far, dead. The life of the All must stream through us to make man and the moment great. 7

6 Ibid., p. 20.
7 Ibid., p. 21.
Emerson also recognizes the similarity of the laws of growth in nature to the laws of the mind. In nature every leaf that appears has a new bud under it; in the mind every new thought is quickly followed by another new one, almost as if thoughts give birth to each other.

He finds that,

The idea of vegetation is irresistible in considering mental activity. Man seems a higher plant. What happens here in mankind is matched by what happens out there in the history of grass and wheat . . . Under every leaf is the bud of a new leaf, and not less under every thought is a newer thought.8

The creative genius does not ignore the perpetual appearance of new thoughts, and in employing them it distinguishes itself from the sensual mind that develops its primary thought but fails to develop the succeeding ones. For, Emerson adds,

The commonest remark, if the man could only extend it a little, would make him a genius; but the thought is prematurely checked, and grows no more. All great masters are chiefly distinguished by the power of adding a second, a third, and perhaps a fourth step in a continuous line. Many a man has taken the first step. With every additional step you enhance immensely the value of the first.9

It is the perceptive intelligence that enables man to carry his thought beyond the first step, to find the truth that lies behind the visible world. It is this intelligence that leads one into "... the region of laws, the sphere of the Intellect, the native air of the human soul. Few men enter it, but all men belong there."10

8 Ibid., p. 24.
9 Ibid., p. 25.
10 Journals, IV, 382.
It is of interest to note here that Emerson's views on the three levels of the mind - instinct, senses, and perceptive intelligence - are similar to those ideas held by William Blake and William Wordsworth. Blake's three levels are innocency, experience, and higher innocency. In the state of innocency, the mind does not strive to know about life; but in the state of experience, the mind is familiarized with the world; and in the third state, higher innocency, the mind rises above the affairs of the world and seeks the home that it came from. Wordsworth personifies the three levels in three periods of man's life: the passive child, the responsive youth, and the thoughtful man. The mind of the passive child is impressed by nature without effort on the part of the child; the responsive youth becomes consciously receptive to the beauties of the material world; the thoughtful man rises above the knowledge of the physical world and, with the aid of thought, looks into the spiritual world.

As Wordsworth suggests with his three periods of life, Emerson feels that three levels of man's mental development are also reflected in the stages of man's civilization. The "savage" man in his original condition symbolizes the mind in its state of instinct. He has undeveloped potential, but he has not developed the means whereby to make it productive. The "civilized" man symbolizes, in his development, the sensual mind. He has found material value in the natural world, though he sees only the physical quality of the objects in nature: trees
are fuel and shelter; the sun is heat and light, the stars are a compass to return one to his home. The "civilized" man uses nature as an end in itself; he does not take the additional steps in observing its laws to discover the laws that direct him. This is the step, the act of creative thought, that the "potential" man, "Man Thinking," incarnates. He finds that nature is not an end in itself, but that it holds the key that he needs to unlock the doors that will reveal his own nature to himself. Nature is not the end but the means to his purpose in life to gain entrance into the spiritual world of ideas. This man lives both in and above the natural world, for he lives in the realm of the pure intellect in order to make a better world for his fellow man.

Paralleling three levels of mental development and the three levels of man's civilization, Emerson identifies three levels of power found in the mind. Memory, the first and profoundest power of the mind, is found in the instinct; its limits are seen in the life of the "savage" man. On this level the mind collects no impressions purposely; it accepts passively what is offered it. Facts, images, scenes, and ideas that are retained by the memory are used later by the "civilized" man, when the mind has reached its second level of power, understanding. The understanding is a rational, thinking power; it uses constructively what it has found in the material world. It makes decisions concerning its

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choice of food, clothes, friends, vocation, entertainment, and it employs the memory in making these decisions. What was found to be successful yesterday it uses again today; what failed yesterday it disregards or improves before using it again. Although it makes decisions, it sees only the effects; it does not see the causes. It is the reason, an intuitive perceptive intelligence, which determines the causes behind the effects. The power of the understanding in action is talent, whereas the power of reason is genius. The distinction that Emerson makes between the two is "... that Talent says things which he has never heard but once, and Genius things which he has never heard. Genius is power; Talent is applicability. A human body, an animal, is applicability; the Life, the Soul is Genius." 13

Having analyzed Emerson's views on the mental processes and the powers of the mind, one is better prepared to understand his views on the three major laws of the mind: (1) unconscious selective assimilation, (2) conscious recognition and classification, and (3) correlation and reflection.

The mind must first have an unconscious assimilation by the senses of its experiences. It has already been stated that the instinct does not

12 Emerson defines the terms understanding and reason in his essay "Nature" by specifying their functions. "The understanding adds, divides, combines, measures, and finds nutriment and room for its activity in this worthy scene. Meantime, Reason transfers all these lessons into its own world of thought, by perceiving the analogy that marries Matter and Mind." "Nature," Works, I, 36.

13 Journals, VI, 370-371.
use its powers to create, but to collect. Yet there are certain laws that it must follow in this collection. Each mind is impressed in a peculiar manner as directed by its individuality. There are some impressions that it accepts to its collection, while others are rejected, according to its needs. It is according to this law that a certain experience makes a greater impression on one mind than it makes on a second mind. The instinct's purpose is only to collect, not to classify or draw conclusions. It must not force its collection but allow it to be spontaneous. As Emerson suggests:

Our thinking is a pious reception. Our truth of thought is therefore vitiated as much by too violent direction given by our will, as by too great negligence. We do not determine what we will think. We only open our senses, clear away as we can all obstruction from the fact, and suffer the intellect to see. We have little control over our thoughts. We are prisoners of ideas.

The influences of sensual experiences are active upon the instinct from the moment of birth. Although the law directing the pre-conscious assimilation of impressions does not enable the instinct to distinguish objects and classify ideas, the surroundings do influence the mind. These impressions continue to store up in the mind; their energy may be compared to electricity; the potential energy is there, but it must be put into certain company or other favorable conditions before it can become charged.

14 "Intellect," _Works_, II, 328.

The law of conscious recognition and classification of natural objects enables the understanding to utilize the impressions unconsciously assimilated by the mind. There is a conscious recollection of the past impressions, and present thoughts are produced. The observation of a natural object, such as the setting of the sun reflected in a clear lake, is no longer merely a sensual impression stored in the unconscious mind, but an experience that is recognized and classified with similar scenes; the mind compares, contrasts, or draws conclusions from its experience of the present scene in reference to former impressions. The end product of such recognition and classification is a thought.

Thoughts are not born instantly; they are conceived in the unconscious mind long before they are brought into conscious reflection by some more immediate mode of inspiration. Emerson states that this law is true of all natural images

. . . with which your life has made you acquainted, in your memory, though you know it not; and a thrill of passion flashes light on their dark chamber, and the active power seizes instantly the fit image, as the word of its momentary thoughts.

It is long ere we discover how rich we are. Our history, we are sure, is quite tame; we have nothing to write, nothing to infer. But our wiser years still run back to the despised recollections of childhood, and always we are still fishing up some wonderful article out of that pond; until by and by we begin to suspect that the biography of the one foolish person we know is, in reality, nothing less than the miniature paraphrase of the hundred volumes of the Universal History.

Though by the law of conscious recognition and classification, the mind is able to classify what it experiences in the natural world into thought, it does not, on this level, use these thoughts creatively.

It is by the law of perceptive correlation and reflection, however, that constructive and creative activity of the mind occurs. The creative intellect perceives the likeness or relationship of "thoughts," correlates them, reflects upon them, and arrives at a conception of an underlying truth. Though on one level, the understanding perceives "thoughts" behind things, on a higher level creative intelligence sees and uses natural objects as symbols of thought to embody its perception of truth, for just as light does not communicate itself until it is reflected by some object, thought cannot be communicated until it takes the form of an object. But to transform this thought into a sensible object, the creative mind must also exert control over its symbols and images to produce its poem, picture, cathedral, or song as the incarnation of its central thought. The force that gives power to thought is what Emerson calls the moral sentiment. It is an intuitive knowledge of the spiritual laws that man receives from his surroundings. Emerson, in his essay, "Nature," states that all things are moral, and consequently their influence upon man is a moral one. The mind that is ruled by the law of perceptive correlation and reflection is conditioned to benefit from the moral influence. Emerson calls the man who has such a mind the "true scholar."
To a true scholar the attraction of the aspects of nature, the
departments of life, and the passages of his experience, is simply
the information they yield him of this supreme nature which lurks
within all. That reality, that causing force is moral. The Moral
Sentiment is but its other name.

Emerson states that all nature, its appearance, its processes, and
its products, teaches a moral lesson to man. It teaches him to be self-
reliant, to be creative, to be honest, and to be beautiful. In his essay
"Nature," Emerson claims that the "moral influence of nature upon
every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him." 18
As the individual has greater perceptive intelligence he has more sensi-
tivity to the influence of the moral sentiment, and consequently he is
more creative, for Emerson says, "Just as much intellect as you add,
so much organic power. He who sees through the design, presides over
it, and must will that which must be." 19 As the moral sentiment teaches
man truth, it gives him power to convert the truth into creative works.
The moral sentiment encourages man to improve, to amend, and to re-
form his life. "It is the interior testimony to a fairer possibility of
life and manners which agitates society every day with the offer of some
new amendment." 20 It is from the knowledge and power of the moral

19 "Fate," Works, VI, 28.
sentiment that reforms begin. Since this sentiment is moral its presence makes right, beauty and genius; its absence makes wrong, ugliness, and deprivation. The mind that functions under the law of correlation and reflection uses the power that it derives from the moral sentiment to put into action the thoughts that it has unconsciously and consciously collected.

However, Emerson finds that another element is necessary in the process of creation. It has been stated that the conscious mind produces the thought, and that the perceptive correlation of the mind finds cause and power to convert thoughts into works through the moral sentiment, but will is necessary to perform the action. The will is the control over the creative genius; it is the ability to put the impressions of the unconscious mind and the thoughts of the conscious into creative works. Emerson finds that all men do not exercise this will.

As all men have some access to primary truth, so all have some art or power of communication in their head, but only in the artist does it descend into the hand. . . . The thought of genius is spontaneous; but the power of picture or expression, in the most enriched or flowing nature, implies a mixture of will, a certain control over the spontaneous states, without which no production is possible.21

However, most men do not utilize for creative expression the power of insight gained through thought; they take only the first step toward creative thought. Their yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows are connected only by the immediately present objects: home, family, trade. They quickly forget the thoughts that were theirs yesterday and

21 Ibid., p. 336.
make no attempt to connect their lives by more than material substances. Exercising the will in conjunction with the higher faculties allows man to find the real purpose of the mind, which is to give meaning to matter through its own power, to look beyond the fulfillment of sensual needs. Such needs, says Emerson "... are mistaken by us for ends and realities, whilst they are properly symbols only; when we have come, by a divine leading, into the inner firmament, we are apprised of the unreality or representative character of what we esteemed final." 22

Essential to understanding Emerson's theory on the laws of the mind is his conception of the individuality of the mind. Each mind's instinct, consciousness, and genius have different modes of inspiration. It is a man's susceptibility to certain influences and his rejection of others that forms his character and makes him different from other men. The mind does not question why it receives these impressions, for it is attracted to them by its individual genius. Emerson states that,

Those facts, words, persons, which dwell in his memory without his being able to say why, remain because they have a relation to him not less real for being as yet unapprehended. ... What attracts my attention shall have it, as I will go to the man who knocks at my door, whilst a thousand persons as worthy go by it, to whom I give no regard. 23

Each mind's genius has a different purpose to fulfill in life: each has a different book to write, picture to paint, or building to design. Though the tendency of age is to direct the feet of youth down well-trodden paths,


individuality must be preserved, for Emerson insists that "The charm of life is this variety of genius..." 24 It is "A low self-love in the parent [that] desires that his child should repeat his character and fortune; an expectation which the child, if justice is done him, will disappoint." 25 If educators adhere to the idea that a child should follow his parents' footsteps, the intended purpose and identity of the child is destroyed. Emerson's admonition to parents in directing their children's lives is, "Cannot we let people be themselves, and enjoy life in their own way? You are trying to make that man another you. One's enough." 26 The genius of the child is unused when he is taught to conform rather than to allow his individual genius to guide him. The Turks, by whitewashing the costly mosaics of ancient art which the Greeks left on their temple walls, covered true art with uninspired labor. The educators whitewash the genius of pupils with their doctrine of conformity and cover the individuality of the minds. If the natural character of the young students were allowed to continue through manhood, the youths would develop into scholars, "...such as are able and fertile for heroic action; and not that sad spectacle with which we are too familiar, educated eyes in uneducated bodies." 27 The educators should capitalize on the individuality of youth:

24 "Education," Works, X, 137.  
25 Ibid.  
26 Ibid., p. 138.  
27 Ibid.  
28 Ibid.
The two points in a boy's training are, to keep his nature and train off all but that: --to keep his nature, but stop off his uproar, fooling and horseplay; --keep his nature and arm it with knowledge in the very direction in which it points. 28

The boy would retain his qualities of youth but without his foolish behavior. He would keep his original nature, but would supplement it with knowledge, a knowledge that guides him only in the direction he has already been pointed by his individual nature.

The natural instinct, the sensual awareness of material objects, and the perceptive intelligence that the mind has appear in man's mental development as well as his social development, and these aspects of the mind also determine the powers and laws of the mind. An understanding of this theory of the mind introduces the next step in Emerson's theory of education: the sources of learning available to the mind.

28 Ibid., p. 144.
CHAPTER III

SOURCES OF LEARNING

Emerson's theory of learning assumes the relative equality of all men in the possession of an innate intelligence. His statements on the laws of the mind, as has been seen, make clear his theory that all men are given intellects but that the development of that potentiality lies with the individual. The "Man Thinking," a term which refers to the man who has developed his intellect to its fullest powers, is the goal Emerson wants each individual to strive for; the possibility of attainment is available to all men, but there are few who will take more than their first step in reaching this goal. The laborer thinks of himself as only a means of gaining a living and not as "Man Thinking." He has not learned to rise above the circumstances of daily living that tend to stifle the growth of his mind. The accountant does not think beyond his records, the doctor beyond his instruments, the teacher beyond his books. All men are in danger of limiting their development to the level of the "savage" man or of aspiring no higher than the level of the "civilized" man. The limitations are self-imposed, however, and can be removed by recognizing the potential of the intellect and the free sources of learning. The availability of these sources to all men upholds the idea of the "democracy of

1 "American Scholar," Works, I, 84.
The first and the most profound source of learning for the mind is nature. The mind can learn, first, by viewing nature. The young mind accepts all objects in nature as being separate and individual. A tree is just a tree, a fruit is food, a blossom is a flower. As the mind develops through more experiences with nature, the youth perceives that the tree, blossom, and fruit are really one unity in nature. His mind continues to join two things and see in them one nature; then three, then three thousand; and so, tyrannized over by its own unifying instinct, it goes on tying things together, diminishing anomalies, discovering roots running under ground whereby contrary and remote things cohere and flower out from one stem. It presently learns that since the dawn of history there has been a constant accumulation and classifying of facts.

As the young mind observes nature further, it finds that the cycles therein have no beginning and no end. The youth observes the tree, blossom, and fruit; the tree bears the blossom, the blossom becomes the fruit, and the fruit completes the cycle when it returns its seeds to the ground to become another tree. Nature's power is a circular one that always seems to return to itself:

The scholar is he of all men whom this spectacle most engages. He must settle its values in his mind. What is nature to him? There is never a beginning, there is never an end, to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself. Therein it resembles his own spirit whose beginning, whose ending, he can never find, - so entire, so boundless.

3 Ibid.
The cycle found in nature suggests Emerson's theory of the organic growth of the conscious mind. In nature there is the seed which contains life, the roots which nourish life, the plant which transfers life, the fruit which receives life in the form of the seed which lies dormant until separated from the fruit and returned to the earth where it develops roots and begins nature's cycle once more. In the mind, the instinct is innate in man and begins the growth cycle of the conscious mind. The senses supply the instinct with nourishment from the natural world in the scenes, experiences, sounds, smells which serve as "food" for thought. Thought converts these sensual impressions into unconscious products, but "...thought exists to be expressed. That which cannot externalize itself is not thought." Thought is of importance only when it gives life to some creative work. The products of the mind's growth are its creative works in the fields of art, music, literature, and science. The creative works complete the cycle when they serve the sensual mind of another man as material for thought. What is perceived in nature—unity and diversity, and the cycle of organic growth—is a physical symbol of what is taking place within the mind.

The law of nature is two-fold: there must be death so that there can be life, and all things, by necessity, have order and unity. The mind also has a law that demands order and unity in its thoughts. "There is in Nature a parallel unity which corresponds to the unity in the mind and makes it available." The organization of nature does not appear to the

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mind until the mind determines the unity in it; similarly, the scattered impressions that fill the mind do not generate into ideas, thoughts, or knowledge until a relation is established among them and a unity is formed from them. In making an analogy between nature and the mind, Emerson states that the governing force of nature is the law of gravity that holds all objects in their course. If the law of gravity were broken, confusion would result. The corresponding law in the mind is truth (intellectual integrity), which directs the organization of the various impressions. If the law of truth is not adhered to, the consequences will also be confusion, this time in the order of the mind. With truth acting as the governing force, the thoughts are collected into related categories and given order. When man allows the natural law to work and establish order in his mind, then he is prepared to turn the most confusing phenomenon into a working principle.

The astronomer discovers that geometry, a pure abstraction of the human mind, is the measure of planetary motion. The chemist finds proportions and intelligible method throughout matter; and science is nothing but the finding of analogy, identity, in the most remote parts. The ambitious soul sets down each refractory fact; one after another reduces all strange constitutions, all new powers, to their class and their law, and goes on forever to animate the last fiber of organization, the outskirts of nature, by insight.

Emerson finds a purpose in the design of man's dependency on nature.

The purpose is to acquaint man with nature so that he can learn from the objects that he has become familiar with. When evaluating the sensual

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appreciation of nature as a source of learning, Emerson rates it as a "... benefit which is temporary and mediate, not ultimate, like its service to the soul. Yet although low, it is perfect in its kind, and is the only use of nature which all men apprehend." Man's dependency on nature is seen in his need for light, rain, food, shelter, clothing. "Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn serve him. The field is at once his floor, his work-yard, his play-ground, his garden, and his bed." Nature not only helps man by providing him material to work with, it also helps him in the process of its own cycles:

The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man.\(^7\)

The material benefits derived from nature should not be an end in themselves but should lead man on to a better end, for "A man is fed, not that he may be fed, but that he may work."\(^8\) The real purpose of the world, as Emerson sees it, is to teach man its laws. Humanity signifies its acceptance of nature's purpose when it makes wealth its means and man its end. This is Emerson's plea - to recognize that nature's final purpose is not only to satisfy man's material needs but to

\(^{7\text{"Nature," Works, I, 12.}}\) \(^{8\text{Ibid., p. 13.}}\) \(^{9\text{Ibid.}}\) \(^{10\text{Ibid., p. 14.}}\)
teach him to observe her laws and use them as a means to develop his full potential - to be "Man Thinking," - for the man who perceives and submits to the real purpose of nature avails himself of additional powers:

If a man know the laws of Nature better than other men, his nation cannot spare him; nor if he know the power of numbers, the secret of geometry, of algebra; on which the computation of astronomy, of navigation, of machinery rest. If he can converse better than any other, he rules the minds of men wherever he goes; if he has imagination, he intoxicates men . . . .

Emerson feels too that all progress made by man in the civilized world is due to what he has learned from natural science:

The benefits thence derived to the arts and to civilization are single and immense. They are felt in navigation, in agriculture, in manufactures, in astronomy, in mining and in war. But over all their utilities, I must hold their chief value to be metaphysical. The chief value is not the useful powers he obtained, but the test it has been of the scholar. He has accosted this immeasurable Nature, and got clear answers. He understood what he read. He found agreement with himself. It taught him anew the reach of the human mind, and that it was the citizen of the universe.

Thus man gains in the field of science when he learns from nature as "civilized man"; he gains in the spiritual field when he learns from it as "Man Thinking." Although there are material advantages derived from nature, its real lessons are the ones that teach man to examine the mechanism of his own mind, to develop the power of his own intellect, and to know himself.


12Ibid., pp. 220-221. (Italics mine.)
Man learns much from the beauty of nature as well as from its laws. Emerson states that there are three aspects of nature's beauty which are important in the education of man. The first is the perception of spaciousness and splendor of nature's beauty that refreshes and calms the tired and troubled man: "The health of the eye seems to demand a horizon. We are never tired, so long as we can see far enough."\(^{13}\) Man's physical body also requires the healing power of nature's beauty:

The man who stands on the seashore, or who rambles in the woods, seems to be the first man that ever stood on the shore, or entered a grove, his sensations and his world are so novel and strange . . . . That is morning, to cease for a bright hour to be a prisoner of this sickly body, and to become as large as nature.\(^{14}\)

The noon day darkness of the American forest has many wonders waiting for the man who comes, forgets himself, and absorbs nature's lessons:

... this beauty, - haggard and desert beauty, which the sun and the moon, the snow and the rain, repaint and vary, has never been recorded by art, yet is not indifferent to any passenger. All men are poets at heart. They serve nature for bread, but her loveliness overcomes them sometimes.\(^{15}\)

A second aspect of the beauty of nature that serves as a source for learning, says Emerson, is its spiritual value that finds a likeness in

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\(^{13}\)"Nature," Works, I, 16.


\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 169.
the heroic works of the human will: "Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue. Every natural action is graceful. Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine." If a deed is virtuous and honorable, the action of that deed is as graceful as nature’s actions and carries with it the air of spiritual worth that nature’s beauty possesses.

The third source of learning in nature’s beauty is the relation it has with thought: "The beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation." Natural beauty produces thought in the mind, and the creative genius transforms the thought into art. When man attempts to copy or reproduce the beauty he sees, he produces a work of art which "... is the result or expression of nature, in miniature." The lessons man can learn from nature’s beauty are freely his by inalienable right, for:

Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will. He may divest himself of it; he may creep into a corner, and abdicate his kingdom, as most men do, but he is entitled to the world by his constitution. In proportion to the energy of his thought and will, he takes up the world into himself.

Nature not only gives man material wealth, laws, and beauty, but also provides man a pattern to follow in setting up a school. The pattern for the elementary school is seen, Emerson feels, in the mother-child relation. The idea of a school is furnished to man by nature’s

17 Ibid.  
18 Ibid., p. 23.  
19 Ibid.  
20 Ibid., p. 20.
own design of a mother's care for her child, and man need only to copy the example furnished by Nature. The child is eager to hear, see, do new things; and the mother is eager to teach. The mother has more experience and therefore knows what the child needs. The natural college also follows the pattern established by nature. Young men with a real desire to learn gather themselves around the natural teacher who is ready to teach them.

So it is that Emerson looks beyond the conventional school room for a source of learning and finds a far richer source in nature. Nature's commodities give man something to work with. The laws of nature - unity, order, and growth - reflect similar laws of his mind. Nature's beauty refreshes man's spirit, motivates virtuous action and conduct, and inspires creation. Nature provides the natural pattern of the school in the mother-child relation. Man's education is incomplete; he is limited to the level of the "savage" man or at most the "civilized" man, until he learns, through nature, to know himself and to use nature as a means of achieving his true end - the full development of all his dormant but potential powers.

The second great influence on the scholar is the Mind of the Past, which is found in literature, art, or institutions; however, Emerson's belief is that the best recorded form of the thought of the past is books. To understand how books bring the mind of the past to present man and

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aid him as a source of learning, it is necessary to examine Emerson's theory of books. Though referred to in many of his writings, Emerson develops his theory of books most fully, perhaps, in "The American Scholar," a Phi Beta Kappa address, and in the lecture "Books."

According to his admittedly imaginary but plausible view, the "first scholar" of the universe observed and collected the facts of the world into his reflective intellect, brooded over them, assimilated them into his thinking, and recorded them as truths in books. "It came into him life; it went out from him truth. It came to him short-lived actions; it went out from him immortal thoughts. It came to him business; it went from him poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought."

In some such manner, the first scholar, the first man to become "Man Thinking," absorbed the products, laws, and beauties of nature into his thoughts and established truths from them. He recorded his truths in books for mankind to study and learn. All such books are developed the same way. It is from the study of nature that man discovers the truths he records. The depth that the natural fact is allowed to penetrate into the mind of the author measures the heights that it will soar to when it becomes an object of study for the minds of other men.

The good books are those that have been preserved for centuries, for time and men winnow out inferior works. The choice of books is

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23 Ibid., p. 88.
limited by talent; only a few men can write what many experience.

There is always a selection in writers, and then a selection from the selection. In the first place, all books that get fairly into the vital air of the world were written by the successful class, by the affirming and advancing class, who utter what tens of thousands feel though they cannot say. . . . It is therefore an economy of time to read old and famed books. Nothing can be preserved which is not good . . . .

In spite of the importance of books in the revelation of the Mind of the Past, Emerson reminds his readers that "... the best are but records, and not the things recorded." A book is another man's interpretation or representation of life; it is not life itself. Therefore, "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this." It is left to each generation to encourage its great minds to record their thoughts for the approaching generation.

Emerson further cautions readers to avoid some of the dangers found in reliance on books as a source of learning: "Books are the best of things well used; abused, among the worst." There is an air of sacredness that is attached to acts of creation, and books do not escape this association. The creative writer is considered divine, and it follows that his creation must also be divine. Thus, too often, authors are thought of as divine creators, and their books are accepted as

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25 Ibid., p. 189.  
27 Ibid., p. 89.
inspired utterances. As a result the books are worshipped, not studied and judged for their intended purpose. Young men are too eager to accept and make their own all the ideas that are found in the book of a man whom the world has called great. The young men assume that the greatness of the man makes the greatness of the book; they do not recall that the author penned his thoughts before he became great. Every man must have his theory of life, his religion, his philosophy. Each event in his life is to test his theories; each event gives rise to the possibility of a truth being discovered. The man who abandons his search and accepts another's theory of life has given his freedom away; "He has just foreclosed his freedom, tied his hands, locked himself up and given the key to another to keep." 28

What then is the correct use of books? It is only to inspire the reader, to enlighten his own thoughts. Each man is given an active intellect, and although few men actually use it, it is the one thing of value in the world. Therefore, let the books, the truths and thoughts of other men, inspire the mind, but not capture it. Otherwise, asserts Emerson, "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system." 29 Let each man read creatively; let him question, examine, and doubt all

28 "Education," Works, X, 133.

that he reads until he has found proof of those ideas in his own thinking
and experience. Let him read other men's works to discover new
ideas, but not to call them his own, to make them his own, until he
knows them to be his own. Reading has an important place in the
scheme of man's education, but it must not be out of proportion to
thinking, which is man's purpose. Books must be a means to his
thinking, not an end or even a hindrance: "Books are for the scholar's
idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to
be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings." 30 Man should
test and establish his thoughts by action, by experience, by living; he
can supplement them by reading that is done only when he is not gaining
first hand knowledge of life. 31

The high respect that is held for a man who is well read is a
great enough praise for the worth of literature, for "If we encountered
a man of rare intellect, we should ask him what books he read. We
expect a great man to be a good reader . . . ." 32

The third important source of learning is experience gained
through action. It is often believed that the scholar is a man of thought
but never a man of action, that he spends his time in reclusion producing
only thoughts which never take form outside his mind. Emerson feels

30 Ibid., p. 91. 31 Ibid., pp. 87-94.
32 "Quotation and Originality," Works, VIII, 178.
that although it is true that action is subordinate to thought with the scholar, it is still essential. Action and experience are the means whereby the mind is replenished with material for thoughts. The mind is able to know only as much as it has lived; what it has not experienced, it cannot know and cannot call its own. Experience furnishes nourishment for the mind, and experience is gained only through action. Thoughts are born in action, and they must return there for strength. Without action, the scholar's thoughts would be of no value, for they would not have a container to carry them to the next generation. Action is the means whereby thoughts move from the unconscious to the conscious. In the necessity of their being expressed, thoughts are similar to light which is important only when it falls on some material object and illuminates that object in the sight of men. Thoughts are important only when they too are made apparent to men in a material form, such as a book, poem, painting, or character.

Experiences gained during childhood are stored up and held in unconscious bondage until the moment calls them forth as thoughts, and then action creates them into objects for transferring to other minds. The more that the mind lives and experiences, the more material there is stored in the mind to use at the time of inspiration. Emerson

illustrates the dependency of thought on action when he says, "Authors we have, in numbers, who have written out their vein, and who, moved by a commendable prudence, sail for Greece or Palestine, follow the trapper into the prairie, or ramble round Algiers, to replenish their merchantable stock." 34 Besides giving him material for thought, action should be coveted by the scholar for the vocabulary that it furnishes him: "Life is our dictionary . . . I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech." 35 The artist thinks and then creates; when the artist has exhausted his sources, when he has no more imagination, when thoughts no longer come to him, then he should turn to the resources of living.

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Of all the resources of action and experience, the home is the first and most important material influence on the young mind. The home is the first to teach the mind the relations in life - of health to sickness, life to death, safety to injury, goodness to evil, riches to poverty - for "The household is a school of power. There, within the door, learn the tragic-comedy of human life." 37 The instinct of the new-born mind requires something that represents stability to it. The mother is the first symbol of this stability; she is the first to offer the child love,

security, and trust. He transfers this relation to the material objects around him, such as the bed, chair, and table. As his mind develops and his body matures, the child realizes that he can part from these objects and yet remain whole in himself. The home has given him confidence in himself, and he has a foundation on which to build his acceptance of the world. The household teaches the primary laws to the child: laws of love, laws of humanity, and laws of economy. He learns from these laws that he must give as well as receive in life.

Young boys also get their education on the playgrounds and in the streets. It is on the playground that they train and exercise their bodies. Emerson believes that to train a child, his natural spirit must be retained, but his foolishness must be released. The playground is the classroom where the foolishness of the young mind is released, and the laws of the household are exercised and tested outside the home, for here youths learn to play together in harmony. They learn to give and take in their association with each other. It is on the playground that the individual boy learns the wealth of having friends and the joy of being one.

Inspiration, the key that opens the door to thoughts, is the fourth major source of learning for the scholar. It is Emerson's theory that

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38 Ibid., pp. 128-129.
39 Ibid., pp. 139-141.
the inspiration must be conditioned for use, that there is more to the workings of inspiration than filling the mind with images and thrusting them out as thought and actions. Health is the first prerequisite for achieving inspiration. The mind is a part of the body, and the body must be cared for. It is as necessary for the scholar to exercise his body as it is for him to exercise his mind. Sleep is that condition which refreshes health. A man can spend his energy in study and not be able to bring forth one new idea, but sleep refreshes his mind for better inspiration. There must also be harmony between the mind and the body. The body that is well nourished more quickly responds to the needs of the mind than does the body that lacks nourishment. All the particulars of health - exercise, sleep, and nourishment - are necessary for the inspiration of the mind.

The natural world is a favorable condition for inspiration. The mood of the mind is susceptible to influence by the temperament of the weather, so that natural conditions can often encourage the inspiration of the mind. The more concrete aspects of nature also inspire the mind: the solitude of the forest, the calmness of the lake, the reaction of nature to a breeze. The solitude found in nature teaches man the benefits to be derived from the solitude of his mind; man can work better away from familiar objects that distract his attention. The serenity of nature has an organizing effect on his thoughts that invites inspiration.

Still another source of inspiration is found in society. Conversation is a game played by minds, often bringing the victory to both the winner and the loser. Conversation draws a man's thoughts out of him; it gives form to ideas that were once just reflections within his mind. It allows ideas to be detached from the mind and viewed as something new, "For, in discourse with a friend, our thought, hitherto wrapped in our consciousness, detaches itself, and allows itself to be seen as a thought, in a manner as new and entertaining to us as to our companions." 42

The four major sources of learning that Emerson advocates for the education of man - nature, the past, experience, and inspiration - are available, free of any cost except the individual energy necessary to obtain them, to all men. As has been seen, the most important and the most abundant source is nature. The benefit that most men gain from nature is the use of her commodities in providing for daily necessities: heat, food, shelter, and clothing. If this is the limit that nature is used, the result in humanity is no better than the "civilized" man. However, when man perceives that nature's laws of growth, beauty, order and unity reflect the laws of his own mind, he discovers a tool that enables him to awaken his dormant powers. Once such a tool has been acquired, he can more readily avail himself of the thought and experience of the past, transmitted through books, and of the thought and experience of the present, gained through action, to transform his

42 Ibid., p. 292.
"potential" self into the fully realized creative thinker. Still a fourth element is required, however, for this transformation to be complete—inspiration, the intuitive perception of truth behind the appearances of nature. And so the cycle is complete, and the "revolution" of thought is accelerated.

Emerson's theory of learning is advanced beyond that of his time because of his awareness that the total child needs education. Not only the child's mind needs training, but his body as well. Emerson is conscious of the needs of the total child possibly because of personal experiences in his own life. He was not a rapid learner due to his ill health, nor did he always read the books and lessons assigned. He allowed his interest to guide his reading, for he believed one should "... never read any [books] but what you like; or, in Shakespeare's phrase, -

"No profit goes where is not pleasure ta'en: In brief, sir, study what you most affect." 43

Also as a child, Emerson was often left alone, and nature interrupted his formal course of study with its lessons. He recognized the value of such an education as he received and expanded a theory of learning from it. He saw a child's surroundings, the natural world with its laws and beauties, the influence of the past, personal experiences, the home, streets and the playground where he grew up as more than passive

influences on the child; he saw them as having an active value in the total education of the child. The child learns something of value from all these influences.

So far, in the analysis of Emerson's theory of learning, it has been seen how the mind works according to certain laws of the mind, and what materials of thought it works upon. Considered next are Emerson's views on the ways that the mind learns as well as instructs.
CHAPTER IV

THE METHOD OF LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

In discussing Emerson's theory of learning, two tenets have been mentioned: the laws of the mind and the sources of learning. Emerson stresses the necessity of one's relying on nature to understand the laws of the mind. In "The Natural History of the Intellect," he says, "... I await the insight which our advancing knowledge of material laws shall furnish." 1 Of the four major sources of learning that he treats in his theory of learning, he makes nature--its commodities, laws, and beauty--the most profound source.

Emerson's theory of education includes a method of learning that is also dependent upon nature. The principal method of learning that reappears throughout Emerson's works is to study nature. This statement is supported by his many references to nature's part in the education of man. Emerson asserts that nature is a convenient standard wherein man finds the laws and force of his mind reflected and measured; it gives him knowledge and power when it draws out his thought and converts it into action; it also gives him examples and principles for his works in science, art, music, and literature. Emerson states that the

education of man is a "... function of opening and feeding the human mind [which] is not to be trusted to any skill less large than Nature itself."

Though Emerson's fundamental method of learning is to study, understand, and employ nature's lessons, three elements compose his method: individual genius of the mind, personal observation and experience, and necessity of drill.

In the discussion of Emerson's laws governing the mind, the individuality of the mind was cited as a fundamental principle in learning. Emerson opposes the tendency of age - parents and teachers - to direct the education of youth down paths that have been established by long tradition. He terms it a "low self-love" in parents that causes them to make their children carbon copies of themselves, for the peculiar purpose given each mind determines its individuality and reason for being. There is a specific need for each mind in life; it might be to teach, write, sing, paint, farm, preach, or manufacture, but each mind has a job to do, and it should be allowed to do it and not repeat the necessity answered by another mind. Emerson expresses his disapproval of traditional education in the words: "I suffer whenever I see that common sight of a parent or senior imposing his opinion and way of thinking and being on a young soul to which they are totally unfit."

\[ ^2 \text{"Education," Works, X, 148.} \quad \text{\cite{footnote:2}} \quad \text{\cite{footnote:3}} \]
The educators who teach conformity to youth rather than the fulfillment of individuality are guilty of concealing and even destroying the natural ability and the separate identity of the child.

Therefore, Emerson is opposed to an education that is no broader than tradition allows it to be. The curriculum that is established by tradition does not make allowances for the individuality of the mind nor for the value of individual experiences. It forces the child to accept preformed ideas without permitting him to prove them for himself. But, Emerson asserts, "There is a better way than this indolent learning of another. Leave me alone; do not teach me out of Leibnitz or Schnelling, and I shall find it all out myself." He believes that the child should be allowed to select his own books to read, people to meet, and places to go. He wants each child to learn what is best for him and not what is best for someone else, and thus to respect the individuality of his mind.

Emerson sees a direct relation between the individuality of the mind and the natural method of learning: "Nature, when she sends a new mind into the world, fills it beforehand with a desire for that which she wishes it to know and do." Therefore, Emerson urges that strict adherence to traditional subjects be relaxed in favor of the subjects that the individuality of the mind inclines toward. Because each mind serves

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a particular purpose in life, Emerson asks that educators allow the mind to select its own method of learning through nature. He insists that each mind learns according to its individuality, and that only when this principle of learning is recognized and employed can the fullest advantage be taken of learning powers. Emerson notes in his journal that in order for one to use the full power of his mind, "It must be by and through . . . individualism. Opinions are organic. Everyman who stamps his personality on his life is great and free." He further states that each man, through his individual nature, brings a new power to the world. All men are given the same resources to develop their power - nature, past, experience, and inspiration - yet each man must find (and he must be allowed to find) his own method of working with these resources. In the essay, "The Natural History of the Intellect," Emerson defines more fully the power found in the individuality of the mind:

Each man is a new power in Nature. He holds the keys of the world in his hands . . . .

But he enters the world by one key. Herein is the wealth of each. His equipment, though new, is complete; his prudence is his own; his courage, his charity are his own. He has his own defences and his own fangs; his perception and his own mode of reply to sophistries. Whilst he draws on his own he cannot be over shadowed or supplanted. 

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7 Journals, IX, 177.
One's genius, Emerson states, is responsible for the individuality of the mind. This genius is distinguished from the constructive genius, mentioned in the second chapter, by being designated the inspiring genius. It is what he calls the "naturel" of a mind, the single purpose that is given to it and to no other. Emerson believes that the inspiring genius of a youth causes him to perceive something yet unseen by others in music, art, mathematics, or science; it causes him to look for something which is not present in his immediate surroundings and to leave his home and his town for the answer that he seeks. The personal genius of each youth, if not hampered by tradition, finds its own courses of study in books, people, and experiences. Emerson finds this inspiring genius a blessing to the child: "Happy this child with a bias, with a thought which entrances him, leads him, now into the deserts, now into the cities, the fool of an idea."

Emerson therefore feels that the individuality of each intellect prevents another from judging accurately the manner in which one learns or even the amount that he learns. One cannot conclude, Emerson says, that because someone is a porter or a cook he cannot have the thought or intellectual experiences of a nobler man.

The walls of rude minds are scrawled all over with facts, with thoughts. They shall one day bring a lantern and read the inscriptions. Every man, in the degree in which he has wit and culture, finds his curiosity inflamed concerning the modes of living and thinking of other men, and especially of those classes whose minds have not been subdued by the drill of school education.

Because of the individuality of the mind, Emerson finds it is wrong for one man to claim to be wiser than another. "There are two mischievous superstitions, I know not which does the most harm, one, that 'I am wiser than you,' and the other that 'You are wiser than I.'" The man who recognizes this independence of the mind is not hampered in his own thinking by comparing his to some other man's intellectual ability, but he finds the power of his mind by using the method of learning that is best for him.

The second element of Emerson's method of learning is individual experience and observation. He asserts that any experience, whether fortunate or unfortunate, is a means to learning: "Whatever private or petty ends are frustrated, this end is always answered. Whatever the man does, or whatever befalls him opens another chamber in his soul, that is, he has got a new feeling, a new thought, a new organ." Emerson believes that each man has unnumbered experiences that he does not usually consider of value in his education. But every moment that a

man with a healthy mind lives, some impression is being made on him. Such experiences stored by the unconscious as well as the conscious mind supply the mind with "... material enough ... to exhaust the sagacity of Newton in working it out." 13

Emerson sees natural experience of man as an invaluable education, for it is that which a man's individuality leads him to; it is one which is encountered by the person with a "bias" in life, that which is not planned but happens in the course of the mind's pursuit of its purpose in life. As a statement of Emerson quoted earlier in the third chapter points out, to have more knowledge, one must have experience: "Only so much do I know, as I have lived." 14 It is only what a man has experienced for himself that he knows to be true. Therefore, in education, living is more important to Emerson than reading, for what one can prove for himself is of more value to him than what he finds another has proven.

In the essay, "Education," Emerson illustrates various ways in which young boys gain valuable experience though they are unaware, at the time, that they are being educated: their lives follow their interest whether it is to the shops, factories, mobs, police stations, fire-companies, or courthouses. Of these youthful experiences Emerson says,

How we envy in late life the happy youths to whom their boisterous games and rough exercise furnish the precise element which frames and sets off their school and college tasks, and teaches them, when least they think it, the use and meaning of these.\textsuperscript{15}

To illustrate the value of personal experience in a formal education, Emerson pictures the "young giant, brown from his hunting-tramp," who recites the narrative of an assigned reading to his class. The student adds to his story references to "Homer, to Virgil, to college-songs, to Walter Scott; and Jove and Achilles, Partridge and trout, opera and binomial theorem, Caesar in Gaul, Sherman in Savannah, and hazing in Holworthy..."\textsuperscript{16} Confusing though his tale may be, the young man has a broader view of his subject as a result of his personal experience. Emerson therefore maintains in his theory of learning that experience is complementary to reading, for it brings to life the adventures of other men.

Emerson stresses the importance of drill as the third element of his method of learning. He finds that physical drill as well as mental drill is necessary as a condition for learning. Frequently in his essays Emerson states that schools are failing to train the body of the child as they train the mind of the child. He wishes for students to work physically and to enjoy physical work, for it serves as a condition for health. A youth is not complete if he cannot defend himself in physical combat

\textsuperscript{15} "Education," \textit{Works}, X, 139-140.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 140.
as well as he can in mental combat. "I wish the youth to be an armed and complete man; no helpless angel to be slapped in the face, but a man dipped in the Styx of human experience, and made invulnerable so."

Just as the physical body requires rigorous conditioning exercises in order to perform physical feats, the mind must be subjected to difficult mental exercises to develop its ability to produce thoughts. In "Education," Emerson suggests that students be drilled to say exactly what they think, to be able to define, describe, contrast, and compare objects in precise terms. He wants them to learn arithmetic because it involves exact performance to master multiplication tables, logarithms, geometric theorems, and differential equations. Through mental drill, the students secure the power to learn; it is not the knowledge that they gain that is important, but the power to perform the mental feats that is important. The students discover the tools of their mind and become proficient in using them in order to employ them in more profound areas of thought. Emerson insists that

Accuracy is essential to beauty . . . . Give a boy accurate perceptions. Teach him the difference between the similar and the same. Make him call things by their right names. Pardon him in no blunder. Then he will give you solid satisfaction as long as he lives.

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Emerson finds that health is a condition essential to effective drill. Perhaps because of the illness that afflicted his own life, Emerson stresses the importance of health, both physical and mental, in learning. He knows that a sound body is the foundation for all activity; the better health that one has, the better work he is able to produce. The lack of health in the physical body is the beginning of adversities, for when the body is drugged with apathy, the perception and power of the mind are limited. Emerson also states that mental health plays an important role in one's learning abilities: "The measure of mental health is the disposition to find good everywhere, good and order. . . ." 19 The better one's mental health is, the brighter is his view of life and consequently the more benefit he is to his fellowmen. Good health is also necessary for an active memory. The healthier the mind is, the more facts the memory is able to retain.

Just as health increases the capacity of the memory, drill exercises its ability. Emerson states that memory is necessary to the mind's education because it ties past facts to present experiences and gives cohesion and strength to knowledge. When memory is properly exercised through mathematical and grammatical drill, it is conditioned to receive more profound thoughts than it received before its drill.

Emerson maintains that with every profound thought that the memory retains, the activity of the mind increases. The active memory is important in learning because it serves as mental capital for producing thoughts:

Opportunities of investment are useful only to those who have capital. Any piece of knowledge I acquire today, a fact that falls under my eyes, a book I read, a piece of news I hear, has a value at this moment exactly proportional to my skill to deal with it. To-morrow, when I know more, I recall that piece of knowledge and use it better. 21

Thus in the study of Emerson's theory of learning, he specifies, in his essays, a method of learning that is constructed upon principles found in nature. The natural world respects the individual genius of a child and encourages it to pursue and fulfill the peculiar purpose given it, for the natural world makes possible the individual experiences that provide first hand observations of truths for the inquiring mind. The physical examples of drill found in nature suggest the necessity of mental drill for the well-trained mind. Therefore, individual genius, personal experience and observation, and drill are the basic elements of Emerson's method of learning.

The thoroughness of Emerson's educational theory is evidenced by his inclusion of conditions essential for effective instruction. The cornerstone of Emerson's theory of instruction is the respect necessary for the individual nature of the student, an idea that appears paramount also in his theory of learning. But there are three other basic qualifications

of a good instructor: interest in humanity, capability in his field of instruction, and abundance of patience. Emerson suggests also three methods of instruction: to teach by doing, to teach by appealing to imagination, and to teach by quoting. Finally, in his theory of instruction, Emerson is concerned with the discipline of the child.

The primary factor that Emerson finds relative to adequate instruction of students, and what he terms the secret of education, is showing respect for the individuality of the pupil. In doing so, Emerson believes, the good instructor allows the pupil to select what he wishes to study. Therefore, the subject matter taught is in accord with the interest of the student and not the instructor. Again it is evident that Emerson wishes the personal purpose of each child to be answered through his education, rather than the adherence to traditional courses. Emerson advocates that the individual nature of each child should be considered in the school program. Thus he wishes to remove all traditional material that hinders rather than encourages the education of the child.

Is it not manifest that our academic institutions should have a wider scope; that they should not be timid and keep the ruts of the last generation, but that wise men thinking for themselves and heartily seeking the good of mankind, and counting the cost of innovation, should dare to arouse the young to a just and heroic life; that the moral nature should be addressed in the school-room, and children should be treated as the high-born candidates of truth and virtue?²²

The plea that Emerson makes for the proper respect of the moral nature of students is summed up in a statement in the essay "Education": "Nature loves analogies, but not repetitions. Respect the child." He asks that parents and teachers try to make students not into imitators but originators.

The natural setting for learning that Emerson describes is a teacher who knows and loves his material, surrounded by a group of students who are filled with a curiosity to know what the teacher can tell them. "One burns to tell the new fact, the other burns to hear it." The natural college is the fortunate one where young men with a desire to learn group themselves around the natural teacher who is ready to teach. Such teachers, Emerson says, were Socrates, Plotinus, Abelard, Fichte, Niebuhr, and Goethe.

Emerson records in his journal that "God's greatest gift is a Teacher..." He considers teaching a worthy and honorable profession, yet he limits the numbers of persons who can claim this worthiness by qualifying the characteristics of a good teacher. He finds that there are two types of teachers: those interested in human life, and those interested in thoughts. Those interested in humanity

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 149.}\]

\[\text{Journals, III, 101.}\]
are admirable, whereas those interested in thoughts are pedantic. Therefore, the first qualification that Emerson finds necessary for a teacher is an interest in humanity. In order to clarify the meaning of the first characteristic, Emerson suggests a means of selecting the best qualified college teacher. The candidates for the job should be placed on a street corner among a group of idle boys. "He who could get the ear of these youths after a certain number of hours, or of the greatest number of these youths, should be professor. Let him see if he could interest these rowdy boys in the meaning of a list of words." The first type of teacher he describes, the pedantic one, would fail to gain the attention of the group. However, the teacher whose interest lies in humanity rather than knowledge would be attracted to the situation by the personalities of the boys and be equally as curious to discover their individual natures as they would be to discover his. When he gains their respect as an individual, he will have their respect as a teacher.

A second qualification for a teacher is to be an expert in his field. Emerson believes that "a college is a society of experts - of men selected for their skill each in one department of art." Emerson states that it is a fact that no man can teach more than he himself knows;

27 Journals, IV, 457-458.
28 Journals, VII, 224.
therefore, the teacher should first not only become acquainted with the books that are the treasures of his field, he must also, "... eat and digest these books. . . ." The students recognize a teacher who is superior to them and yet who desires to impart his knowledge to them, and they respect him. 31

The third and most important qualification that Emerson finds necessary for a teacher is patience. He compares the extent of patience a teacher must have to the reformer whose "'patience could see in the bud of the aloe the blossom at the end of a hundred years.'" 32 Yet the mass education that the teacher must cope with works against the good intentions of even the best teachers. As a result, Emerson finds, teachers are quick to recognize the sensual vices of the children: they read slowly, they speak loudly; they write poorly. Because of the large number of students and the lack of time, the teachers rely on corporal punishment to teach and too often become machines. Emerson


32 "Education," Works, X, 152.
sees that the role of a teacher

... involves at once immense claims on the time, the thoughts, the life of the teacher. It requires time, use, insight, event, all the great lessons and assistances of God; and only to think of using it implies character and profoundness; to enter on this course of discipline is to be good and great.  

Emerson finds the correction for this situation in nature, whose secret is patience. Emerson compares the teacher to the naturalist who desires to discover nature's intimate life. He cannot rush out to the woods, dash up to the lakes, and command nature to let him learn its ways and understand its mind. He must sit quietly for hours, wait patiently, become a part of the scene, allow nature's creatures to accept him; then he will be able to discover nature's way. Emerson asks the teacher,

Can you not baffle the impatience and passion of the child by your tranquillity? ... Can you not keep for his mind and way, for his secret, the same curiosity you give a squirrel ... He has a secret, wonderful methods in him; he is, - every child, - a new style of man; give him time and opportunity.

Emerson gives several suggested methods that the wise teacher employs in instructing. The first is to teach by doing. "The man may teach by doing, and not otherwise. If he can communicate himself he can teach, but not by words. He teaches who gives, and he learns who receives."  

A man cannot teach composition unless he can write; he

33 Ibid., p. 154.
34 Ibid., p. 156.
cannot teach art unless he can paint; he cannot teach oration unless he can speak.

The second method of teaching is by appealing to the imagination of the pupils. Emerson suggests that the period following the days of youth, the young adulthood of the student, is the time most suitable for encouraging the imagination. The young adult is acquainted with many marvels of life, yet his acquaintance is not so great that he is tarnished and disillusioned. He has numerous dreams and plans for an ideal world. The wise teacher capitalizes on the imagination of the youth and directs him to study greater literary adventures, artistic achievements, or scientific advances. He also gives the student encouragement to create his dreams and to be constructive. Emerson states that the imagination is fed on the power of beauty, books, and poetry, all of which are part of the student's experiences; and that there is benefit found in

...good poetry in all kind, epic, tragedy, lyric. If we can touch the imagination, we serve them, they will never forget it. Let him read Tom Brown at Rugby, read Tom Brown at Oxford, - better yet, read Hodson's life - Hodson who took 36 prisoner the king of Delhi. They all teach the same truth..."

A third method of teaching that Emerson suggests is quoting passages of great literature to students to inspire them to read the material. The teacher who is well informed and who has a broad reading background arouses the interest and curiosity of the students by frequent quotation from works that supplement the subject studied. The good

36 "Education," Works, X, 143.
teacher also shows an avid interest in and respect for the works he teaches. If he effectively reads and quotes passages for his students, he transfers his enthusiasm for learning to them. Emerson asks,

Would you inspire in a young man a taste for Chaucer and Bacon? Quote them to him. . . . It is a law of Wit that whose can make a good sentence can make a good book. And to read a sentence of Hooker or Bacon is like offering a lump of gold as specimen of a mine or an apple to denote the quality of the tree; which would be right.\(^\text{37}\)

In discussing his theory of instruction, Emerson does not omit the problem of discipline. He suggested earlier that the primary factor of instruction is to respect the child and allow him to select his own subject matter; but he does not imply that the teacher should submit to every desire of the child. He advises the teacher to "respect the child, respect him to the end, but also respect yourself. Be the companion of his thought, the friend of his friendship, the lover of his virtue, --but no kinsman of his sin."\(^\text{38}\) In the matter of discipline as well as instructing, Emerson admonishes the teacher to teach by doing:

Have the self-command you wish to inspire. Your teaching and discipline must have the reserve and taciturnity of Nature. Teach them to hold their tongues by holding your own. Say little; do not snarl; do not chide; but govern by the eye. See what they need; and that the right thing is done.\(^\text{39}\)

\(^\text{37}\)"On the Best Modes of Inspiring Taste for English Literature," The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I, 214.

\(^\text{38}\)"Education," Works, X, 144.

\(^\text{39}\)Ibid., p. 156.
Through examination of Emerson's theory of instruction, it is found that the secret to good instruction is proper respect for the student. The instructor himself is a man who loves humanity; who knows well what he teaches others; and who has the patience necessary to wait while his students reveal their individual interests and desires to him. The good instructor teaches by doing well what he wants his students to do, by utilizing their imagination, by turning their dreams into constructive work, and by supplementing their lessons with interesting quotations.
CHAPTER V

THE DUTY AND REWARD OF THE SCHOLAR

The portions of Emerson's theory of learning presented in the previous chapters - the laws of the mind, the sources of learning, and the method of learning and instruction - culminate in his view of the scholar. Emerson's concept of a scholar is that of a man who both understands and uses the laws of his mind to the fullest learning advantage; he recognizes the sources of learning and respects their influence on him; he uses nature's method of learning to his greatest benefit through his unique personality. Primary sources used to determine Emerson's theory of the scholar are "Nature," "The Man of Letters," "Literary Ethics," and "The Scholar." However, the principal source of Emerson's theory of the scholar is his Phi Beta Kappa address, "The American Scholar."

To understand how the scholar exemplifies Emerson's theory of learning, it is necessary to understand his view of life, which he explains by reference to an old fable regarding the division of one Man into men. Emerson believes that even though society is diversified, it forms a unit. To clarify his idea, he uses the term Man to represent that unity. Therefore total Man stands for all men working together for
one purpose. Again referring to the fable, he states that the one Man was divided into many men, each having a certain function to perform: farmer, doctor, teacher, priest, lawyer, merchant. All the powers of total Man are latent in all men, but each man is most active with his own power. Therefore all men have the power to teach, preach, or sell, but they are more proficient in one activity. In the course of performing their particular duties, men forget that they are Man Farming, Man Teaching, or Man Preaching. Instead of considering themselves as part of the total Man, they become just farmers, teachers, priests, lawyers, or merchants and contribute nothing to the unity of total Man.

Emerson finds that the result of this division is weakness, for such an extensive diversity causes men to become too concerned with their immediate occupation and to find the end or the purpose of their life in their work. They fail to share other men's ideas and work, and thus they keep the one Man separated into many smaller and lesser men. The men who fail to broaden their view of life beyond their own business are placed in the status of the "civilized man," who was discussed in the second chapter. They make their work their end in life rather than Man. They find that their only benefit to society is through their single effort at their one occupation. They do not see the advantage of a society wherein each laborer at times embraces the labors of all other

1 "The American Scholar," Works, I, 82-84.
men. Emerson pictures the problem that results from too great diversity:

Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney a statute-book; the mechanic a machine; the sailor a rope of the ship.

In the division of Man, the farmer is given one purpose, the doctor another, the priest another; the scholar’s function in society is that of the "delegated intellect." In a society that neglects to develop the total Man, the scholar "... tends to become a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking." When he is a "mere thinker," he has enough thoughts and ideas to do great works, but he fails to use any action to produce those works. When he is the "parrot of other men's thinking," he imitates their ideas rather than originates his own. However, when he fulfills his duty of the delegated intellect to society, he becomes "Man Thinking." Emerson's use of the term defines the office of the scholar; he is to be the speculative intellect, to think for all society for the total Man. He is to observe, think, and create for Man; his extension of thought, therefore, affects nations.

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2 Ibid., pp. 83-84. 3 Ibid., p. 84. 4 Ibid. 5 "The American Scholar," Works, I, 83-84; also "Literary Ethics," Works, I, 154.
In determining the functions of the scholar in society, it is necessary to discuss the influences upon him, for he is responsible to all men for gaining the most possible good from these influences. The three major influences on the scholar are nature, the past, and action.

Nature is the most influential of these three. It is the most engaging because it is so evident in his life. The scholar sees his soul reflected in nature; that is, he sees that the endless cycle that engages nature's processes suggests the endlessness or the eternity of his soul. He also finds a correspondence between the laws of nature and the laws of his mind, and he studies the laws of nature in order to better understand the laws of his mind. The principles of science, art, and literature are revealed to him through nature. Emerson states that nature is such an important influence on the scholar that it

... becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess. And, in fine, the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept, "Study nature," become at last one maxim.

In brief, Emerson believes that the scholar knows only as much of himself as he knows of nature.

The second influence on the scholar is the Mind of the Past, which is recorded in books. Essential to the scholar's understanding and correct use of the past is his understanding of the universality of

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7 Ibid., pp. 84-87.
intellectual power. According to Emerson, the first scholar who recorded the truths of the world had no more intellectual power than the latest scholar of the present day. All of the inspiring modes that were present to the first scholar are still present and reveal the same truths that they did centuries ago. The fable of the One Man is a symbolic explanation of the identity of the mind. According to the fable, all men are a part of Man, and Man represents them as a unit. The identity of the mind is represented by Man. The total power of the one great mind lies latent in all men. These powers awaken to interpret the works of another man. Just as all men are part of One Man, all minds share identity; therefore every mind has the power to understand the works of another mind through its identity with that mind.

Emerson states that the scholar is

A divine pilgrim in nature, all things attend his steps. . . And so pass into his mind, in bright transfiguration, the grand events of history, to take a new order and scale from him. He is the world; and the epochs and heroes of chronology are pictorial images, in which his thoughts are told. There is no event but sprung somewhere from the soul of man; and therefore there is none but the soul of man can interpret.  

In the essay "The American Scholar," Emerson states that one of the most beneficial influences of the past is books. Yet the scholar must beware of submitting to the wrong influence of books. Often the

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8"Literary Ethics," Works, I, 158-159. (Italics mine.)
scholar accepts completely the words and ideas of another man and for-
sakes his own. In doing so, he becomes "a parrot of other men's
thinking," or, perhaps, of a single man's thinking, and refuses to
consider or examine any other idea. In his admiration for one man,
he confines his thoughts and limits the good that he can do as a scholar
and as "Man Thinking." He accepts another man's theory rather than
proves one of his own.

Emerson insists that the correct use of books is to inspire the
reader. If the scholar makes books an end in themselves, he forsakes
his own intellectual powers. Emerson finds that "The whole value of
history, of biography, is to increase . . . self-trust, by demonstrating
what man can be and do." Books are to suggest new ideas that the
scholar may follow, but they are not to dictate them. He must discover
truth through his own initiative. Books are only to inspire him, to re-
fresh his mind by presenting other men's ideas, and to stimulate his
thought.

The third major influence upon the scholar is that of personal
action and experience. The scholar's creative action is responsible for
converting his thought into works. The scholar, however, does not make
action an end in itself. As "Man Thinking" he uses action as a means of
revealing his thoughts to society. He has gathered facts from nature in
the past, and it is his action that transforms those facts into works that
make him a creative scholar.

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9 Ibid., p. 160.
Emerson finds another use of action for the scholar: action as experience. To perform his function as the designated intellect, the scholar must first experience a wide variety of life, for as Emerson says, "Only so much do I know, as I have lived." Experiential action gives the scholar the opportunity to discover and broaden his life.

Emerson again emphasizes the importance of action to the scholar when he states, "The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power. It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products." 11

Emerson compares the function of thought and action in the scholar to the process of undulation in nature, the inhaling and exhaling of air by the lungs, or the receiving and expulsion of blood by the heart. Thought is the material for action, yet the action produces an experience that furnishes material for another thought. There must be thought to produce action, but there must be action to inspire thought.

Another value that Emerson sees in action is that of physical labor. In "The American Scholar" he says, "I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands." 12

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11 Ibid., pp. 95-96.
12 Ibid., p. 100.
In an address to a literary society, "The Man of Letters," Emerson states the physical requirements that he finds necessary for a scholar. He must be an energetic person who is fond of labor rather than ashamed of it; he must be able to participate in sports; and he must be attentive to his physical condition such as cleanliness and physical fitness.

So let his habits be formed, and all his economies heroic; no spoiled child, no drone, no epicure, but a stoic, formidable, athletic, knowing how to be poor, loving labor, and not flogging his youthful wit with tobacco and wine; treasuring his youth. I wish the youth to be an armed and complete man... 13

Emerson wants the scholar to be self-sufficient. When visiting the West Point Academy, Emerson found a situation that he felt should apply to all scholars; he found the cadets physically and mentally alert. They were diligent in their labor, for they had no one to assist them in cleaning their rooms, making their beds, or repairing their clothes. In a sense, they were physically independent. Emerson states,

"These are first steps to power . . . it is a primary duty of the man of letters to secure his independence." 14

Emerson states that the scholar is to be "... a learner of the laws of Nature and the experiences of history; a prophet surrendered with self-abandoning sincerity to the Heaven which pours through him its will to mankind." 15 His office is to cheer society, and to raise it from the "civilized" state to the "potential"state; he is to guide other men by showing them what they fail to see in the appearance of nature and the

events of history. He is to keep the nation alive through thought. His duty is to make the farmer see that his value to society lies beyond the products that his work yields, to make the doctor see that his value is greater than his instruments, and to make the merchant see that his value is greater than his trade.

The scholar's duty is to use his reason. Most men have the power of understanding; with this power they make their daily decisions, add, subtract, combine, measure, and care for their physical life. The power of reason, however, is more profound than that of the understanding. The reason finds an analogy between material and spiritual laws, whereas the understanding sees only the material laws. The understanding leads a man to material wealth, but the reason leads him to spiritual wealth, for it enables him to see the complete man or the total Man. In his essay, "Nature," Emerson defines these two mental powers by describing their work:

The understanding adds, divides, combines, measures, and finds nutriment and room for its activity in this worthy scene. Meantime, Reason transfers all these lessons into its own world of thought, by perceiving the analogy that marries Matter and Mind.

The benefits of Reason are best seen in the works of the scholar, the self-reliant man, and the poet. Emerson calls these men,

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. . . the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are equal. Each is that which he is, essentially, so that he cannot be surmounted or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him and his own, patent.¹⁷

These three men represent Emerson's idea of the total Man; each one has a separate function to perform in life and his own peculiar talent necessary to perform it; however, each one also has the power of the others in him although it is not as active as his own.

The scholar is the total "Man Thinking"; he is the Knower for society. Both his life and his duty are directed by his love of truth. In his search for truth he perceives in nature what other men do not see; they find only material goods, whereas the scholar transcends the surface outlines and finds facts and causes in nature. Men use nature to aid their physical lives, whereas the scholar uses nature to enrich his spiritual life, for he finds eternal truths in the presence of nature. The scholar, therefore, is the eye of society because he observes the world with spiritual insight. He is also the mind of society because he perceives truths in nature and converts these truths into thoughts. As the "delegated intellect" of society, he serves as a prophet. Emerson states that the scholar

¹⁷"The Poet," Works, III, 6-7. (Italics mine.)
... is to find consolation in exercising the highest functions of human nature. He is one who raises himself from private considerations and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart. He is to resist the vulgar prosperity that retrogrades ever to barbarism, by preserving and communicating heroic sentiments, noble biographies, melodious verse, and the conclusions of history. Whatever oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions - these he shall receive and impart. And whatever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day - this he shall hear and promulgate.

Part of the duty of the scholar to society is to rise above the temptations of envy and imitation in his work. Envying the works of another - whether he is a poet, a man of action, a farmer, a merchant, or a lawyer - is a display of the scholar's ignorance of the total Man.

Rather than envying their accomplishments, he sees them exercising powers similar to the ones that lie latent in him, and he glories in the progress of total Man. When the scholar imitates the works of another man, he commits creative suicide, for he destroys his own original thoughts when he pushes them aside to copy the thoughts of another man. He retards the growth of total Man when he fails to fulfill his duty, which is to live in society as its intellect but not to lose his own identity in imitating it. Of this responsibility Emerson states, "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."
The Doer that Emerson speaks of is society's self-reliant Man of Action. When Emerson uses the term self-trust, he refers to a trust that is more profound than man's confidence in his material body. Man's self-trust comes from his knowledge of his association with the Divine Soul, "... because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." Therefore his trust is in his soul which "... we know ... is divine." The Man of Action relies upon this spirit in performing his creative duties. Because of his relation to the Divine Soul, his works are measured by goodness, as the scholar's are measured by truth. The self-reliant man's duty is to have intellectual independence. Self-trust gives him confidence to develop his own thoughts from his resources. When he relies upon himself for expression of his feelings, he necessitates the birth of his own thoughts and actions. Concerning the reward of the self-reliant man, Emerson states, "When private men shall act with original views, the lustre will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen."  

The scholar learns from the self-reliant Man of Action to have freedom, courage, and energy in his life. When the scholar becomes

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self-reliant, he frees himself from the shackles of conformity, ".... for he is without any hindrance that does not arise out of his own constitution." Self-reliance also makes the scholar brave, for one fears only what he does not know. The scholar has the courage to face any unknown obstacle and the intellect to solve any problem that exists. The third attribute that self-reliance gives a scholar is energy. The scholar is independent of other men's actions and thoughts; therefore, he utilizes his own experiences in order to develop his own thoughts. The scholar who is a sluggard allows opportunity for action to pass him by, and he fails to fulfill his purpose in life. Thus self-reliance gives the scholar freedom, courage, and energy.

The Sayer in society is the poet. His responsibility to society is to be the Man of Beauty, for the love of beauty guides his life. The poet's duty to Man is to express thoughts that enrich life. Emerson states that "... all men live by truth and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his experience." The poet assists in completing the total Man, "... for the experience of each new age requires a new confession and the world seems always waiting for its poet."

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His duty is to announce and affirm to man the truth, goodness, and beauty of nature, and in doing so he reveals a new and higher beauty to men; it is a beauty they see but cannot express without words. Ugliness, Emerson states, results when things are detached from God; the poet creates beauty in the world when he, through his words, associates nature once more with the Eternal Creator. 27

The duties and responsibilities of the scholar are numerous, but his office is not without its rewards which are intellectual and spiritual, for self-reliance, knowledge, and expression are their own rewards. 28

27 Ibid., pp. 15-18.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF EMERSON'S THEORY OF LEARNING

As a result of America's threatened position as leader in a democratic world, a re-evaluation of its system of education is necessary to determine the weakness and strength of its program of training youth, for the progress of any nation is dependent upon effective education. A still valid concept of education that deserves consideration is Ralph Waldo Emerson's theory of learning.

Emerson's specific view of education traces the learning process from the laws that govern the mind, to the sources of learning, to the method of learning and instructing, and then culminates in his theory of the scholar as "Man Thinking."

Emerson's view of life is an idealistic one which maintains that the invisible or spiritual world contains the patterns for all material objects in the visible world, and in accord with this view of life, he finds that the greatest function of the mind is to achieve an insight into the ideal. The insight, however, is gained from a knowledge of the material world and its laws. In order to obtain this knowledge, the mind develops through three levels of learning. On the first level of learning, the instinct passively receives impressions and stores them in the unconscious mind much like the "savage" man who has access to natural
resources, but who does not utilize them in any productive manner. On
the second level of learning, the mind's senses are active in recognizing
the laws that govern nature and uses these laws to benefit the "civilized"
man. The development of the perceptive intelligence is the third level
of learning and the most beneficial to moral man, for it enables him,
as the "potential" man, to utilize the correspondence between the laws
of nature and the laws of his mind to gain an insight into the idealistic
world.

Similar to the three levels of learning are three potentialities of
power. The instinct utilizes the power of the Memory, which collects
facts but does nothing constructive with them. The sensual mind has
the rational, thinking power of Understanding. However, it is the
perceptive intelligence that has the power of Reason, which enables man
to look through the transparency of nature into the world of ideals.

There are three laws which govern the levels of development and
powers of the mind. The law of unconscious assimilation allows the
instinct to collect passively the spontaneous impressions made upon the
mind. Under the law of conscious recognition, the senses classify,
contrast, and compare the collected impressions and utilize them to
develop thoughts. But it is the law of perceptive correlation that
enables the mind to convert thoughts into creative work. Essential to
effective use of the laws of the mind is the recognition that each mind
must work according to its individuality.
After establishing how the mind works, Emerson reveals the sources of learning that the mind uses to produce thoughts. Of the four major sources—nature, the past, experience, and inspiration—nature is the most profound influence on man through its law of growth and decay, its law of unity, its commodities, and its beauty. The man who perceives the real purpose of nature—to teach man to live—makes himself indispensable to his society. The Mind of the Past, as recorded in books, is the second source of learning. Its purpose is to inspire man to think and act creatively. Essential to creative works, however, is experience, the third source of learning. An education does not consist of what a man reads, but rather of what he does. It is only those things that a man has proven by his personal actions that he knows to be true. A fourth source of learning is inspiration, which is necessary to turn impressions into thoughts. Inspiration is gained from nature’s beauty, from solitude, and from society. Emerson stresses the necessity of a broad education by going beyond school books and the schoolroom to find more valuable sources of learning in nature, the past, experience, and inspiration.

In discussing the laws of the mind, Emerson explains how the mind works. He also enumerates the sources of learning that influence the mind and reveals the method of learning and instructing. The method of learning that Emerson asserts is to study nature. Nature has assigned
each mind a separate role in life. Emerson maintains that recognition of individual interest and talent is a necessary element in the method of learning. A second necessity is individual experience and observation. Every man must develop his talents through his own personal action and not through someone else's experience. He must make personal observations of life rather than observe life through another man's books, paintings, or music. A third necessary element in Emerson's method of learning is drill, both mental and physical. Essential to both types of drill is good health. The result of mental drill is the ability to produce profound thought, and the result of physical drill is physical independence.

Emerson maintains that effective instruction requires respect for the individual nature of the child, interest in humanity, knowledge of subject matter, and abundance of patience. Whereas the personal interest of each child should be considered in selecting the subject matter, Emerson does not assert that the teacher should respect the child's every whim and destroy effective discipline in the classroom. Emerson's key advice to a teacher is to respect the child but also to respect himself as a person.

Emerson illustrates his theory of learning in his concept of the scholar. In a diversified society, the function of the scholar is "Man Thinking," for his duty is to be the "delegated intellect" for the total Man. He is society's sayer, knower, and doer. His rewards lie in the possession of his talents: expression, knowledge, and self-reliance.
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