EMERSON'S REPRESENTATIVE MEN: A STUDY OF
EMERSON'S SIX REPRESENTATIVE TYPES

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EMERSON'S SIX REPRESENTATIVE TYPES

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PREFACE

The purpose of the chapters which follow is to relate the six personalities dealt with by Emerson in his Representative Men to such portions of the essayist's ideas as may be applied to these six representative types, to the end of arriving at an understanding of Emerson's aim in writing about these six men and about great men in general.

In order to limit the scope of the work, and at the same time, to insure an adequate expression of Emerson's own ideas, it was decided to limit citations within the thesis to the contents of the eleven volumes of essays collected in the Centennial Edition of The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The secondary sources listed in the bibliography were read prior to a decision as to the nature and scope of the thesis, and though these books have undoubtedly influenced the tone and thought in this work, every effort was made in the following pages to avoid interpretative writing and to allow Emerson to speak for himself.
CHAPTER I

PLATO, THE PHILOSOPHER

"Philosophy," says Emerson, "is the account which the human mind gives to itself of the constitution of the world."\(^1\) In the philosopher "the love of truth predominates,"\(^2\) and his aim is absolute Truth.\(^3\) Philosophy "proceeds on the faith that a law determines all phenomena, which being known, the phenomena can be predicted."\(^4\) The philosopher is the definer, and it may be said that he "knows only laws."\(^5\) The two cardinal facts which form the basis of all philosophy are the perceptions of Unity and Variety. The problem of the philosopher, seeking truth, is to seize upon the underlying laws which govern all things and so to perceive and define the fundamental unity in its varied and changing forms.\(^6\)

Speculation tends toward a "terrific unity, in which

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\(^1\)Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Plato; or, The Philosopher," The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (hereafter abbreviated as Works), edited by Edward Waldo Emerson, IV, 47.

\(^2\)"The Comic," Works, VIII, 159.


\(^4\)Ibid., p. 55.

\(^5\)"The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 40.

all things are absorbed." The "resolution of all into the ever-blessed ONE" is the ultimate fact reached on every topic.  

The mind is urged to ask for one cause of many effects; then for the cause of that; and again the cause, diving still into the profound; self-assured that it shall arrive at an absolute and sufficient one, -- a one that shall be all.  

Certain minds everywhere tend to dwell chiefly upon the conception of unity, to lose themselves in contemplation of Being, and "this tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East." To these devotees the soul is all. Variations of form are unimportant in the light of the knowledge that all is made of one essence. Vishnu is all.  

The knowledge that this spirit, which is essentially one, is in one's own and in all other bodies, is the wisdom of one who knows the unity of things. . . . When the difference of investing form, as that of god or the rest is destroyed, there is no distinction.  

The whole universe is but a manifestation of Vishnu. That which such individuals and all souls seek is "resolution into being above form . . . liberation from nature." Corresponding to the bias of individuals toward concentration on Being, is the philosophic trend of certain nations:

7Ibid., p. 51.  
8"Self-Reliance," Works, II, 47.  
10Ibid., p. 49.  
11Ibid., p. 50.  
12Ibid., p. 51.
The country of unity, of immovable institutions, the seat of a philosophy delighting in abstractions, of men faithful in doctrine and in practice to the idea of a dear, unimplorable, immense fate, is Asia; and it realizes this faith in the social institution of caste.\(^\text{13}\)

But if speculation tends toward unity, "action tends directly backwards to diversity. The first is the course or gravitation of mind, the second is the power of nature. . . . The unity absorbs. . . . Nature opens and creates."\(^\text{14}\)

Since "Essence or God is not a relation, or a part, but the whole,"\(^\text{15}\) it cannot be understood by the faculties of its creatures. The Unity may be seen and understood only through its manifold manifestations or effects, through variety.

"Every chemical substance, every plant, every animal in its growth, teaches the unity of cause, the variety of appearances."\(^\text{16}\)

These appearances indicate the fact that the universe is represented in every one of its particles. Everything in nature contains all the powers of nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff. . . . The true doctrine of omnipresence is, that God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb.\(^\text{17}\)

Just as some minds tend to dwell upon unity, others, influenced by their intellect and senses, have a bias toward diversity. It is so also with nations, and the delight of

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 52. \(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 51.

\(^{15}\)"Compensation," Works, II, 80.

\(^{16}\)"History," Works, II, 10.

\(^{17}\)"Compensation," Works, II, 64.
Europe is in the many. "European civility is the triumph of talent, the extension of system, the sharpened understanding, adaptive skill, delight in forms, delight in manifestations, in comprehensible results."18

It is "the problem of thought [and therefore, of philosophy] to separate and reconcile these mutually contradictory and exclusive elements."19 "We owe to genius always the same debt, of lifting the curtain from the common, and showing us that divinities are sitting disguised in the seeming gang of gypsies and pedlars."20 The greatest minds of the world have always sought to disclose the manifold meanings hidden in every fact and object,21 for their value to the intellect appears only when the spiritual truth they cover is made plain.22 It is the problem and function of the man of thought to trace everything home to a cause.23

Emerson believes that the debt of the world, and particularly of Europe, to Plato is almost without limit.

"Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato."24

In Plato you explore modern Europe in its cause and seed, -- all that in thought, which the history of Europe embodies or has yet to embody. . . . Nothing

18 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 52.
19 Ibid., p. 48.
24 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 41.
has escaped him. . . . Why should not a young man be educated on this book? It would suffice for the tuition of the race.\textsuperscript{25}

From him come all things still written or debated among men of thought. Even the greatest men and thinkers are his debtors.\textsuperscript{26}

In proportion to the culture of men they become his scholars. . . . As our Jewish Bible has implanted itself in the table-talk and household life of every man and women in the European and American nations, so the writings of Plato have preoccupied every school of learning, every lover of thought, every church, every poet, -- making it impossible to think, on certain levels, except through him. He stands between the truth and every man's mind, and has almost impressed language and the primary forms of thought with his name and seal.\textsuperscript{27}

Even Aristotle, who is considered to have founded a rival school of thought, platonizes.\textsuperscript{28} Though there have never been more than a dozen persons alive in the world at one time capable of understanding the books of Plato, his works come down to every generation,\textsuperscript{29} for his writings have the perpetual modernness which is the "measure of merit in every work of art."\textsuperscript{30}

Yet, in spite of the fact that his works are eternal

\textsuperscript{25}"Books," \textit{Works}, VII, 199.

\textsuperscript{26}"Plato; or, The Philosopher," \textit{Works}, IV, 39.

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 44. \textsuperscript{28}"Circles," \textit{Works}, II, 308.

\textsuperscript{29}"Spiritual Laws," \textit{Works}, II, 154.

\textsuperscript{30}"Plato; or, The Philosopher," \textit{Works}, IV, 45.
and universal, we have little factual knowledge of the life of Plato. Great men live in their writings, and "Plato especially has no external biography." His greatness cannot be explained by the few facts about his life that have come down to us. Almost all that is known is that he was born in 437 A.D. of patrician parents, was a student under Socrates for ten years, travelled in Italy and Egypt, and returned to Athens where he taught until his death at the age of eighty-one years. His achievements indicate that he must have been "a sound, sincere, catholic man, able to honor, at the same time the idea, or laws of mind, and fate, or the laws of nature."  

Emerson says that Plato stands as the representative of philosophy because of his tremendous breadth. His range of thought and knowledge is so great that men find it difficult to accept the fact that the writings attributed to his pen are those of one individual. This is a singular tribute paid to nearly all men of transcendent genius. It occurs because great men are so able to magnetize their contemporaries that it is difficult in later ages to determine what was the work of the master and what that of his disciples. In effect, the great man lives in many bodies.  

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31 Ibid., p. 43.  
32 Ibid., p. 44.  
33 Ibid., p. 45.  
34 Ibid., p. 42.  
35 Ibid., p. 41.
Such men always "embody the ideas of each time." The great man consumes his times; hence, he is charged with plagiarism and lack of originality.

"No new truth," say the critics on all sides. Is it so? Truth is very old, but the merit of seers is not to invent but to dispose objects in their right places, and he is the commander who is always in the mount, whose eye not only sees details, but throws crowds of detail in their right arrangement and a larger and juster totality than any other.37

"We are as much informed of a writer's genius by what he selects as by what he originates."38 The originals are not original. There is imitation, model and suggestion to the very archangels... The first book tyrannizes over the second... Read in Plato and you will find Christian dogmas.39

Plato's unparalleled breadth cannot be explained alone by the fact that he is the greatest collector, definer, and expositor of truth. "A philosopher must be more than a philosopher." This qualification is partially explained by Emerson's conception of the Trinity. He describes the Over-Soul or God as an indivisible unity, possessed of three co-equal emanations: Truth, Goodness, Beauty. Man's soul, being identical with God, also has these characteristics. In

37"Papers from the Dial," Works, XII, 380.
38"Quotations and Originality," Works, VIII, 195.
40"Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 43.
moments of complete self-surrender (which Emerson calls inspiration, ecstasy, or revelation), the emanations of the soul seek outlet through the faculties of the individual. "When it breathes through his intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affections, it is love." 41 The essential equality of these channels or faculties is emphasized in Emerson's essay, "The Poet":

For the Universe has three children, born at one time, which reappear under different names in every system of thought, whether they be called cause, operation, effect; or, more poetically, Jove, Pluto, Neptune; or theologically, the Father, the Spirit, the Son; but which we will call here 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. 42

Plato's place in the Trinity is that of the Knower, but the latent powers of the Sayer are developed in him. "The true philosopher and the true poet are one, and a beauty, which is truth, and a truth, which is beauty, is the aim of both." 43

You find in him [Plato] that which you have already found in Homer, now ripened to thought, -- the poet converted to a philosopher, with loftier strains of musical wisdom than Homer reached; as if Homer were

the youth and Plato the finished men; yet with no less security of bold and perfect song, when he cares to use it, and with some harpstrings fetched from a higher heaven.\textsuperscript{44}

He is the greatest of the high-priests of pure reason, the \textit{Trismegisti}, who have "somewhat so vast in their logic, so primary in their thinking, that it seems antecedent to all the ordinary distinctions of rhetoric and literature, and to be at once poetry and music and dancing and astronomy and mathematics."\textsuperscript{45} Plato is not primarily a poet because he chooses to use his poetic gifts to an ulterior purpose;\textsuperscript{46} however, not the beauty of his verse, but the "metre-making argument" of his thought makes a poet.\textsuperscript{47}

Plato is no accident. On the contrary, he and his advent are the logical results of the workings of divine laws. In "Circles" Emerson ascribes the evolutionary processes seen in nature to the efforts of the Absolute "to create a life and thought as large and excellent as itself."\textsuperscript{48} Though this process may be temporarily halted, amelioration is the law.\textsuperscript{49} The growth of nations is like that of individuals. In youth and childhood both men and races of men are vehement, quarrelsome, and inarticulate. As they grow

\textsuperscript{44}"Books," \textit{Works}, VII, 198.
\textsuperscript{46}"Plato; or, The Philosopher," \textit{Works}, IV, 43.
\textsuperscript{47}"The Poet," \textit{Works}, III, 9.
\textsuperscript{48}"Circles," \textit{Works}, II, 205.
\textsuperscript{49}"The Natural History of Intellect," \textit{Works}, XII, 57.
older culture and experience teach both to express their needs, desires, and ideas in less violent terms. "It is ever thus. The progress is to accuracy, to skill, to truth, from blind force." 50 There comes a time in the history of every nation when it reaches the zenith of its adult health and power: 51

In history the great moment is when the savage is just ceasing to be a savage, with all his hairy Pelasgic strength directed on his opening sense of beauty; -- and you have Pericles and Phidias, not yet passed over into the Corinthian civility. Everything good in nature and the world is in that moment of transition, when the swarthy juices still flow plentifully from nature, but their astringency or acridity is got out by ethics and humanity. 52 Plato was fated to arrive in Greece at this moment:

When there is something to be done, the world knows how to get it done. The vegetable eye makes leaf, pericarp, root, bark, or thorn ... according to the want; the world throws life into a hero or a shepherd, and puts him where he is wanted. Dante and Columbus were Italians, in their time; they would be Russians or Americans today. Things ripe, new men come. The adaptation is not capricious. 53

Before him had gone the Seven Wise Masters and the times of Pericles leaving a mass of poorly integrated science and speculation. Now comes Plato, "the distributor, who needs no barbaric paint, or tattoo, or whooping; for he can define. ... He is the arrival of accuracy and intelligence." 54

50 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 46.
51 Ibid., pp. 46-47. 52 "Power," Works, VI, 70-71.
53 "Fate," Works, VI, 39.
54 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 47.
marks an epoch in the history of mankind. 55

Plato thus arrived at the right place and time in history as a consequence of divine plan. He was superbly equipped to accomplish the purposes for which he was created. He absorbed the learning of the Greeks who had preceded him and then that of Socrates. And "finding himself still capable of a larger synthesis, -- beyond all example then or since, -- he travelled into Italy, to gain what Pythagoras had for him; then into Egypt ... to import the other element, which Europe wanted, into the European mind." 56

Plato, in Egypt and in Eastern pilgrimages, imbibed the idea of one Deity, in which all things are absorbed. The unity of Asia and the detail of Europe; the infinitude of the Asiatic soul and the defining, result-loving, machine-making, surface-seeking, operagoing Europe, -- Plato came to join, and by contact, to enhance the energy of each. The excellence of Europe and Asia are in his brain. Metaphysics and natural philosophy expressed the genius of Europe; he sub structs the religion of Asia, as the base.

In short, a balanced soul was born, perceptive of the two elements.... A man who could see two sides of a thing was born. The wonderful synthesis so familiar in nature; the upper and under side of the medal of Jove; the union of impossibilities, which reappear in every object; its real and its ideal power, -- was now also transferred entire to the consciousness of a man. 57

This is the explanation of the power and charm of Plato. 58 "He marries the two parts of nature," 59 which others

56"Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 42.
57Ibid., pp. 53-54.
58Ibid., p. 56.
had dealt with singly. He always shows both the material and the spiritual truth about every fact. For example, Plato regarded the materialistic studies of the world made by other philosophers as mere lists and inventories. Characteristically, he appends to these physical studies of nature a spiritual corollary showing that "all things are for the sake of good, and it is the cause of every thing beautiful." 60 And though he delights in dwelling on the abstract and transcendental, he draws his illustrations from the commonplace and ordinary. 61

The same union of apparently irreconcilable elements that made up his mental character appears in his talents. He combines the abandonment and imagination of a poet with the precision of a geometer. His patrician elegance and polish are accompanied by sound health and a strong body. His earnestness mounts in some works to piety, yet his active and courageous defense of Socrates against the population of Athens shows a man of affairs. He believes that poetry, prophecy, and the high insight are from a wisdom of which man is not the master, but his circumspection never forsakes him. 62 "Nothing can be colder than his head, when the lightnings of his imagination are playing in the sky." 63

60 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 56-57.
61 Ibid., p. 55.
62 Ibid., p. 58.
63 Ibid., p. 59.
He is a literary master:

Plato, in his plenty is never restricted, but has the fit word. There is indeed no weapon in all the armory of wit which he did not possess and use, -- epic, analysis, mania, intuition, music, satire and irony, down to the customary and polite. His illustrations are poetry and his jests illuminations.\(^{64}\)

So complete are his perceptions and so firm his self-confidence that he is able to toy with doubts, to argue with force and power for the opposition, until finally comes "a burst of light, a sentence that moves sea and land."\(^{65}\)

Influenced by his European background, Plato saw the value of culture and recognized, "more genially one would say than any since, the hope of education."\(^{66}\) He delights in all useful accomplishments, but above all in the achievements of genius and intellect. He values the faculties and talents almost beyond measure. In the Timaeus he illustrates that the senses are given to man so that he may learn the divine laws by observation of natural phenomena. "He has a probity, a native reverence for justice and honor, and a humanity which makes him tender for the superstitions of the people,"\(^{67}\) but his travels in the East and his patrician connections cause him to lay special stress upon the advantages of birth. His theory of organic character and disposition has in it the germ of a system of caste. A higher application of this aristocratic theory is seen in the

\(^{64}\)Ibid.

\(^{65}\)Ibid., p. 60.

\(^{66}\)Ibid., p. 64.

\(^{67}\)Ibid., p. 58.
conversation between Socrates and young Theages. Socrates can teach the young man nothing, but says in effect: "You will be what you must. . . . All my good is magnetic, and I educate, not by lessons, but by going about my business."68

In discussing the metaphysical ideas of Plato, Emerson dwells longest and most enthusiastically upon what he calls the consistent ascension of Platonic thought. This ascension he finds and admires in all of the philosopher's writings. Plato's fame, says Emerson, rests on the fact that he "represents the privilege of the intellect . . . of carrying up every fact to successive platforms and so disclosing in every fact a germ of expansion."69 "Our faculties run out into infinity, and return to us thence. . . . All things are in a scale; and, begin where we will ascend and ascend. All things are symbolical; and what we call results are beginnings."70 All of Plato's speculation has this ascension: Every thought and creature reflects the Supreme Good. Some degree of Beauty enters into all things, but more beautiful than beauty is wisdom. Art that uses material nature for a model is not beautiful. The love of the sexes symbolizes the passion of souls for absolute Beauty. Wisdom and virtue are inspirations; they cannot

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68 Ibid., pp. 66-67.


70 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 68. Either this quotation or the one immediately preceding it might be mistaken for an extract from Emerson's "Circles."
be taught.

These perceptions and expansions announced by Plato are not the creation of the philosopher. They are organic. Plato is able to be their expositor because he is "a more complete man, who . . . [can] apply to nature the whole scale of the senses." He knows, like Socrates, that the "laws below are sisters of the laws above," and he is able to pierce the surface of nature and see the "long lines of law which shoot in every direction. . . . Whatever he looks upon discloses a second sense, and ulterior senses." He establishes a science of sciences which he calls the Dialectic, and after giving due reverence to Being beyond the limits of human intellect, he asserts, "Yet things are knowable." The human intellect is part of the mind that made nature and can understand its creation. Science, which deals with facts and surfaces only, should be studied in order to advance beyond it to the true meaning of its facts. He "secures a position not to be commanded, by his passion for reality, valuing philosophy only as it is the pleasure of conversing with real being."

Emerson has an opportunity to revise any previously

71"Plato; New Readings," Works, IV, 82.
72Ibid., p. 83. 73Ibid., p. 82.
74"Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 62.
75Ibid., p. 64.
expressed opinions of his philosopher in "Plato; New Readings." Significantly, he devotes most of this essay to an exposition of Plato's writings in the fields of ethics and morals. His moral conclusions, says Emerson, are more striking than his perceptions of truth and beauty. "His subtlety commended him to men of thought. The secret of his popular success is the moral aim which endeared him to mankind. 'Intellect,' he said, 'is king of heaven and of earth;' but in Plato, intellect is always moral." 76 He saw that spiritual laws are as constant as the material laws of mathematics. He hated varnish and falsehood and reveals connection, continuity, and representation everywhere. He perceived and states universal laws of justice, good, and evil. "Before all men, he saw the intellectual values of the moral sentiment. He describes his own ideal, when he paints, in Timaeus, a god leading things from disorder into order." 77 So complete is Plato's moral theory that all of the class of thinkers who have delighted in giving an "ethico-intellectual" expression to every truth (Michael Angelo, Shakespeare, and Swedenborg, for instance) are said to platonize. 78

Emerson finds two defects in his representative philosopher. In the first place, "he is intellectual in his aim; and therefore, in expression, literary." 79 "He is the

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77 Ibid., p. 87.
78 Ibid., p. 88.
79 "Plato; or, The Philosopher," Works, IV, 76.
great average man. . . . A great common-sense is his warrant and qualification to be the world's interpreter." He always reconciles his poetry with the appearance of the world.

"He never writes in ecstasy, or catches us up into poetic raptures."  

It is almost the sole deduction from the merit of Plato that his writings have not, -- what is no doubt incident to this regnancy of intellect in his work, -- the vital authority which the screams of prophets and the sermons of unlettered Arabs and Jews possess. There is an interval; and to cohesion, contact is necessary.

Secondly, Emerson believes that perhaps Plato was guilty of "the ambition of individualism." He attempted to institutionalize the world, to pass all through the mind of Plato and present it anew, not as nature but as art. The world is perfect; every thing is in place, but any theory of the world must be a thing of shreds and patches. "No power of genius has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains." The philosopher's ambition is beyond the genius of Plato or of any other man. As a result, he has no system, and "indeed, admirable texts can be quoted on both sides of every great question from him."  

Concluding his essay, Emerson says that the only fair

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80 Ibid., p. 61.  
81 Ibid.  
82 Ibid., p. 76.  
83 Ibid., p. 77.  
84 Ibid., p. 78.  
85 Ibid.
way to criticize Plato is by comparing him with other men, and that when this is done, it is seen that none who have come since have approached him in merit. We have seen that Emerson believes that his representative philosopher fulfills the essential requirements of his class, that relying upon intuitive perceptions of Unity and Variety for authority, Plato gives what Emerson regards as an excellent account of the constitution of the world. Plato is both Knower and Sayer, though his writings are not in metrical form, and he approaches the functions of the third entity of the Trinity as well, because his aim and achievements are moral. This man has put the whole western world in his debt by perceiving and reporting almost every truth known before or since his time. He has no personal vices. He is a literary master in the field of prose writing. He is, perhaps, the perfect philosopher -- Emerson certainly believes him the most perfect one that nature has yet produced.

But Plato is only a more perfect man, a more complete man. His lack of system is the result of individual ambition or egotism, a fault which Emerson finds so universal among men of genius that he blends it into his theory of the nature of man. "Egotism has its root in the cardinal necessity by which each individual persists to be what he is."86

86 "Culture," Works, VI, 134.
Nature achieves her purposes by giving to every man a bias that he must obey. She so overloads great persons with a belief in the importance of their individual functions that they accomplish the ends for which they were created. By obeying this bias one gains the power of concentration. Its compensating loss, narrowness, may be avoided by the self-surrender and subordination of the individual to the Supreme Reason. Intellect or thought frees man from the necessities of Fate or nature, but by thought Emerson means "pious reception."

Plato's other fault, intellectual detachment, is inherent in the character of one whose bias directs him more toward Truth than to Beauty or Good. "Affection blends, intellect disjoins subject and object." The analytic process is cold and bereaving. "Intellect is void of affection and sees the object as it stands in the light of science, cool and disengaged." It is abandonment to the

88"The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 50-51.
89"Fate," Works, VI, 24.
90"Intellect," Works, II, 328.
91"The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 44.
93"Intellect," Works, II, 326.
ecstasy of communication with the Supreme Unity that Emerson finds lacking in the writings of his philosopher. Plato and his class show too much restraint, restraint that seems to Emerson to indicate a lack of self-surrender, too great an infusion of the individual ego and will in reporting divine revelations. "When all is said and done, the rapt saint is found the only logician." 94 Emerson's last word concerning Plato in "New Readings" is an expression of regret that the philosopher allows himself to "play providence" to men of lesser stature than himself, 95 a characteristic which he lists as a vice common to men of thought in his "The Natural History of Intellect." 96


96 "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 45.
CHAPTER II

SWEDENBORG, THE MYSTIC

By way of introduction to his second of representative men, Emerson defines the functions of what he calls the three classes of men who are dearer to mankind than those whom the economists call producers. These are poets, philosophers, and mystics. The poet and the philosopher uplift and instruct men through their intellectual faculties. The mystic deals with the "world of morals or of will."\(^1\) The poet may deal with the same themes, by drama and poetry giving an oblique reply to the questions of Whence? What? and Whither? asked by the soul, but the mystic (such a man as Moses, Meno, or Jesus) "works directly on this problem."\(^2\) The privilege of the mystic "is an access to the secrets and structure of nature by some higher method than by experience."\(^3\) The gateway to knowledge of this class is always the intuition, and its moments of intuitive reception frequently take the form of a trance.\(^4\)

The region of morals and will, which is the special province of the mystic, the saint, and the prophet, is the

\(^{1}\)"Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," *Works*, IV, 93.
\(^{2}\)Ibid., p. 94. \(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 95. \(^{4}\)Ibid., p. 97.
realm of the moral sentiment. This sentiment is the emanation of the Universal Spirit; "Truth, Power, Goodness, Beauty, are its varied names, -- faces of one substance, the heart of all."\(^5\)

If from these external statements we seek to come a little nearer to the fact, our first experiences in moral, as in intellectual nature, force us to discriminate a universal mind, identical in all men. Certain biases, talents, executive skills, are special to each individual; but the high, contemplative, all-commanding vision, the sense of Right and Wrong, is alike in all. Its attributes are self-existence, eternity, intuition, and command. It is the mind of the mind. We belong to it, not it to us. It is in all men, and constitutes them men. In bad men it is dormant . . . but, however inoperative, it exists underneath whatever vices and errors. . . . It admits of no appeal, looks to no superior essence. It is the reason of things.\(^6\)

Men have given this sentiment many names; "as, the light, the seed, the Spirit, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Daemon, the still, small voice, etc., -- all indicating its power and its latency."\(^7\)

"It is the same fact existing as sentiment and as will in the mind, which works in Nature as irresistible law."\(^8\)

"The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference."\(^9\) "All things are moral, and in their boundless changes have an unceasing reference to the spiritual nature. . . . This ethical character so penetrates the


\(^{8}\) "The Sovereignty of Ethics," *Works*, X, 188.

bone and marrow of nature as to seem the end for which it was made."  

We see the steady aim of Benefit in view from the first. Melioration is the law. The cruelest foe is a masked benefactor. . . . An eternal, beneficent necessity is always bringing things to right; and though we should fold our arms . . . the evils we suffer will at last end themselves through the incessant opposition of Nature to everything hurtful.

Nature, Fate, law, necessity are terms used to describe the limitations imposed upon the world, and in the realm of morals, as elsewhere, they work for good. "In the world of morals, Fate appears as vindicator . . . requiring justice in man, and always striking soon or late when justice is not done. What is useful will last, what is hurtful will sink."  

Among men the moral sentiment and the law of melioration appear in the guise of morals and virtue. The key to all right thought and action is universality:

Morals is the direction of the will on universal ends. He is immoral who is acting to any private end. . . . All the virtues are special directions of this motive: justice is the application of this good of the whole to the affairs of each one; courage is contempt of danger in the determination to see this good of the whole enacted; love is the delight in the preference of that benefit redounding to another over the securing of our own share; humility is a sentiment of our insignificance when the benefit of the universe is considered.

10 I b i d . , p. 40.  
11 "F a t e , " W o r k s , I I , 4 8 .  
12 "T h e S o v e r e i g n t y o f E t h i c s , " W o r k s , X , 1 8 9 .  
13 "F a t e , " W o r k s , I I , 1 8 .  
14 "C h a r a c t e r , " W o r k s , X , 9 2 - 9 3 .
All things but man are moral because they must be. It is the law of their being, and their morality is enforced. Man alone possesses the quality of will which gives him the privilege of choice in his conduct. "The one serious and formidable thing in nature is a will." 15 "The will constitutes the man. He has his life in Nature, like a beast; but choice is born in him. . . . He chooses, -- as the rest of creation does not. But will, pure and perceiving, is not wilfulness." 16 The virtuous man is he who wills to obey the promptings of the moral sentiment, and character is simply this habit of obedience. 17 "The weakness of the will begins when the individual would be something of himself. All reform aims in some one particular to let the soul have its way through us; in other words, to engage us to obey. 18

On the perpetual conflict between the dictate of this universal mind and the wishes and interests of the individual, the moral discipline of life is built. The one craves a private benefit, which the other requires him to renounce out of respect to the absolute good. 19

"Humility is the avenue." 20 "The choral song which rises from all elements and all angels, is a voluntary obedience,

15 "Fate," Works, II, 30.
19 "Character," Works, X, 94.
a necessitated freedom." 21 "Obedience alone gives the right to command." 22

It is characteristic of the impact of the moral sentiment upon the human will that it always results in action. The man of Good in Emerson's Trinity is the Doer. 23

The sentiment never stops in pure vision, but will be enacted . . . and the acts which it suggests -- as when it impels a man to go forth and impart it to other men . . . are the homage we render to this sentiment, as compared with the lower regard we pay to other thoughts: and the private or social practices we establish in its honor we call religion. 24

The actions of the man who is humble and whose will coincides with the dictates of the moral sentiment are free from any compensating loss. Virtue, like wisdom, flows directly from the vast Affirmative. "There is no tax on the good of virtue, for that is the incoming of God himself, of absolute existence, without any comparative." 25 In virtuous action man gains the power of all of the elemental forces of nature:

Good is positive. Evil merely privative, not absolute. . . . All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he. For all

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21 "Worship," Works, VI, 240.
22 "Perpetual Forces," Works, X, 84.
24 "Character," Works, X, 103.
things proceed out of the same spirit, and all things conspire with it. Whilst a man seeks good ends, he is strong by the whole strength of nature. In so far as he roves from these ends, he bereaves himself of power, or auxiliaries; his being shrinks out of all remote channels, he becomes less and less, a mote, a point, until absolute badness is absolute death. 26

The life and works of Swedenborg, Emerson's representative of the class of men who live in the moral sentiment, may be divided into two parts. The productive portions of his first fifty-four years were spent in successful practical work in the fields of science and engineering and in the writing and publishing of some twenty-five scientific volumes. In his fifty-fourth year Swedenborg's "profound mind admitted the perilous opinion, too frequent in religious history, that he was an abnormal person, to whom was granted the privilege of conversing with angels and spirits." 27 The many religious works which he published during the next thirty-one years show the extreme, narrowing effects of the theological trend of mind occasioned by his seizure. He never married, and though he travelled on occasion to England and other countries for business and cultural purposes, most of his simple, frugal life was spent in a house surrounded by a large garden in Stockholm.

"Swedenborg was born into an atmosphere of great ideas. It is hard to say what was his own." 28 Prior to his birth

27 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 118.
28 Ibid., p. 103.
in 1688, Harvey, Gilbert, Descartes, and Newton had published their discoveries. "Unrivaled dissectors . . . had left nothing for scalpel and microscope to reveal in human or comparative anatomy." The works of Leibnitz, Christian Wolff, Locke, and Grotius were having their effect upon philosophy.

What was left for a genius of the largest caliber but to go over their ground and verify and unite? It is easy to see, in these minds, the origin of Swedenborg's studies, and the suggestion of his problems. He had a capacity to entertain and vivify these volumes of thought. Yet the proximity of these geniuses, one or other of whom had introduced all his leading ideas, makes Swedenborg another example of the difficulty, even in highly fertile genius, of proving originality, the first birth and annunciation of one of the laws of nature.

The enormous breadth of knowledge displayed by Swedenborg in assimilating, testing, and organizing the great ideas of his time suggests that "a certain vastness of learning, or quasi omnipresence of the human soul in nature, is possible." His work covers so great and varied a field of learning that probably no one man is capable of judging its merits. He is "one of the missouriums and mastodons of literature . . . not to be measured by whole colleges of ordinary scholars." Not every man can read his works, but he who can and does will be rewarded for his efforts.

29 Ibid., p. 104. 30 Ibid., p. 105.
31 Ibid., p. 102. 32 Ibid., p. 101.
33 Ibid., p. 103. 34 Ibid., p. 105.
Swedenborg was a believer in the philosophy of identity, a theory dating from the oldest philosophers. This theory "he experimented with and established through years of labor, with the heart and strength of the rudest Viking that his rough Sweden ever sent to battle."\textsuperscript{35} The basic idea of the identity theory is "that Nature iterates her means perpetually on successive planes."\textsuperscript{36} The plant can produce only leaves, but it has the power to modify leaves into all of the forms necessary to its life and functions. In the animal the unit of reproduction is the vertebra or spine. Beginning with a spine in man, all bodily appendages are produced according to need. The original spine produces two spines which are modified to become arms. The arms produce fingers. The head is a modified spine, and within the head the same germinating processes are continued.

There is no limit to this ascending scale, but series on series. Everything, at the end of one use, is taken up into the next, each series punctually repeating every organ and process of the last. We are adapted to infinity. . . . Creative force, like a musical composer, goes on unweariedly repeating a simple air or theme, now high, now low, in solo, in chorus, ten thousand times reverberated, till it fills earth and heaven with the chant.\textsuperscript{37}

All laws in nature rise in successive planes into the spiritual world. "Identity of law . . . perfect parallelism between the laws of Nature and the laws of thought exist. . . .

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 107.  \textsuperscript{36}Ibid.  \textsuperscript{37}Ibid., pp. 108-109.
The same vegetable point or eye which is the unit of the plant can be transferred at pleasure into every part. 38

These grand rhymes or returns in nature, -- the dear, best-known face startling us at every turn, under a mask so unexpected that we think it the face of a stranger, and carrying up the semblance into divine forms, -- delighted the prophetic eye of Swedenborg; and he must be reckoned a leader in that revolution, which, by giving to science an idea, has given to an aimless accumulation of experiments, guidance and a form and a beating heart. 39

"The 'Economy of the Animal Kingdom' is one of those books which, by the sustained dignity of thinking, is an honor to the human race." 40 "It was written with the highest end, -- to put science and the soul, long estranged from each other, at one again. It was an anatomist's account of the human body in the highest style of poetry." 41

In it Swedenborg, one who understood nature as few others have, attempts to follow, by analytic methods, the flowings of visible nature into the invisible world of spirit. Emerson believes that this attempt was highly successful:

I have heard that there is a hope which precedes and must precede all science of the visible or the invisible world; and that science is the realization of that hope in either region. I count the genius of Swedenborg and Wordsworth as the agents of a reform in philosophy, the bringing poetry back to Nature, -- to the marrying of Nature and mind, undoing


39 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 110. This theory also delighted Emerson and forms the basis of some of his most imaginative and enthusiastic writing. See "Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 5.

40 Ibid., pp. 105-106. 41 Ibid., pp. 111-112.
the old divorce in which poetry had been famished and false, and Nature had been suspected and pagan. The key idea of the "Animal Kingdom" is that the large may be known by the little and the little by the large, the macrocosm by the microcosm. Swedenborg pursues this idea into the highest spiritual and moral realms:

Men is a kind of very minute heaven, corresponding to the world of spirits and to heaven. Every particular idea of man, and every affection, yea, every smallest part of his affection, is an image and effigy of him. A spirit may be known from only a single thought. God is a grand man.

His theory of form embodies a similar ascension of thought: "Forms ascend in order from the lowest to the highest," from the angular or terrestrial to the perpetual-celestial or spiritual.

In the first volume of the "Animal Kingdom" Swedenborg states his intention to follow his theories of identity and correspondence between the material and spiritual world to their ultimate conclusion and to show that each material truth or form exists not for itself but rather as a symbol of a particular spiritual truth or theological dogma. He further promises to "communicate a number of examples of such correspondences, together with a vocabulary containing the terms of spiritual things, as well as of physical things

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42"Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 166.
44Ibid., p. 115.
for which they are to be substituted." This project, says Emerson, is the science of sciences, the key to the meaning of the world. Its truth "is implied in all poetry, in allegory, in fable, in the use of emblems and in the structure of language." It was a fact known to Plato and to Bacon.

Swedenborg first put the fact into a detached scientific statement, because it was habitually present to him, and never not seen. It required an insight that could rank things in order and series; or rather it required such rightness of position that the poles of the eye should coincide with the axis of the world.

"The interpreter whom mankind must still expect, will find no predecessor who has approached so near to the true problem as Swedenborg, but the dictionary of symbols remains for another to write, for in his fifty-fourth year the mystic began to see visions and to report them in his writings.

"Modern psychology offers no similar example of a deranged balance." While his mind and body retained their normal functions, Swedenborg professes to see things in the spiritual world more clearly than those of the familiar earth. "To a right perception, at once broad and minute, of the order of nature, he added the comprehension of the moral laws in their widest social aspects; but whatever he

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46 Ibid.  
47 Ibid., p. 117.  
48 Ibid., p. 121.  
49 Ibid., p. 119.
saw . . . he was forced to couch . . . in parables." We have seen that Emerson believed the privilege of intuitive knowledge to be a characteristic of men "who are by nature good, and whose goodness has an influence on others." It must not be thought, however, that he has any intention of limiting this gift to one class or to any class:

There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same end to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. Who hath access to this universal mind is a party to all that is or can be done, for this is the only and sovereign agent.

"The doors of the temple stand open, night and day before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never." The moral sentiment is guarded by one condition: "it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand." "The path of science and of letters is not the way into nature. The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer's boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read than the dissector or antiquary." Real poets, philosophers, and mystics speak from within.

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 95.
52 "History," Works, II, 3.
54 Ibid.
55 "History," Works, II, 41.
In seeking an explanation of the intuitive knowledge possessed by all souls, Emerson says we are led into "that property which Plato denoted as Reminiscence, and which is implied by the Brahmins in the tenets of Transmigration." 57 These theories maintain that the individual soul, having been born again and again since the beginning of time, has all knowledge latent within it. An individual should, therefore, be able to tap and use this reservoir of all knowledge. Inquiry and learning are simply reminiscence. Here Emerson reconciles these doctrines with his own theory of the Over-Soul by saying that if the inquirer be a holy and godlike man, his soul is assimilated by the Universal Soul wherein all things subsist. There the individual soul is unified with all spiritual and physical truth. 58 Nowhere else in his essays does Emerson indicate more than a consciousness of these two theories. Uniformly, he accepts the omniscience and omnipresence of the Universal Soul, and it is apparent that he regards all individual souls as simply a part of the great Unity. All knowledge is integral in each soul and reaches man's external consciousness when the individual will permits. 59

57"Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 95-96.

58Ibid.

59Note: See paragraphs on moral sentiment and will in this chapter, pp. 21-26.
We distinguish the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature, by the term Revelations. These are always attended by the emotion of the sublime. For this communication is an influx of the Divine mind into our mind. It is an ebb of the individual riverlet before the flowing surges of the sea of life. Every distinct apprehension of the central commandment agitates men with awe and delight. . . . In these communications the power to see is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception. 60

Revelation is always accompanied by fervor or emotion, but "the character and duration of this enthusiasm vary with the state of the individual, from an ecstasy and trance and prophetic inspiration, -- which is its rarer appearance, -- to the faintest glow of virtuous emotion."61 In religious history are recorded many instances of the trances of the saints. Those of Socrates, Plotinus, Porphyry, Behmen, Bunyan, Fox, Pascal, and Guyon will come readily to mind. But what comes as readily to mind is the disease which is recorded along with them. "A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as if they had been 'blasted with excess light.'"62

This bestitude comes in terror, and with shocks to the mind of the receiver . . . and drives the man mad; or gives a violent bias which taints his judgment. In the chief examples of religious illumination somewhat morbid has mingled, in spite of the unquestioned increase of mental power.63

61 Ibid., p. 281.
62 Ibid., pp. 281-282.
63 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 97.
It appears as though nature will allow only fixed amounts of spiritual and of physical capacity in the makeup of any man, and that if the former be increased, the gain is at the expense of the latter. 64

So far as Swedenborg's claim to revelation is concerned, "only his probity and genius can entitle it to any serious regard." 65 Swedenborg gives the particulars of heaven and hell, something concerning which not even the most sociable of angels had ever dropped a hint. Revelations never answer the questions of the intellect. They are the disclosures of the soul, not the telling of fortunes:

We must pick no locks. We must check this low curiosity. An answer in words is delusive; it is really no answer to the questions you ask. . . . Men ask concerning the immortality of the soul, the employments of heaven, the state of the sinner, and so forth. They even dream that Jesus left replies to precisely these interrogatories. Never for a moment did that sublime spirit speak in their potoxic. . . . Jesus . . . never . . . uttered a syllable concerning the duration of the soul. 66

Emerson sees final proof of the falsity of the revelations of Swedenborg in the fact that the latter's description of heaven does not "tally with what is best in nature." 67 Instead of finding himself in a world of indescribable beauty, the reader discovers himself in the midst

64 Ibid., p. 98.
65 Ibid., p. 139.
67 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 141.
of all of the elements of a nightmare. There are no individuals in this world, for there is no will. Intermediary spirits control the mind and heart and actions of each who is there. All figures speak one speech, that of Swedenborg. His angels are country persons. 68

His heavens and hells are dull; fault of want of individualism. The thousand-fold relation of men is not there. The interest that attaches in nature to each man, because he is right by his wrong, and wrong by his right; because he defies all dogmatizing and classification, so many allowances and contingencies and futurities are to be taken into account; strong by his vices, often paralyzed by his virtues; -- sinks into entire sympathy with his society. 69

These visions are dangerous:

True in transition, they become false if fixed. . . . When his visions become the stereotyped language of multitudes of persons of all degrees of age and capacity, they are perverted. . . . Genius is ever haunted by similar dreams, when the hells and heavens are opened to it. But these pictures are to be held as mystical, that is, as a quite arbitrary and accidental picture of the truth, -- not as the truth. Any other symbol would be as good; then this is safely seen. 70

It is difficult to criticize these religious writings of Swedenborg because of the greatness of their merits and their faults. After his seizure he continued to occupy himself with consideration of the correspondences between the natural and the spiritual world and the harmony of law between the two which he states -- in perfect agreement with Emerson -- is the result of influx from the Lord. His aim
was "narrowed and defeated by the exclusively theologic di-
rection which his inquiries took."\textsuperscript{71} His writings have an
"immense and sandy diffuseness . . . and their incongruities
are like the last delirium. He is superfluously explana-
tory."\textsuperscript{72} But he makes important discoveries and deals in
essentials. He is earnest and weighty and has no literary
egotism or pride. His method of thought and writing pro-
ceeds habitually from inward to outward.

There is one man of genius . . . whose literary
value has never been rightly estimated; -- I mean
Emanuel Swedenborg. The most imaginative of men,
yet writing with the precision of a mathematician,
he endeavored to engrat a purely philosophical
Ethics on the popular Christianity of his time.
Such an attempt of course must have difficulty which
no genius could surmount. But he saw and showed the
connection between nature and the affections of the
soul. He pierced the emblematic or spiritual charac-
ter of the visible, tangible world. Especially did
his shade-loving muse hover over and interpret the
lower parts of nature; he showed the mysterious
bond that allies moral evil to the foul material
forms, and has given in episcopal parables a theory of
insanity, of beasts, of unclean and fearful things.\textsuperscript{73}

He is the last "Father of the Church," and he brought to the
traditional, form-ridden church of his day a religion in
which the worshipper could take part, a religion in which all
nature is shown to have meaning and significance continuing
into the invisible world.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., p. 120. \quad \textsuperscript{72}Ibid., p. 123.
\textsuperscript{73}"The American Scholar," Works, I, 112-113.
\textsuperscript{74}"Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 122.
Swedenborg, of all men in the recent ages, stands eminently for the translator of nature into thought. I do not know the man in history to whom things stood so uniformly for words. Before him the metamorphosis continually plays. Everything on which his eye rests, obeys the impulse of moral nature. 75

The metamorphosis, which was objective in Indian and Greek philosophy and mythology, becomes subjective in the mind of Swedenborg. The universe arranges itself for each man according to that man's thought and affections. "Man is man by virtue of willing, not by virtue of knowing and understanding." 76 The world becomes a living poem where birds and beasts are emanations of the minds and wills of the men of the place. Poetic justice takes place on the spot, for the evil man can see nothing but evil about him and lives in fear of the projections of his own mind. "Every man makes his own house and state." 77

There was this perception in him which makes the poet or seer an object of awe and terror, namely that the same man or society of men may wear one aspect to themselves and their companions, and a different aspect to higher intelligences. Certain priests, whom he describes as conversing very learnedly together, appeared to the children who were at some distance, like dead horses; and many like misappearances. 78

Plato is a gownswoman, his garment, though of purple, and almost sky-woven, is an academic robe and hinders action with its voluminous folds. But this mystic is awful to Caesar. Lycurgus himself would

76 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 125.
77 Ibid., p. 125.
bow. The moral insight of Swedenborg, the correction of popular errors, the announcement of ethical laws, take him out of comparison with any other modern writer and entitle him to a place, vacant for some ages, among the lawgivers of mankind. 79

"The vice of Swedenborg's mind is its theologic determination. Nothing with him has the liberality of universal wisdom, but we are always in a church."80 From this vice may be traced all of the defects that Emerson finds in his representative mystic. In Conjugal Love Emerson says that Swedenborg has written a "fine Platonic development of the science of marriage,"31 which fails because of the lack of universality and the Hebraism that distort it. The difference between a poet and a mystic is "that the last nails a symbol to one sense, which was a true sense for a moment, but soon becomes old and false. . . . Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for an universal one."32 Swedenborg, "after his mode,"33 pins his science of marriage to a temporary form in Conjugal Love. By transferring the form and permanence of earthly marriage to the spiritual world, he misinterprets the law. "Heaven," says Emerson, "is not the pairing of two, but the communion of all souls."34

80 Ibid., p. 134. 81 Ibid., p. 127.
82 "The Poet," Works, III, 34.
83 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 128.
84 Ibid.
In his biased and narrowed mental condition, Swedenborg came to hate the intellect. "Though he was aware that truth is not solitary nor is goodness solitary, but both must ever mix and marry, he makes war on his mind, takes the part of the conscience against it, and on all occasions, traduces and blasphemes it."\(^{85}\) Perhaps because of the sins to which men of intellectual bias are liable, "he repudiates to weariness the danger and vice of pure intellect."\(^{86}\) But what is more probable, because of a bias toward thought which he consciously felt in himself, his excessive theological prejudices influenced him at all times to glorify the moral at the expense of the intellectual faculties. Regardless of what the cause may have been, this man who had declared himself a lover of analysis in his "Animal Kingdom," ceased to exercise that blending of the intellectual perception and the moral sentiment which constitute wisdom.\(^{87}\) The redemption of the world depends upon the bringing together of love and perception, Emerson believes. Lovers of goodness and students of wisdom form two distinct classes, not realizing that neither can exist without the other. "Truth is always holy, holiness is always wise. . . .

\(^{85}\)Ibid., pp. 130-131.


\(^{87}\)"The Natural History of Intellect," *Works*, XII, 46.
Accept the intellect, and it will accept us."

The spiritual power of man is twofold, mind and heart, intellect and morals; one respecting truth, the other the will. One is the man, the other the woman in spiritual nature. One is power, the other is love. These elements always coexist in every normal individual, but one predominates. . . . Each has its vices, its proper dangers. . . . But all great minds and all great hearts have mutually allowed the absolute necessity of the twain.

"The high intellect is absolutely at one with moral nature," and Swedenborg's violence to Truth is instantly avenged by a complete loss of Beauty in his writings:

He is wise, but wise in his own despite. There is an air of infinite grief and the sound of wailing all over and through this lurid universe. A vampire sits in the seat of the prophet and turns with gloomy appetite to the images of pain. Indeed, a bird does not more readily weave its nest . . . than this seer of the souls substructs a new hell and pit, each more abominable than the last, round every new crew of offenders.

"Except Rabelais and Dean Swift nobody ever had such a science of filth and corruption." "This man, who, by his perception of symbols, saw the poetic construction of things and the primary relation of mind to matter, remained entirely devoid of the whole apparatus of poetic expression, which that perception creates." His religious books are entirely without melody, emotion, or humor. There is no

89 "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 60-61.
91 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 131.
92 Ibid., p. 132.  
93 Ibid., p. 143.
beauty in his profuse and accurate imagery.\textsuperscript{94}

It is because his "perception of nature is not human and universal, but mystical and Hebraic,"\textsuperscript{95} that Swedenborg fails in his attempt to create his dictionary of correspondences between the physical and spiritual worlds. "He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion. ... A cat means this; an ostrich that. ... The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught. ... In the transmission of the heavenly waters, every hose fits every hydrant."\textsuperscript{96} Swedenborg carries his Hebraism to the extreme of importing so much Oriental vocabulary into his books that it is difficult for even the learned to understand their meaning. "'Tis boyish in Swedenborg to cumber himself with the dead scurf of Hebrew antiquity, as if the divine energy had fainted in his own century."\textsuperscript{97} Even the disputes of the Swedish church intrude themselves into his visions.\textsuperscript{98} Similar lack of universality because of theological narrowness is seen in his cardinal position in morals. He believes that evil should be shunned because it is sin. Emerson maintains that it is the fear of evil that should be shunned. "That pure malignity can exist is the extreme proposition of unbelief.

\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 144. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{95}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{97}"Poetry and Imagination," \textit{Works}, VIII, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{98}"Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," \textit{Works}, IV, 135.
... It is atheism; it is the last profanation."99 "The first lesson of history is the good of evil."100 "Nature converts evil to good."101 Yet Swedenborg believes in devils, and he carries his vindictive Gothic narrowness so far that he will allow no redemption to his evil spirits.102 Emerson thinks that the books of Swedenborg will not always be read. "His laurel is so largely mixed with cypress, a charnel-breath so mingles with the temple incense, that boys and maids will shun the spot."103 But Swedenborg rendered a double service to mankind which cannot be lost, regardless of the faults of the man:

Truth gathers itself spotless and unhurt after all our surrenders and concealments and partisanship -- never hurt by the treachery or ruin of its best defenders, whether Luther, or William Penn, or Saint Paul. . . . The law of gravity is not hurt by every accident, though our leg be broken. No more is the law of justice by our departure from it.104 "The world has a sure chemistry, by which it extracts what is excellent in its children and lets fall the infirmities and limitations of the grandest mind."105 Just as rain falls on the mountains and runs down into the valleys below, "so does thought fall first on the best minds, and run down, from class to class, until it reaches the masses, and

99Ibid., p. 138.
100 "Considerations by the Way," Works, VI, 253.
103 Ibid., p. 144.
works revolutions." 106

Using scientific methods, Swedenborg observed, experimented with, and published laws of physical and of spiritual or moral nature. His work in this field, along with that of others of similar perceptions, effected a reform in natural philosophy and in metaphysics. Emerson finds Swedenborg's second contribution to mankind in the slow advance of the mystic's non-conforming religious ideas to a position of commanding influence over the thought of "an important intellectual class," 107 and in the seepage of these ideas into the thoughts and life of the masses.

Swedenborg . . . announced many things true and admirable, though always clothed in somewhat sad and Stygian colors. These truths, passing out of his system into general circulation, are now met with every day, qualifying the views and creeds of all churches and of men of no church. 108

Swedenborg was a man of vast genius, 109 prodigious mind, 110 and extraordinary perception, 111 but though he possessed the force of many men, he "did not rise to the platform of pure genius." 112 "No man is quite sane; each has a

112 "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 143.
vein of folly in his composition . . . to make sure of holding him hard to some one point nature has taken to heart."113 Though the bias of Emerson's representative mystic held him to the earth and prevented his reaching the heights of beauty and truth in his writings that his abilities seem to indicate as possible, Emerson believes that in Swedenborg's "immolation of genius and fame at the shrine of conscience, is a merit sublime beyond praise. He lived to purpose; he gave a verdict. He elected goodness."114 He planted himself on the side of rectitude and lived and wrote according to his choice. It is primarily because of this decision, and because Swedenborg's life reflects his choice, that Emerson selects him as his representative mystic. Like all men, Swedenborg fails to attain even half of the possibilities of man,115 but in his mystic's self-renunciation and in his stern and incessant demand for virtue among men, Emerson discovers the best modern example of the man of good.

114"Swedenborg; or, The Mystic," Works, IV, 144.
CHAPTER III

MONTAIGNE, THE SCEPTIC

Sceptics and scepticism are a natural outgrowth of the fact that all things possess two faces which are known variously as the infinite and finite, the absolute and relative, the real and apparent, or the abstract and material. "The game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these two sides, to find the other."¹ Because men are born with a predisposition to one or the other of these two faces of nature, there are two classes of men in the world:

One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant with facts and surfaces, cities and persons, and the bringing certain things to pass; — the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius.²

Men of each of these classes are apt to be intolerant of the other type and unduly proud of their own affinity. The man of genius sees the cause behind the effect of which the man of talent is proud. He sees the ideal and belittles the product which the practical man has made of it. On the other hand, the man of action has little interest in causes. He lives in a world of effects and facts and accepts what he

¹"Montaigne; or, The Sceptic," Works, IV, 149.
²Ibid., p. 150.
sees at face value. His is the philosophy of things, of
prudence, and he repays the disdain of genius with scorn.
The sceptic comes to occupy the middle ground between these
two extremes. 3

The wise sceptic sets himself in the balance between the
materialist and the abstractionist. Seeing the faults of
both, he seeks to maintain a position avoiding the excesses
of both. "I see plainly, he says, that I cannot see." 4
Human strength is not in extremes. Why pretend to power
and knowledge we do not possess? There is a human wish for
immortality, but no evidence that it is so. Why not say
just that? Let us suspend judgment; neither affirm nor
deny until there is more evidence. "Who shall forbid a
wise skepticism, seeing that there is no practical question
on which anything more than an approximate solution can be
had?" 5 The value of marriage, of the state, of the church --
all of these are open to serious question. Who would ques-
tion the worth of culture? Yet it kills spontaneity. "A
world in the hand is worth two in the bush." 6 "Let us have
a robust, manly life; let us know what we know, for certain;
what we have, let it be solid and reasonable and our own." 7

The attitude of the true sceptic is not one of univer-
sal doubting or denying, of scoffing and jeering at what is

3Ibid., pp. 150-153. 4Ibid., p. 156.
5Ibid., p. 157. 6Ibid., p. 159.
7Ibid.
stable and good, any more than such is the habit of the priest or the philosopher. Emerson is careful to distinguish the cynic and the scoffer from the sceptic in this essay and in his others. The danger of materialism, he says, is the tendency of the materialist to lapse into a philosophy of "indifferentism" and of disgust toward life. Those touched by this disease of the mind say with "my languid gentleman at Oxford, 'there's nothing new or true, -- and no matter.'" On the other hand, the cynic sums up human nature with, "'Mankind is a damned rascal. . . . The world lives by humbug, and so will I.'" The cynic lives in perpetual, bitter negation, wasting himself and injuring others with his gloomy philosophy. The scepticism of such as these Emerson treats with scant respect: "I do not press the skepticism of the materialist. I know the quadruped opinion will not prevail. 'Tis of no importance what bats and oxen think." Our instinctive recoil from the "slaughter-house style of thinking" we hear in the scepticisms of the barroom and street is proof that such ideas can have no lasting weight.

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8Ibid. 9Ibid., pp. 153-154.
10Ibid., p. 154. 11Ibid.
The true sceptic is one who simply puts on a defensive armor against the known and unknown forces of the universe. He builds his armor to be adaptable to improvement and change and fit to weather the buffeting of the world; then he moves to a position from which he can watch and judge all that is best on the planet. To succeed in this venture, the sceptic must be able to meet two conditions. He must possess a solid, proven means of making a living which will at once furnish him with a livelihood and serve as evidence to his fellow men that he is a success in their world. He must be a "stark and sufficient man, who is not salt or sugar, but sufficiently related to the world to do justice to Paris or London, and, at the same time, a vigorous and original thinker, whom cities can not overawe, but who uses them."15

Though he says that Montaigne is in every respect qualified to stand as his representative sceptic, Emerson admits a more personal reason for selecting him. When he was "newly escaped from college," Emerson found in his father's library an odd volume of Cotton's translation of Montaigne's Essays.16 This first contact with the French sceptic delighted Emerson: "It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke

16Ibid., p. 162.
to my thought and experience." 17 He secured the remainder of the Essays, and during the years that followed, these books, contacts with admirers of Montaigne, and other circumstances caused him to retain his interest in and respect for the Frenchman and his works.

In 1571, when Montaigne was thirty-eight years of age and practicing law in Bordeaux, his father, one of the French landed gentry, died, leaving the young lawyer his estate. Montaigne moved to the country, where he became a successful and assiduous squire.

Though he had been a man of pleasure and sometimes a courtier, his studious habits now grew on him, and he loved the compass, steadiness and independence of the country gentleman's life. . . . Down-right and plain-dealing, and abhorring to be deceived or to deceive, he was esteemed in the country for his sense and probity. 18

The respect in which he was held by all men was demonstrated under the most trying circumstances during the civil wars of the League:

A state of war or anarchy, in which laws have little force, is so far valuable that it puts every man on trial. The man of principle is known as such, and even in the fury of faction is respected. In the civil wars of France, Montaigne alone, among all the French gentry, kept his castle gates unbarred, and made his personal integrity as good as a regiment. 19

"Gibbons reckons, in these bigoted times, but two men of liberality in France, — Henry IV. and Montaigne." 20 Montaigne

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 164.
20 "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 164.
died in 1592. His last act was characteristic of the man.
In conformity with custom he had mass celebrated in his
death-chamber. "Que sais je?" said he, "What do I know?"

Emerson says that the readers of Montaigne have included
the most intelligent and highly placed men of the world.
His works have been translated into all tongues, and there
have been seventy-five European editions of them. "Mono-
taigne is the frankest and honestest of all writers. His
French freedom runs into grossness; but he has anticipated
all censure by the bounty of his own confessions." The
licentiousness of his writing is explained in part by the
fact that he wrote for men only. It is not from viciousness
that he writes thus, says Emerson, but because he wants no
man to think him better than he is. In an essay published
in the Dial in 1841, Emerson is similarly tolerant of the
indecent element in the works of his representative sceptic.
There he compares the coarseness of Walter Savage Landor
with that of Montaigne, saying that the literary licentious-
ness of the former is the result of bitterness, while the
basis of the latter's lack of restraint is humorous honesty;
"Montaigne assigns as a reason for his license of speech that
he is tired of seeing his Essays on the work-tables of la-
dies, and he is determined they shall for the future put them

\[21\] Ibid., p. 169.  \[22\] Ibid., pp. 169-170.
\[23\] Ibid., p. 164.  \[24\] Ibid., p. 165.
out of sight." In a comparison of Plutarch and Montaigne published in 1871, Emerson is slightly less tolerant:

He [Plutarch] perpetually suggests Montaigne, who was the best reader he has ever found, though Montaigne excelled his master in the point and surprise of his sentences. Plutarch had a religion which Montaigne wanted, and which defends him from wantonness; and though Plutarch is as plain-spoken, his moral sentiment is always pure.

Montaigne parades his vices. "But with all this really superfluous frankness, the opinion of an invincible probity grows in every reader's mind." Every one of my virtues, says Montaigne, has in it a tinge of vice, and were Plato so to question his own virtue, he would find it the same.

"Here is an impatience and fastidiousness at color or pretense of any kind." Montaigne found relief from the deceit and formality of the court in mixing with all kinds of men and in getting out of doors on his horse. He took for his motto "an emblematic pair of scales, and wrote Que sais je? under it." He seems to say to the reader:

"I stand here for truth, and will not, for all the states and churches and revenues and personal reputations of Europe, overstate the dry fact, as I see it; I will rather mumble and prose about what I certainly know, -- my house and barns; my father, my wife and my tenants; my old lean bald pate . . . and a hundred straws just as ridiculous . . . . Our condition as men is risky and ticklish enough. . . .

28 Ibid., p. 166.
29 Ibid.
Why should I vapor and play the philosopher, instead of belasting, the best I can, this dancing balloon?"30

"There have been men with deeper insight; but, one would say, never a man with such abundance of thoughts; he is never dull, never insincere."31 His sincerity is reflected in his manner of writing. He treats everything without ceremony, and his language is that spoken by men of all kinds and classes:

Montaigne must have the credit of giving to literature that which we listen for in barrooms, the low speech, -- words and phrases that no scholar coined; street-cries and war-cries; words of the boatman, the farmer and the lord; that have neatness and necessity, through their use in the vocabulary of work and appetite, like the pebbles which the incessant attrition of the sea has rounded. Every historic autobiographic trait authenticating the man adds to the value of the book. We can't afford to take the horse out of the Essays; it would take the rider too.32

Montaigne is shrewd and knows the world and books and himself. Only in writing of Socrates does he show marked emotion. He indulges in no superlative; "his writing has no enthusiasm, no aspiration; contented, self-respecting and keeping to the middle of the road."33

Montaigne is one of the simple and great characters "marked by absence of pretension and by understatement,"34

30Ibid., pp. 166-167. 31Ibid., p. 168.
33"Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 169.
34"The Superlative," Works, X, 175.
one of the sturdy, superior individualists whose speech is characterized by "directness, truth spoken more truly, as if everything of obstruction, of malformation, had been trained away." Common sense, probity, sincerity, and honesty are the characteristics of the life and works of Montaigne that Emerson finds most appealing. Emerson never deviates from his insistence upon these homely virtues as the foundation of character:

In this kingdom of illusions we grope eagerly for stays and foundations. There is none but a strict and faithful dealing at home and a severe barring out of all duplicity or illusion there. Whatever games are played with us, we must play no games with ourselves, but deal in our privacy with the last honesty and truth. I look upon the simple and childish virtues of veracity and honesty as the root of all that is sublime in character. Speak as you think, be what you are, pay your debts of all kinds. . . . This reality is the foundation of friendship, religion, poetry and art. 36

"Common sense is as rare as genius, -- is the basis of genius"; 37 it is "the mark of all valid minds." 38 It is the quality that we admire in Aristotle, Cervantes, Montaigne, Samuel Johnson, and Franklin. 39 One feels Emerson's sympathetic understanding of his sceptic throughout the essay, and it is this down-to-earth soundness of the Frenchman that makes any bond between two so different men.

36 "Illusions," Works, VI, 322-323.
possible. It is inevitable, however, that Emerson should find this earthiness inadequate: In the last analysis, "skepticism is unbelief in cause and effect." Montaigne serves well in his function as a sceptic, but he cannot reach the heights:

Montaigne kills off bigots as a cowhage kills worms; but there is a higher muse there sitting where he durst not soar, of eye so keen that it can report of a realm in which all the wit and learning of the Frenchman is no more than the cunning of a fox.

"We are natural believers. Truth, or the connection between cause and effect, alone interests us. . . . We love whatever affirms, connects, preserves; and dislike what scatters or pulls down." We want to believe that all things and events are strung on a thread of law, and any book or statement which tends to show that there is no such thread, no purpose or central direction in life, dispirits us. We will support and approve of even the inferior leader who promises order and stability. We dislike the nonconformist who would tear down the existing order and yet has no adequate structure to put in its place. Men rightly "reject the reformer so long as he comes only with axe and crowbar."

40 "Worship," Works, VI, 220.
42 "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 170.
43 Ibid., p. 171.
But though we are natural believers in causation and by nature conservative, every superior mind will, at some time, pass through a period of scepticism. The value of this period is that it gives the individual practice in the weapons available for use "against the exaggeration and formalism of bigots and blockheads." The sceptic occupies the vestibule of the temple, and from that point of vantage, he criticizes the existing order:

Society does not like to have any breath of question blown on the existing order, but the interrogation of customs at all points is an inevitable stage in the growth of every superior mind, and is the evidence of its perception of the flowing power which remains itself in all stages.  

"The superior mind will find itself equally at odds with the evils of society and with the projects that are offered to relieve them. The wise skeptic is a bad citizen." He sees the evils in commerce, in institutions, and in politics, but he sees as well the faults of those who would correct the evils. "He does not wish to take the ground against these benevolences . . . to blazon every doubt and sneer that darkens the sun for him. But he says, There are doubts."  

Emerson's emphasis upon self-trust, individualism, and nonconformity, tempered by "self-reliance," is constant throughout his essays. In so far as his description of the

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.  \(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 172.  

\(^{46}\) Ibid.  \(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 173.
wise sceptic is applied to his beliefs relative to nonconformity in matters of politics, religion, and institutions, that description may be said to describe Emerson's own beliefs as stated in his essays. Certainly if ever a "natural believer" existed, he is one. He lived within the temple in the sense that he always accepted and preached the universality of beneficent Deity in the universe, but he never compromised in his insistence upon the necessity for individual nonconformity. "We pray to be conventional. But the wary Heaven takes care you shall not be, if there is anything good in you." 48

We accept the religions and politics into which we fall, and it is only a few delicate spirits who are sufficient to see that the whole web of convention is the imbecility of those whom it entangles, -- that the mind suffers no religion and no empire but its own. 49

"Self-Reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God." 50 But man's access to God is through the intuition, and the self-reliant man still must act, therefore, as his individual conscience and inspiration direct. "Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but


what they thought."51 One must not seek to please others: "Adhere to your own act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken the monotony of a decorous age."52

Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. . . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution; the only wrong what is against it.53

The moral sentiment, which Emerson believes is strictly an intuition, is the judge of all systems of religion, philanthropy, and politics. Religious forms, which were once moral because they were designed to correct evils existing in society at the time of their inception, become meaningless formalities with the passage of years. "The moral sentiment is the perpetual critic of these forms."54 The minister of a church is a paid attorney, obligated to speak not for himself but for his party only.55 Greater self-reliance will do away with creeds and churches, which are a disease of the intellect in that they interpose an intermediary

54"Character," Works, X, 103.
between man's soul and God. Philanthropy should be gov-
erned by the individual case and the judgment of the indi-
vidual giver:

There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual
affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to
prison if need be; but your miscellaneous popular
charities; the education at college of fools; the
building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which
many now stand; alms to ills, and the thousand-fold
Relief Societies; -- though I confess with shame I
sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a wicked
dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to
withhold. Democracy is no better than other systems of government; it
is only better for us and in accord with the spirit of the
age. In actual practice it is defective. "Every actual
state is corrupt. Good men must not obey the laws too
well." "For nonconformity the world whips you with its
displeasure," but the self-reliant man will learn that
"society never advances," that "not in time is the race pro-
gressive," that for every gain by a given civilization,
there is a compensating loss. When man has ceased to rely
upon property and upon the government that protects it, he
will be strong because he stands self-reliantly upon his own
two feet.

56Ibid., pp. 79-80. 57Ibid., p. 52.
60Ibid., pp. 84-86. 61Ibid., pp. 87-89.
The foregoing illustrations show that Emerson has no quarrel with the material aspects of scepticism. The falsity of the philosophy of Montaigne and other sceptics, he says, is to be found in the three negations of their theory. The first of these Emerson calls the levity of the intellect. "Knowledge is the knowing that we can not know," contends the sceptic. "The dull pray; the geniuses are light mockers."62 All direct ascension, all the visions of saints, have led to the discovery by these holy men that their faith was false; they learned "that the universe is a nest of boxes with nothing in the last box."63 "They found the ark empty; saw, and would not tell."64 Instead, they turned to the reviled intellect in order to invent plausibilities to lead their followers away from their new and dangerous knowledge. This negation Emerson answers by simply stating his belief that the intellect and the moral sentiment are the same. He is not concerned with the truth or falsity of charges levied by sceptics against institutionalized religion. Though the intellectual scepticism of Goethe, Byron, and others of the nineteenth century may have caused a great flutter among the churches, Emerson says that such ecclesiastical excitement might well arise over matters which came "very far from

touching any principle of faith." 65 "God builds his temple in the heart-on the ruins of churches and religions." 66 "I think that the wiser a man is, the more stupendous he finds the natural and moral economy, and lifts himself to a more absolute reliance." 67

The second stand of scepticism is that man's opinions and faith are at the mercy of his rapidly changing moods and emotions, which are governed, in turn, by fate or circumstances. The individual starts a day full of faith in the unlimited power of his will; a new circumstance acts upon him; his common sense takes control, and he acknowledges fate as the ruler of the universe and the law of self-interest as the best guide for individual and international behavior. 68

The word Fate, or Destiny, expresses the sense of mankind, in all ages, that the laws of the world do not always befriend, but often hurt and crush us... We paint Time with a scythe; Love and Fortune, blind; and Destiny, deaf. 69

What can we do to change our inheritance? How can we change the effects of disease, climate, or barbarism?

In "Experience" Emerson explains that the changing of moods is only the workings of the law which necessitates change and causes progress. 70 But neither in that essay nor

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65 Ibid., p. 175. 66 "Worship," Works, VI, 204.
67 "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 175.
68 Ibid., p. 176. 69 Ibid., p. 177.
elsewhere does he attempt to deny the local, individual, or momentary ill effects of circumstances and moods. He suggests instead that one look to the general average over longer periods of time to find the prevailing international and individual trends and results of moods and opinions. 71

Of course it needs the whole of society to give the symmetry we seek. The party-colored wheel must revolve very fast to appear white. Something is earned too by conversing with so much folly and deceit. In fine, whoever loses, we are always of the gaining party. Divinity is behind our failures and follies also. 72

So far as the law of self-interest is concerned, Emerson acknowledges its power and influence, accepts it as part of the divine law, and says that since it is such, it must be reconciled with 'aspirations the best I can.' 73

In "Fate" he gives full respect to the limitation of circumstance and admits "it is of no use to try to whitewash its huge, mixed instrumentalities, or to dress up that terrific benefactor in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student of divinity." 74 Fate is completely impersonal, and "when each comes forth from his mother's womb, the gate of gifts closes behind him." 75 "But Fate has its lord; limitation its limits. . . . For though Fate is immense, so is Power." 76 Thought and the moral sentiment are the measure

71 "Montaigne; or, the Skeptic," Works, IV, 176.
72 "Experience," Works, III, 57.
73 "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 177.
74 "Fate," Works, VI, 8.
75 Ibid., p. 11.
76 Ibid., p. 22.
of power and of individual freedom from the limitations of nature. "Just as much intellect as you add, so much organic power. . . . A breath of will blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of Right and Necessary."77 Both thought and the moral sentiment are intuitions, influxes from Deity itself, and they annul fate by uniting man spiritually with the power which creates limitation:

To offset the drag of temperament and race, which pulls down, learn this lesson, namely, that by the cunning co-presence of two elements, which is throughout nature, whatever lames or paralyzes you draws in with it the divinity, in some form, to repay. A good intention clothes itself with sudden power. When a god wishes to ride, any chip or pebble will bud and shoot out winged feet and serve him for a horse.78 Divine law rules existence. It gives life to nature, and it is beyond our understanding, but it "solicits the pure in heart to draw on all its omnipotence."79 "Temperament is the veto or limitation-power in the constitution, very justly applied to restrain an opposite excess in the constitution, but absurdly offered as a bar to original equity."80 Temperament is omnipotent in the sphere of nature: "Given such an embryo, such a history will follow."81 But if one should accept this material limitation as the ultimate power, he would sink into a "sty of sensualism, and would

soon come to suicide."\(\text{82}\) There exists in every man a door through which he may rise above nature. One whisper through the intellect or heart and the individual can never live on the sensual level again.\(\text{83}\)

But the main negation of the sceptic, and the one that includes all others, is found in the doctrine of the Illusionists, who would deprive man of his will. All of the persons, events, and actions in our lives leave us exactly as we were, say adherents of this school of thought. Yet our lives are made up entirely of these circumstances. "In fact we may come to accept it as the fixed rule and theory of our state of education, that God is substance, and his method is illusion."\(\text{84}\) It is impossible to reconcile the practice of life with the theory of the ideal. Reason, the prized exhibit and reality of the spiritual man, appears so seldom as to have little or no weight in the over-all scheme of things. "So vast is the disproportion between the sky of law and the mismire of performance under it," that it cannot be very important whether a man be a sot or a man of worth.\(\text{85}\) The individual is simply so much bone and fibre, and it does not matter whether this avoid duplois was gained by good means or bad. "Men are strangely mistimed and misapplied; and the excellence of each is an inflamed individualism."\(\text{86}\)

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\(\text{82}\) Ibid.  
\(\text{83}\) Ibid., p. 55.  
\(\text{84}\) "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," Works, IV, 178.  
\(\text{85}\) Ibid., p. 179.  
\(\text{86}\) Ibid.
These things being evident all about us and an integral part of our lives, question Montaigne and the sceptics, are we then to say there are no doubts simply because of a desire to be virtuous men? "Is life to be led in a brave or in a cowardly manner? and is not the satisfaction of doubts essential to all manliness? Is the name of virtue to be a barrier to that which is virtuous?" 87 Is it not possible that a man should require more than essays and catechism to convince him of things which are against the evidence of his senses?

"Belief," replies Emerson, "consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; unbelief, in denying them." 88 Some men are incapable of scepticism. "Others there are to whom the heaven is brass, and it shuts down to the surface of the earth. It is a question of temperament, or of more or less immersion in nature." 89

The difference between men is in their principle of association. Some men classify objects by color and size and other accidents of appearance; others by intrinsic likeness, or by the relation of cause and effect. The progress of the intellect is to the clearer vision of causes, which neglect surface differences. To the poet, to the philosopher, to the saint, all things are friendly and sacred, all events profitable, all days holy, all men divine. 90

The man of the earth or senses has a parasitic sort of

87Ibid., p. 180.  
88Ibid.  
89Ibid., p. 181.  
90"History," Works, II, 12.
faith, which is reliance on authority and not true faith at all.\textsuperscript{91} Such a man believes in the realities told and shown him by the man of spirit. But the true believer inevitably advances from his old position to new perceptions, while the man of the senses remains fixed to the old, and so it comes to pass in time that "the unbeliever, for love of belief, burns the believer."\textsuperscript{92}

"Great believers are always reckoned infidels, impracticable, fantastic, atheistic, and really men of no account. The spiritualist finds himself driven to express his faith by a series of skepticisms."\textsuperscript{93} He is always forced to speak against the projects of those who seek his advice. Even in matters of spiritual doctrines, he finds that he cannot completely agree with his neighbors:

But he denies out of more faith, and not less. He denies out of honesty. He had rather stand charged with the imbecility of skepticism, than with untruth. I believe, he says, in the moral design of the universe; it exists hospitably for the weal of souls; but your dogmas seem to me caricatures; why should I make believe them?\textsuperscript{94}

This is not a cold and infidel attitude; rather it is the abandoning to the adversary of all of the support of tradition and popular belief in a far-sighted faith in the essential strength of his cause.

\textsuperscript{91}"The Over-Soul," \textit{Works}, II, 295.
\textsuperscript{92}"Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," \textit{Works}, IV, 181.
\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 182.
"The final solution in which skepticism is lost, is in the moral sentiment, which never forfeits its supremacy."95 The man of thought may safely play with all of the superficialities of skepticism, for eventually he will see that the world is filled with and controlled by deity and law and that all which seems to the contrary is sensual and untrue. Then skepticism becomes impossible. It has been said that "every desire predicts its own satisfaction."96 Although every man feels the yawning difference between the aspirations of his soul and the accomplishments that are permitted by the limitations of nature, this is a true law. Its truth, and all truth, may be seen by larger generalizations. One must believe the evidence of the centuries against that of the present hour. One must penetrate the particular or individual effect to find its universal cause. "The appearance is immoral; the result is moral."97 Everywhere about us we see the elevation of knaves over better men. The control of government seems to pass from the hands of one set of rogues into that of another as bad. "The march of civilization is a train of felonies, -- yet, general ends are somehow answered. . . . Through the years and the centuries . . . a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams."98

95Ibid., p. 183.  
96Ibid., p. 184.  
97Ibid., p. 185.  
98Ibid., pp. 185-186.
Man is drawn along in this stream. He is here, "not to work but to be worked upon." All is contained at last in the Eternal Cause.

Emerson's answer to the third negation is, in effect, that the highest type of man is not a sceptic, or if he be a sceptic at the moment, the phase will pass when his normal faith returns. He has dealt with all of the arguments of the Illusionists in his essay, "Illusions," and elsewhere. He simply does not repeat his arguments here. In "Illusions" he pictures all of nature and mankind in league to hide by the multiplicity of things and events the correspondence of material and spiritual laws and the fundamental unity of all things:

We are coaxed, flattered and duped from morn to eve, from birth to death; and where is the old eye that ever saw through the deception? ... Seldom and slowly the mask falls and the pupil is permitted to see that all is one stuff, cooked and painted under many counterfeit appearances.

The final and complete answer to doubts of all sorts he always finds in the intuitions of the moral sentiment and in the workings of its physical correspondent, the law of amelioration.

To say then, the majority are wicked, means no malice, no bad heart in the observer, but simply that the majority are unripe, and have not yet come to themselves, do not yet know their opinion. ..., But in the passing moment the quadruped interest is very prone to prevail; and this beast-force, whilst

99 Ibid., p. 186.

it makes the discipline of the world, the school of heroes, the glory of martyrs, has provoked in every age the satire of wits and the tears of good men. They find the journals, the clubs, the government, the churches, to be in the interest and pay of the devil.101

Why, asks Emerson, should we seek to hide the ugly facts of life when God has not glossed over disease, deformity, or corrupt society? There is a counter-statement which will balance all such apparent evil. The doctrine of faith is not outweighed by any amount of leaning to the side of fate, worldly power, or trade.

Nor do I fear skepticism for any good soul. A just thinker will allow full swing to his skepticism. I dip my pen in the blackest ink, because I am not afraid of falling into my inkpot. . . . We are of different opinions at different hours, but we always may be said to be at heart on the side of truth. 102

"We may well give skepticism as much line as we can. The spirit will return and fill us. It drives the drivers. It counterbalances any accumulations of power. . . . We are born loyal."103 "We are born believing. A man bears belief as a tree bears apples."104 The sceptic will find proof of the falsity of his doubts within his own soul.

101 "Considerations by the Way," Works, VI, 252.
104 Ibid., p. 203.
CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE, THE POET

Not originality but receptivity is the mark of poetic genius. "The greatest genius is the most indebted man," says Emerson. ¹

Great genial power, one would almost say, consists in not being original at all; in being altogether receptive, in letting the world do all, and suffering the spirit of the hour to pass unobstructed through the mind. ²

The great man is not unlike other men, ³ except that he is more sensitive to the needs and thoughts of his times. "There is no choice to genius. . . . He finds himself in the river of thoughts and events, forced onward by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries." ⁴ Working within this current of national feeling and history, the genius discovers that all mankind is working and has worked to prepare the materials which he uses. But should the great man seek to accomplish anything outside of this trend of his time, "he would have to do all for himself; his powers would be expended in the first preparation." ⁵ God "will not have any individual great, except through the general." ⁶

¹ "Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Werke, IV, 189.
² Ibid., p. 191. ³ Ibid., p. 189. ⁴ Ibid., p. 190.
⁵ Ibid., p. 191. ⁶ Ibid., pp. 189-190.
With the above as an introduction, Emerson proceeds to show how the drama of Shakespeare was an integral part of his times. The Elizabethan poet lived during a period in English history when, in spite of opposition from powerful groups, dramatic entertainment flourished simply because the people of England wanted it. The stage was a national interest. Shakespeare needed to waste no time in preparation. His audience awaited him, and the material upon which he was to work existed already in plays which had been the subject of drama for so many years that they were, like street ballads, a part of the national life and tradition of the period. Since he used these plays as a basis for his dramas, Shakespeare owes debts "in all directions," and has been charged with lack of originality. In "Quotation and Originality" Emerson quotes with approval Landor's reply to critics who had attacked Shakespeare's borrowing: "'Yet he [Shakespeare] was more original than his originals. He breathed upon dead bodies and brought them into life."

Shakespeare's so-called lack of originality is actually proof of his genius, for the poet realized that "tradition supplies a better fable than any invention can." Emerson

7Ibid., pp. 191-192.  
8Ibid., pp. 193-194.  
9Ibid., p. 195.  
10"Quotation and Originality," Works, VIII, 191.  
is convinced that "thought is the property of him who can entertain it and of him who can adequately place it." He implies that Shakespeare was fortunate to live in illiterate times, when audiences were not critical and the modern demand for originality did not plague the writer. The great men may draw in thought from any source without compunction, the essayist feels, because the ultimate source of all thought is the same:

It is easy to see that what is best written or done by genius in the world, was no man's work, but came by wide social labor, when a thousand wrought like one, sharing the same impulse. . . . And the generic catholic genius who is not afraid or ashamed to owe his originality to the originality of all, stands with the next age as the recorder and embodiment of his own.

The exhaustive efforts of the Shakespeare Society to unearth facts about the life of the poet have met with small success because the genius of Shakespeare was not recognized by his age. "A popular player; -- nobody suspected he was the poet of the human race; and the secret was kept as faithfully from poets and intellectual men as from courtiers and frivolous people." Apparently, the dramatist lived the normal life of an actor and manager, a life which Emerson thinks in no wise explains the genius of Shakespeare. "Shakespeare is the only biographer of Shakespeare; and even

\[12^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ p. 198.}\]
\[13^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ p. 197.}\]
\[14^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ pp. 199-201.}\]
\[15^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ p. 202.}\]
\[16^{\text{Ibid.}}, \text{ p. 206.}\]
he can tell nothing, except to the Shakspeare in us, that is, to our most apprehensive and sympathetic hour." 17 "Yet, with Shakspeare for the biographer, . . . we have really the information which is material." 18 In the poet's works he has left us his convictions upon every pertinent question, and "so far from Shakspeare's being the least known, he is the one person, in all modern history, known to us." 19

Having disposed of the above more or less external and introductory matters, Emerson enters into a discussion of Shakespeare's place as a poet. He accepts without question the fact that the Elizabethan is the best dramatist the world has produced, but he says that this dramatic talent of Shakespear's is of secondary importance. What Shakespeare has to say makes the medium he uses to say it unimportant. In effect, the greatness of his genius is the measure of the extent of his responsibility; therefore, the dramatist must be judged also as a poet and a philosopher. "He was a full man, who liked to talk; a brain exhaling thoughts and images, which, seeking vent, found the drama next at hand." 20 That Shakespeare used the dramatic form to express his genius is the result of circumstance; it is the genius that is important:

17Ibid., p. 208.  
18Ibid.  
19Ibid., p. 209.  
He is like some saint whose history is to be rendered into all languages, into verse and prose, into songs and pictures, and cut up into proverbs; so that the occasion which gave the saint's meaning the form of a conversation, or of a prayer, or of a code of laws, is immaterial compared with the universality of its application. . . . And the importance of this wisdom of life sinks the form, as of Drama or Epic, out of notice. 'Tis like making a question concerning the paper on which a king's message is written.21

Since Emerson presents Shakespeare as his representative poet and goes to some pains to say that he must be judged as such, it becomes necessary to determine the Emersonian conception of a poet, his function and his characteristics. No definition of what Emerson meant by the word "poet" is to be found in the essay on Shakespeare. Elsewhere the essayist says that a poet is a man capable of receiving and transmitting the influxes of the Creator with equal facility.22 What Emerson says about the poet in the Essays may be grouped under the qualities of expression or reception. The poet must see the truth and report it.23 In Emerson's Trinity of Knower, Doer, and Sayer, the poet represents the last named emanation of the Universal Spirit and stands for the love of Beauty:24

The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. For the world is not painted or adorned, but is from

21Ibid., pp. 210-211.
24See p. 21, this thesis.
the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right.\textsuperscript{25}

We have seen that Truth, Goodness, and Beauty are to be regarded as identical in essence. They are the emanation of God which pervades the soul of every man, but in the thought and action of the individual man the emanation assumes primarily one form or another according to the bias of the individual. God is Beauty, and man can no more isolate or define, or understand this aspect of the divinity than he can the entity in which it exists. Individual material objects possess beauty in the measure that they suggest the all-inclusive whole of which they are an incarnation.\textsuperscript{26} The poet is given the power to perceive and express this relationship of the real to the ideal, of matter to spirit, of the part to the whole, and in so doing, he shows the beauty of both:

For it is dislocation and detachment from the life of God that makes things ugly; the poet who re-attaches things to nature and the whole, -- re-attaching even artificial things and violations of nature, to nature, by a deeper insight, -- disposes very easily of the most disagreeable facts.\textsuperscript{27}

This power to express beauty is art, for Emerson defines art as "the conscious utterance of thought, by speech or

\textsuperscript{25}"The Poet," \textit{Works}, III, 7.

\textsuperscript{26}"Michael Angelo," \textit{Works}, XII, 218.

\textsuperscript{27}"The Poet," \textit{Works}, III, 18.
action, to any end." Such conscious speech or action has for its purpose either use or beauty, because "the Spirit, in its creation, aims at use or beauty," and for that reason, all of man's conscious activity may be divided into either useful or fine art. All art, Emerson thinks, "must be a complement to nature, strictly subsidiary." In the useful arts the truth of this principle may be observed in the success of architectural structures patterned upon some form existing in nature and in the failure of any such construction which violates the natural laws of physics. The same rule is evident in the fine arts:

"The power of Nature predominates over the human will in all works of even the fine arts, in all that respects their material and external circumstances." Although Emerson has much more to say about poets and poetry in his essays than about other kinds of artists or fine arts, it is evident that he accepted men other than

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30 *Ibid.*, p. 43. The fine arts are listed here as music, eloquence, poetry, painting, sculpture, and architecture.  
poets in his classification of those whose aim is the creation and interpretation of beauty. He selects Shakespeare as his representative artist, but he calls Michael Angelo, who dedicated his life to the expression of "the idea of Beauty" in four fine arts, "the perfect image of the artist." Actually, Emerson feels that all men belong in this group, for he says that every man is to some extent a poet. And though it is "true that the stratification of crusts in geology is not more precise than the degrees of rank in minds," the disparities of power in men are superficial:

Let a clear, apprehensive mind, such as every man knows among his friends, converse with the most commanding poetic genius, I think it would appear that there was no inequality such as men fancy, between them, . . . and the poet would confess that his creative imagination gave him no deep advantage, but only the superficial one that he could express himself and the other could not; that his advantage was a knack.

Every man possesses such a knack, "some shining trait of beauty or utility"; each has "some triumphant superiority, some adaptation of fingers or ear or eye or ciphering or pugilistic or musical or literary craft." And regardless

35 "Michael Angelo," Works, XII, 216.
37 "Greatness," Works, VIII, 312; see also "Aristocracy," Works, X, 47.
39 Ibid., p. 281.
of the nature of this talent, every man has equal access
to the original source of all wisdom and beauty, the Over-
Soul. 42 "The difference between persons is ... in art." 43
The special talent given to individual men is thus pre-
destined, but because "man has access to the entire mind of
the Creator," 44 the scope of each individual's use of his
talent is almost unlimited. 45 The original impulse behind
each work of art is the same:

Herein is the explanation of the analogies,
which exist in all the arts. They are the reap-
pearance of one mind working in many materials to
many temporary ends. Raphael paints wisdom, Handel
sings it, Phidias carves it, Shakespeare writes it,
Wren builds it, Columbus sails it, Luther preaches
it, Washington arms it, Watt mechanizes it. Painting
was called 'silent poetry,' and poetry 'speaking
painting.' 46

Artists differ externally only in the material in which
each works, for "every work of art is a more or less pure
manifestation" of the Universal Spirit. 47 Emerson says
that an inspired humility is an essential quality of the man
who would create: "The law is this. The universal soul is
alone the creator of the useful and beautiful; therefore to
make anything useful or beautiful the individual must be
subtracted to the universal mind." 48

44 "Nature," Works, I, 64.
47 Ibid., p. 51.
48 Ibid., p. 40.
The artist . . . must work in the spirit in which we conceive a prophet to speak, or an angel of the Lord to act; that is, he is not to speak his own words, or do his own works, or think his own thoughts, but he is to be an organ through which the universal mind acts. . . . The wonders of Shakespeare are things which he saw whilst he stood aside, and then returned to record them. 49

When the individual surrenders his will to the Universal Spirit and thus becomes an accurate receptor of divine emanations, he achieves a corresponding sensitivity to the needs and thoughts of mankind. Since the over-all influence upon any given period of history is that of the Creator, sensitivity to the trend of human thought and action implies reception of the divine will. Hence Emerson says that "the chief difference between man and man is a difference of impressionability" 50 and that to be great the individual must represent all humanity. 51

The height of culture, the highest behavior, consists in the identification of the Ego with the universe; so that when a man says I hope, I find, I think, he might properly say, The human race thinks or finds or hopes. 52

When this two-fold sensitivity appears in the art of an individual, that art takes on the property of universality. When Emerson writes that the works of Shakespeare are so subtle as to be "only just within the possibility of authorship," 53 or that Shakespeare "has no discoverable

49Ibid., pp. 48-49. 50 "Success," Works, VII, 301.
51 "Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 189-190.
52 "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 62.
53 "Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 212.
egotism, he means that the individual personality of the dramatist is so subjected to the influence of the Universal Soul that the identity of the poet all but disappears. Shakespeare's individual talent and bias, his personal opinions and prejudices, do not appear in his writings. Not Shakespeare, but humanity seems to be the author of the plays. The spiritual basis of Shakespeare's greatness is founded upon his capacity as a channel through which the divinity speaks. This receptive universality is also the source of the representative poet's unprecedented and inspired wisdom.

Thought is spontaneous, a miracle which flows into the individual consciousness direct from the universal mind. While it exists inactively in the individual mind (and it exists equally in every mind), thought is called instinct. Put into action, instinct becomes inspiration. The art of the inspired man may be recognized by the fact that he arrives at the old universal ends by new means and that the new means are "as good as the end." Shakespeare, Emerson says, expresses ageless universal truths, using beautiful and accurate new combinations of symbols; "his means are as

54 Ibid., pp. 212-213; also 215. 55 Ibid., p. 212.
57 "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 66.
58 Ibid., pp. 65-68. 59 Ibid., p. 71.
60 Ibid., p. 42.
admirable as his ends." 61 A second proof of the authenticity of his representative poet's wisdom Emerson finds in the fact that Shakespeare and his works are inexplicable to the modern reader of the plays now that Shakespeare "cannot step from off his tripod and give us anecdotes of his inspiration." 62

Emerson says that much which passes for wisdom in the world is not wisdom because it is the expression of talent rather than inspiration, 63 and though he insists that no man can be wise at all times, 64 the essayist calls Shakespeare the wisest man who has lived and left a record:

Shakespeare is as much out of the category of eminent authors, as he is out of the crowd. He is inconceivably wise; the others conceivably. A good reader can, in a sort, nestle into Plato's brain and think from hence; but not into Shakespeare's. We are still out of doors. 65

The wisdom of all true men of genius is universal rather than individual. It consists in "a larger imbibing of the common heart," of being rather more than less like other men. 66 In "The Over-Soul" Emerson calls the wisdom of great poets "wisdom of humanity"; in his essay on Shakespeare he

65 "Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 211-212.
calls it "wisdom of life" and "omnipresent humanity." But whatever the terminology used, he believes that inspired and universal wisdom is an attribute of all truly great poets:

There is in all great poets a wisdom of humanity which is superior to any talents they exercise. . . . Humanity shines in Homer, in Chaucer, in Spenser, in Shakespeare, in Milton. They are content with the truth. They use the positive degree. They seem frigid and phlegmatic to those who have been spiced with the frantic passion and violent coloring of inferior but popular writers. For they are poets by the free course which they allow to the informing soul, which through their eyes beholds again and blesses the things which it hath made. . . . Shakespeare carries us to such lofty strains of intelligent activity as to suggest a wealth which beggars his own. . . . The inspiration which uttered itself in Hamlet and Lear could utter things as good from day to day for ever.

Unless inspired, wisdom is fallible and human rather than universal and divine; therefore, Emerson says that inspiration or silence is the rule of poetry. "The poet works to an end above his will, and by means, too, which are out of his will. . . . The muse may be defined, Supervoluntary ends effected by supervoluntary means." "The universal nature, too strong for the petty nature of the bard, sits on his neck and writes through his hand. . . . Hence Plato said that 'poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves

67"Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 212.


70"The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 71-72.
understand.  By voluntarily setting aside his own personality and becoming an almost perfect receiver of divine
class, Shakespeare attains a relationship to the Divine
Spirit similar to that of any object in nature. As a result,
his works have the effortless harmony and irresistible power
of expression. In addition to receptive qualities the
poet must possess the ability to transmit the divine thought
and wisdom which pour into his consciousness. Poetry and
poetic expression depend upon the faculty of imagination,
a faculty which all men possess in more or less degree.
Imagination, says Emerson, "is the vision of an inspired
soul reading arguments and affirmations in all Nature of
that which it is driven to see."  

71"History," Works, II, 34.
72"Shakspeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 213.
74Ibid., p. 56; also "The Poet," Works, III, 30.
Poetry is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of the thing, to pass the brute body and search the life and reason which causes it to exist; -- to see that the object is always flowing away, whilst the spirit or necessity which causes it subsists. . . .

The term 'genius,' when used with emphasis, implies imagination; use of symbols, figurative speech. The deep insight will always, like Nature, ultimate its thought in a thing.76

Imagination is the mental power which enables man to perceive that man, nature, all material things are but tropes or symbols of spirit.77 It reveals that "nature is the incarnation of a thought, and turns to thought again, as ice becomes water and gas, [that] the world is mind precipitated, and the volatile essence is forever escaping again into the state of free thought."78 It is the imagination which shows that the "world exists for thought"79 and that contrary to appearance, material things are in a constant state of flux, while spirit or thought is fixed.80 Another "feast of the imagination is in showing the convertibility of everything into every other thing."81

Emerson says that no man can imagine better than Shakespeare.82 Many men attain skill in writing verses, but the

76Ibid., p. 17. 77Ibid., p. 19.
81"Beauty," Works, VI, 304.
82"Shakespeare; or, The Poet," Works, IV, 212.
earthly, uninspired basis of their words cannot be disguised. In Shakespeare's mind what was once experience or material has been assimilated by his imagination and has "gone quite over to the new element of thought." The locality of the Midsummer Night's Dream, the Forest of Arden, "the antres vast and deserts idle" of Othello's captivity" cannot now be determined because the physical settings have passed through the magic of the poet's imagination. "For creation, Shakespeare is unique. . . . He clothed the creatures of his legend with form and sentiments as if they were people who had lived under his roof; and few real men have left such distinct characters as these fictions." "The humor of Falstaff, the terror of Macbeth, have each their swarm of fit thoughts and images, as if Shakespeare had known and reported the men, instead of inventing them at his desk." The Elizabethan's powers of imagination give him all nature to act as the symbols of his thought;

The imagination may be defined to be the use which the Reason makes of the material world. Shakspeare possesses the power of subordinating nature to the purposes of expression, beyond all other poets. His imperial muse tosses the creation like a bauble from hand to hand, and uses it to embody any caprice of thought that is uppermost in his mind. . . . We are made aware that magnitude of material things is relative, and all objects shrink and expand to serve the passion of the poet. . . .

The perception of real affinities between events (that is to say, of ideal affinities, for those only

83Ibid., p. 215. 84Ibid., pp. 206-207. 85Ibid., p. 212.
86"Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 44.
are real), enables the poet thus to make free with the most imposing forms and phenomena of the world, and to assert the predominance of the soul.87

Inspired by the Creator and blessed with superlative imagination, Shakespeare possessed also the talent necessary to express the products of his faculties and thoughts. Emerson does not value the man who cannot use his powers; genius must be both receptive and constructive:

To genius must always go two gifts, the thought and the publication. The first is revelation, always a miracle. . . . It is the advent of truth into the world, a form of thought now for the first time bursting into the universe, a child of the old eternal soul, a piece of genuine and immeasurable greatness. . . . But to make it available it needs a vehicle or art by which it is conveyed to men. To be communicable it must become picture or sensible object. . . . The thought of genius is spontaneous; but the power of picture or expression, in the most enriched and flowing nature, implies a mixture of will, a certain control over the spontaneous states, without which no production is possible.88

"Genius is not a lazy angel contemplating itself and things. It is insatiable for expression. Thought must take the stupendous step of passing into realization. A master can formulate his thought."89

Since inspiration and imagination are properties of all types of genius, it is essentially this talent of expression in terms of words which sets Shakespeare and other poets apart from other men of great talent. Emerson says that

89"The Natural History of Intellect," *Works*, XII, 43.
"all men are poets at heart," but "some men, namely poets, are natural sayers, sent into the world to the end of expression." Shakespeare's "principal merit may be conveyed in saying that he of all men best understands the English language, and can say what he will." Without this talent the man is no poet:

The poet, like the electric rod, must reach from a point nearer the sky than all surrounding objects, down to the earth, and into the dark, wet soil, or neither is of use. The poet must not only converse with pure thought, but he must demonstrate it almost to the senses. His words must be pictures, his verses must be spheres and cubes, to be seen and smelled and handled. His fable must be a good story, and its meaning must hold as pure truth.

"Fit expression is so rare that mankind have a superstitious value for it, and to the most expressive man that has existed, namely, Shakespeare, they have awarded the highest place."

The poet's mode of expression, poetry, is the attempt to express the beauty or soul of things; therefore, it "runs into fable, personifies every fact." The poet speaks in terms of parable and symbol because he sees, as others do not, that each object or fact is the symbol of a thought,

and by so using the fact, he shows its relation to all other facts and to spirit. Emerson calls this verbal transmutation of matter into thought representation. He says that the possession of perfect powers of representation makes Shakespeare the prototype of a new and improved species of man:

This power of expression, or of transferring the inmost truth of things into music and verse, makes him the type of the poet and has added a new problem to metaphysics. This is that which throws him into natural history, as a main production of the globe, and as announcing new eras and ameliorations. Things were mirrored in his poetry without loss or blur. . . . There are always objects; but there was never representation. Here is perfect representation, at last. . . . No recipe can be given for the making of a Shakspeare; but the possibility of the translation of things into song is demonstrated.

Shakespeare's lyric power matches his imagination.

"He is not reduced to dismount and walk because his horses are running off with him in some distant direction: he always rides." Emerson thinks that the perfect rhyme exists for every thought.

The difference between poetry and stock poetry is . . . that in the latter the rhythm is given and the sense adapted to it; while in the former the sense dictates the rhythm. . . . The rhyme is there in the theme, thought and image themselves.

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98 Ibid., p. 212.
99 Ibid., p. 215.
100 "Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 47.
101 Ibid., p. 54.
Shakespeare's lyric power, as seen in both the sonnets and the dramas, lies "in the genius of the piece." Not only is each total work a poem, but so is each line. The lines have beauty which tempts the ear and thought which gratifies the intellect, while the whole is so linked together that the logician is satisfied. All of the great dramatist's mechanics are organic and natural. "Shakespeare made his Hamlet as a bird weaves its nest."

"One more royal trait properly belongs to the poet," writes Emerson. "I mean his cheerfulness, without which no man can be a poet, -- for beauty is his aim." The perception and transmission of beauty, truth, and goodness bring repose and cheerfulness, for the man in harmony with man, nature, and the Creator finds his heart overflowing with pure joy and lavishes his happiness on all those about him. "'Tis the fulness of man that runs over into objects, and makes his Bibles and Shakspeares and Homers so great. "A saint might lend ear to the riotous fun of Falstaff; for it is not created to excite the animal appetites, but to vent the joy of a supernal intelligence."

103 Ibid.
The poet is the cheerful man, for,

Poetry is the gai science. . . . Let others be distracted with cares, he [the poet] is exempt. All their pleasures are tinged with pain. All his pains are edged with pleasure. The gladness he imparts he shares. As one of the old Minnesingers sung, -- 'Oft have I heard, and now believe it true Whom man delights in, God delights in too.' 109

Shakespeare "loves virtue, not for its obligation but for its grace; he delights in the world, in man, in woman, for the lovely light that sparkles from them. Beauty, the spirit of joy and hilarity, he sheds over the universe."110

As the above passages show, Emerson can write lyrically upon the subject of the joys which love of beauty engender; yet when he comes to evaluate Shakespeare as a man and a genius, it is the complete engrossment of his representative poet in the joys of beauty that the essayist gives as Shakespeare's primary fault. The great Elizabethan, unequalled by any prior or subsequent man in mental power and talent, capable of habitually writing the speech of angels,111 rested in the beauty which his perception of the representative nature of the universe enabled him to see "and never took the step which seemed inevitable to such genius, namely, to explore the virtue which resides in these symbols and imparts this power; -- what it is that they themselves say."112

Emerson says that the ideal poet must have a decided bias toward beauty, but the beauty of which he speaks is ideal Beauty, which is equally Truth and Goodness. The power of expression is given to the poet so that he may better express God, not just the beauty of God, but the whole of God. That he speaks in poetry, in rhythmic and beautiful language, using symbols to express thought, is because God himself speaks to us in that manner.\textsuperscript{113} There are prose poets,\textsuperscript{114} but when one speaks above the material plane in the realm of thought, his speech naturally "refines into order and harmony."\textsuperscript{115} Shakespeare owned this power of expression above all other men,\textsuperscript{116} and this, along with his receptive and perceptive qualities, enabled him to translate things beautifully into verse, to paint a perfect word-picture. This use of his powers does not satisfy Emerson:

\begin{quote}
But when the question is, to life and its materials and its auxiliaries, how does he profit me? What does it signify? It is but a Twelfth Night, or Midsummer-Night's Dream, or Winter Evening's Tale; what signifies another picture more or less?\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

Time after time in his essays Emerson speaks of the poet as the lawgiver of mankind. This function he finds inherent in the poet's responsibilities as the Sayer of the

\textsuperscript{113}"Poetry and Imagination," \textit{Works}, VIII, 12.
\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 50.
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid., p. 51.
\textsuperscript{116}"Art and Criticism," \textit{Works}, XII, 295.
\textsuperscript{117}"Shakespeare; or, The Poet," \textit{Works}, IV, 218.
Trinity. It is the poet's duty to speak for the deity:

It was always the theory of literature that the word of a poet was authoritative and final. He was supposed to be the mouth of divine wisdom... If the theory has receded out of modern criticism, it is because we have not had poets. Whenever they appear, they will redeem their own credit.\textsuperscript{118}

The ideal poet will express not his own but the will of the Creator. "The inexorable rule in the muse's court, either inspiration or silence, compels the bard to report only his supreme moments."\textsuperscript{119} There must be absolute veracity, no chance or willfulness, in the poet's words, for "he is the lawgiver, as being an exact reporter of the essential law."\textsuperscript{120}

Since he believes that a poet should be such a reporter, Emerson thinks that there must be a strong moral and prophetic element apparent in all ideal poetry, and it is the absence of this element he deplores in the poetry of Shakespeare:

Poetry must be affirmative. It is the piety of the intellect. 'Thus saith the Lord,' should begin the song... Therefore when we speak of the poet in any high sense, we are driven to such examples as Zoroaster and Plato, St. John and Maimon, with their moral burdens.\textsuperscript{121}

Emerson finds the primary flaw in the greatness of Swedenborg and Shakespeare to be the same. Both, being biased toward the direction in which their greatest talent lay, failed to show the true relation between the spiritual and

\textsuperscript{118}"The Method of Nature," \textit{Works}, I, 211.

\textsuperscript{119}"Poetry and Imagination," \textit{Works}, VIII, 72-73.

\textsuperscript{120}Ibid., p. 39.

\textsuperscript{121}Ibid., p. 64; see also "Shakspeare, or, The Poet," \textit{Works}, IV, 31-32.
the material world. Swedenborg, biased toward the moral elements in the universe, became lost in gloom and failed in his catalogue of material-spiritual relationships. Shakespeare, gifted with adequate receptive, mental, and expressive powers to delve with success into these relationships, was biased toward beauty and "converted the elements which waited on his command, into entertainments."° Emerson is stern in his condemnation of what he regards as Shakespeare's perversion of his god-given powers:

Is it not as if one should have, through majestic powers of science, the comets given into his hand, or the planets and their moons, and should draw them from their orbits to glare with the municipal fireworks on a holiday night, and advertise in all the towns, 'Very superior pyrotechny this evening'? Are the agents of nature, and the power to understand them, worth no more than a street serenade, or the breath of a cigar? One remembers again the trumpet-text in the Koran, -- 'The heavens and earth and all that is between them, think ye we have created them in jest?''

The complete absorption of Shakespeare into the moral life of a "jovial actor and manager" puzzles Emerson to the extent that he doubts the truth of the facts of the dramatist's life which have been uncovered. He finds it impossible to reconcile his representative poet's life with his verse. Though the lives of few great men have been

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123Ibid., pp. 217-218.  
124Ibid., p. 218.  
125"Milton," Works, XII, 276.
so harmonious as to correspond completely with their works, 126 "other admirable men have led lives in some sort of keeping with their thoughts," -- but not Shakespeare. 127 Trying to explain this unpleasant discrepancy in "Milton," Emerson reluctantly goes so far as to suggest that the failure of the personalities of Homer and Shakespeare to appear in their poems may have resulted from the fact that they were "too passive in their great service," that they were merely good receptors and reporters of the divinity and "knew not what they did." 128 Milton, though of lesser stature as a poet, was of greater worth as a man than Shakespeare, and though Shakespeare is the world's best poet, though he "gave to the science of mind a new and larger subject than had ever existed and planted the standard of humanity some furlongs forward into Chaos," 129 Milton has better fulfilled the didactic function of the great man:

Better than any other he [Milton] has discharged the office of every great man, namely, to raise the idea of Man in the minds of his contemporaries and of posterity, -- to draw after Nature a life of man, exhibiting such a composition of grace, of strength and of virtue, as poet had not described nor hero lived. 130

A second reason for Emerson's high regard for Milton coincides with his primary criticism of both Swedenborg and Shakespeare. Milton, Emerson says, has a balanced love of beauty and goodness which neither mystic nor dramatist possessed. For this reason he is, within his limits, a greater lawgiver than either:

He [Milton] is rightly dear to mankind, because in him, among so many perverse and partial men of genius, -- in him humanity rights itself; the old eternal goodness finds a home in his breast, and for once shows itself beautiful. His gifts are subordinated to his moral sentiments; and his virtues are so graceful that they seem rather talents than labors.\textsuperscript{131}

"Shakespeare is a voice merely; who and what he was that sang, that sings, we know not. Milton stands erect, commanding, still visible among men, and reads the laws of the moral sentiment to the new-born race."\textsuperscript{132}

But Milton, too, falls short of Emerson's ideal. He is "too literary."\textsuperscript{133} The ideal poet has not yet been born.

We are sometimes apprised that there is a mental power and creation more excellent than anything which is commonly called philosophy and literature; that the high poets, that Homer, Milton, Shakspeare, do not fully content us. How rarely they offer us the heavenly bread! The most they have done is to intoxicate us once and again with its taste. They have touched this heaven and retain afterwards some sparkle of it: they betray their belief that such discourse is possible.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p. 262. \textsuperscript{132}Ibid., pp. 253-254.

\textsuperscript{133}"The Poet," Works, III, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{134}"Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 63.
As yet, Emerson says, no true poems have been written, but he does not doubt that some day poems will be composed that will make the Iliad seem "a poor ballad-grinding" in comparison.\textsuperscript{135} Neither has a complete man been born.\textsuperscript{136} For the present the world can know only the "half-views of half-men," and expect and await the coming of the balanced and complete man.\textsuperscript{137} In spite of his superb gifts, Shakespeare falls far short of the ideal.

\textit{The world still wants its poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle, with Shakspeare the player, nor shall grope in graves, with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act, with equal inspiration; right is more beautiful than private affection; and love is compatible with universal wisdom.}\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{137} "Shakspeare; or, The Poet," \textit{Works}, IV, 219.
\textsuperscript{138}\textit{Ibid.}
CHAPTER V

NAPOLEON, THE MAN OF THE WORLD

When Emerson uses the phrase, man of the world, he intends that the words be interpreted in their literal sense. Napoleon, his representative man of the world, is the type of man whose aim in life is material and worldly, as distinguished from those individuals who treasure ideals and spiritual values above worldly gain. Emerson, the mystic, must be classed with the latter of the above groups, but this American idealist was not without his worldly side. He was keenly aware of the necessity of material as well as spiritual progress among men, and he does not seek in his essays to belittle the value to society of those individuals who direct their efforts toward practical, worldly affairs.

Every individual man, says Emerson, is created to advance in some way Nature's universal scheme, and no man is produced until conditions, spiritual and physical, are ready for his coming.1 Because he believed that every man is sent into the world equipped to perform a particular function, Emerson insists repeatedly that every man should follow the dictates of his individual bias and should cultivate

1"Fate," Works, VI, 35-39.
his individual talent. Every man, he declares, is directed to the work that nature intends for him to do by "a certain blind wisdom," a "seminal brain," a "potential wit," which corresponds to the instinct of animals.\(^2\) For every force or thing in material nature there is a man born whose special province it is to cope with that part of nature:

There is to each function and department of Nature supplementary men. Thus there is not a piece of Nature in any kind but a man is born, who, as his genius opens, aims ... to dedicate himself to that.\(^3\)

All men share in the gifts of reason and of moral sentiment, but all differ -- slightly or greatly -- in bias, just as all differ in physical characteristics.\(^4\)

A point of education that I can never too much insist upon is this tenet that every individual man has a bias which he must obey, [declares Emerson] and that it is only as he feels and obeys this that he rightly develops and attains his legitimate power in the world.\(^5\)

The Emersonian formula for advancing the well-being of the world and of the individual is simple: Let each man trust and follow his bias and cultivate and use his peculiar and unique talent:

Nature arms each man with some faculty which enables him to do easily some feat impossible to any other,


and thus makes him necessary to society. . . . Nothing is beneath you, if it is in the direction of your life; nothing is great or desirable if it is off from that. . . . Society can never prosper but must always be bankrupt until every man does that which he was created to do. 

In order, therefore, to be an effective unit in the universal whole, each man must produce according to his individual personality. This thesis implies the need for action by every man in accordance with his natural bent, and Emerson frequently emphasizes that every man must not only put his talents into action, but must also act according to the dictates of common sense and prudence in order to maintain himself successfully in the material world and in society. The young man of letters is advised that it is a "primary duty . . . to secure his independence," and the scholar is admonished that he must exercise the same practical prudence as the man of business in order to have health and financial security. On the other hand, the essayist points out with equal emphasis that thinking, not physical action upon his material environment, is the primary function of the scholar. Action upon the physical plane is the special province of men of the world, who are intended to concern themselves primarily with the material and utilitarian aspects of life and

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are given biases which cause them to regard health and wealth as ultimate goals. Such materially inclined men are important and necessary, for they create "usefulness, comfort, society, low power of all sorts." Napoleon's life is an object lesson in just how much may be accomplished by a man of the world who translates his abilities wholeheartedly into action.

Bonaparte, Emerson says, is the result of the times in which he lived, "his constitution and his early circumstances," but it must not be supposed that the essayist regarded these influences as separate elements in the development of the personality of his representative man. In Emerson's philosophy the times and the men are the result of the same natural evolutionary process. The great man does not appear until the time is ripe for him, and when he does appear, he is necessarily representative of the age in which he lives. A man, declares Emerson, "is the compend of time; he is also the correlative of nature."

The secret of the world is the tie between person and event. Person makes event, and event person. . . . The same fitness must be presumed between

11 "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 57.
14 "History," Works, II, 35.
a man and the times and event, as between the sexes, or between a race of animals and the food it eats.\textsuperscript{15}

"An individual man is a fruit which it cost all the foregoing ages to form and ripen."\textsuperscript{16} All men of a given time, be they philosophers or brokers, are "bones of one body," products of "influences impossible to parry or resist."\textsuperscript{17} "The men who come on the stage at one period are all found to be related to each other."\textsuperscript{18}

Great men always represent "the expanding senses of the hour,"\textsuperscript{19} and Bonaparte, like others of Emerson's representative men, is so sensitive to the trends of his times that he seems to absorb all the thought and action of the period into himself and then to re-enact them in his deeds and communications. "He is so largely receptive, and is so placed, that he comes to be a bureau for all the intelligence, wit and power of the age and country."\textsuperscript{20} Not the man, but the forces which bring him into being and direct his efforts are responsible for the deeds of men like Caesar and Napoleon:

We impute deep-laid far-sighted plans to Caesar and Napoleon; but the best of their power was in nature, not in them. . . . Their success lay in their parallelism to the course of thought, which found in them

\textsuperscript{15}"Fate," \textit{Works}, VI, 39.
\textsuperscript{17}"The Scholar," \textit{Works}, X, 268-269.
\textsuperscript{18}"Fate," \textit{Works}, VI, 44.
\textsuperscript{19}"Women," \textit{Works}, XI, 424.
an unobstructed channel; and the wonders of which they were the visible conductors seemed to the eye their deed. 21

Napoleon recognized this fact, Emerson says, and for that reason, regarded himself as the "Child of Destiny," refusing to admit himself guilty of any of the crimes imputed to him because he "'always marched with the opinion of great masses and with events.'" 22 Bonaparte is the best known and most powerful man of the nineteenth century because of "the fidelity with which he expresses the tone of thought and belief, the aims of the masses of active and cultivated men" of the time, 23 and since Emerson regards the nineteenth century as an age dominated by the middle-class, it is inevitable that Napoleon should be representative of that group. The conqueror of Europe, is the "incarnate Democrat," he is the representative of "active, brave, able men throughout the middle class everywhere."

"God has granted," says the Koran, "to every people a prophet in its own tongue." Paris and London and New York, the spirit of commerce, of money and material power, were also to have their prophet; and Bonaparte was qualified and sent. 24

According to Emerson's theory of polarity there is a positive force working to balance or compensate for every negative force in the universe. This law may be observed

22 "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," Works, IV, 231.
23 Ibid., p. 223.
24 Ibid., pp. 224-225.
among men as well as elsewhere in nature. Men of the world are divided by nature into a progressive and a conservative class. All men of the type of the man of the world are alike in that they subordinate "all intellectual and spiritual forces into means to material success," but at any given time, some men of this type have gained what they seek and some have not. 25 The men of the world who have already attained their goals of wealth or material power, either by their own endeavor or by inheritance, seek conservatively to maintain the status quo. 26 Though occasionally a youthful member of this rich or aristocratic group may adopt for a short time an aggressive, progressive way of life and thought, the group as a whole is "effeminated by position or nature, and can only . . . act on the defensive." 27 All other men of the type of the man of the world belong in what Emerson calls variously the middle-class, the democratic class, the class of the business man, or the modern party. 28 The primary distinguishing characteristic of this second group, which includes the great mass of mankind, is that it desires material success which it has yet to attain, and since its interests and desires are in conflict with those of the conservative group of men of the world, there is

25 Ibid., p. 224.  
26 Ibid., pp. 223-224.  
27 "Fate," Works, VI, 13.  
continual conflict between the two. Napoleon is so completely the representative man of the world that in his lifetime he typifies both the conservative and the progressive types. Until success and age changed him, he was of the progressive group; in later life he was marked by the characteristics of the conservative man of the world.\textsuperscript{29}

It was also necessary that Emerson's great man of the world be originally of the middle class by birth and training because the essayist did not believe it possible for a great man to be a conservative. "All great men come out of the middle classes," he says.\textsuperscript{30} A primary source of Napoleon's strength lay in the conviction of the people that he was their representative, and this belief was partially caused by his middle class origin.\textsuperscript{31}

The people felt that . . . a man of themselves held, in the Tuileries, knowledge and ideas like their own, opening of course to them and their children all places of power and trust. . . . In 1814, when advised to rely on the higher classes, Napoleon said to those around him, "Gentlemen, in the situation in which I stand, my only nobility is the rabble of the Faubourgs."\textsuperscript{32}

And though Bonaparte in his later years became cynical about the virtue and ability of men, he justified the expectation

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{30}"Considerations by the Way," \textit{Works}, VI, 259.

\textsuperscript{31}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 241.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 242-243.
of his followers by seeking out and rewarding natural talent in whatever social class he found it.\textsuperscript{33}

Napoleon's middle class origin also was of value to him because it made it necessary for him to work his way up in the world. Emerson declares that there have been a few men in history who seemed to have attained skill without practice, but that generally "skill comes of doing, knowledge comes of eyes always open, and working hands."\textsuperscript{34} Because he was born into the progressive, "have not" class, Napoleon was privileged to serve in many of the ranks in civil and military society between the level of his modest beginnings and of his final magnificence as the most powerful man in the world. And by virtue of this "austere education," the future emperor learned the "meaning and value of labor," developed knowledge and skill by doing the details of the work he was to direct others to do later.\textsuperscript{35} Because of this early training as a citizen, Bonaparte was able to understand and deal with the particulars of governing a kingdom,\textsuperscript{36} and when he became a general, his experience in the lower ranks of the army enabled him to say,

"There is nothing in war . . . which I cannot do with my own hands. If there is nobody to make gunpowder, I can manufacture it. If guncarriages, I know

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., pp. 243-244. \textsuperscript{34}"Old Age," Works, VII, 321.

\textsuperscript{35}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," Works, IV, 239-240.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 240.
how to construct them. If it is necessary to make cannons at the forge, I can make them. The details of working them in battle, if it is necessary to teach, I shall teach them. In administration, it is I alone who have arranged the finances.  

"To be the rich man, is the end" sought by the class whom Napoleon represents, and like the rest of his class, "Bonaparte wrought . . . for power and wealth." Emerson recognizes the value to mankind of commercial and industrial activity. He calls "selfish, huckstering Trade" the "greatest meliorator of the world." He points out that engaging in business affairs is educational to any man and that commerce destroyed feudalism. There is nothing intrinsically unfit for men in the "lucrative employments," he declares, but the immoral means and methods of the business world are degrading.

Napoleon's success is in part based upon his application of ordinary business methods to the business of conquest and kingship. The secret of all success, says Emerson, "consists in close application of the laws of the

38 "Napoleon; or, the Man of the World," Works, IV, 224.
41 "Education," Works, X, 129.
The secret of success in commerce lies in application of "the law of particles" to business affairs, for the problem of the great merchant is simply "to combine many and remote operations with the accuracy and adherence to the facts which is easy in near and small transactions; so as to arrive at gigantic results, without compromise of safety." Napoleon exemplified this principle in the art of war by always combining the units of his forces so as to have more strength at a given point than the enemy.

But "Nature must have far the greatest share in every success, and so in" Napoleon's. Nature, in Emerson's philosophy, is the bringer of gifts, but she is also the definer of limits. Fate or Circumstance, in the form of the laws of nature, limits the potentialities of all natural things and creatures. Fate operates according to scale or degree, and the sort of limitations set by Nature to govern the things of nature depend upon the degree of refinement toward the spiritual of the individual creature. For instance, a stone and a bird are both governed by the law of gravity, but the bird, because it is more advanced in the scale of creation, has the power to momentarily offset the law, while the stone cannot move of its own accord.

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45 Ibid., p. 100.  
offsets Fate. The bird has the power to use gravity and even
the stone. Though higher in the scale of nature than stone
or bird, man too is subject to the limitations and powers of
natural law.

Man is not order of nature . . . but a stupendous
antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of
the Universe. He betrays his relation to what is
below him, . . . but the lightning which explodes
and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is
in him. On one side elemental order . . . and on
the other part thought, the spirit which composes
and decomposes nature, -- here they are, side by
side, god and devil, mind and matter, . . . riding
peacefully together in the eye and brain of every
man.48

"All power is of one kind, a sharing of the nature of
the world,"49 but there are countless levels in the scale
of power. An individual attains to the lowest stratum in
the human scale of power by simply being an efficient natural
organism and obeying the laws of nature like a stone or a
bird. "The right use of Fate is to bring up our conduct to
the loftiness of nature. . . . A man ought to compare ad-
vantageously with a river, an oak, or a mountain."50 Every
man must use this low power in order to exist in the world.

The next level in the human scale of power is attained
by the use of the intellect. Fate or limitation is really
nothing but "a name for facts not yet passed under the fire

48"Fate," Works, VI, 22-23.
49"Power," Works, VI, 56.
50"Fate," Works, VI, 24.
of thought; for causes which are unpenetrated."

Though "man must bend to the law, never the law to him," as the individual comes to understand the limitation, he attains the power to control and use it. Therefore, "Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free." Using only the strength available to him upon these two lowest levels of power "all the forces are his [man's] . . . he can use in turn, as he wants it, all the property in the world." The potential resulting from the combination of intellectual might with elemental force is not the highest degree of power available to man, but it is the basis of the highest degrees, and it is the force "relied on by Nature for bringing the work of the day about."

The man of the world seeks to control and improve his material environment by the use of elemental and intellectual power only. Emerson emphasizes that this is the only source of Napoleon's strength:

Napoleon renounced, once for all, sentiments and affections, and would help himself with his hands and his head. With him is no miracle and no magic. He is a worker in brass, in iron, in wood, in earth, in roads, in buildings, in money and in

51Ibid., p. 31.
52"Perpetual Forces," Works, X, 73.
53"Fate," Works, VI, 23.
54"Perpetual Forces," Works, X, 76.
55"Power," Works, VI, 80.
troops, and a very consistent and wise master-workman. He... acts with the solidity and precision of natural agents.\(^{56}\)

Men give way before such elemental force in other men as they do before the unleashed power of a tempest, but Napoleon had, in addition to "this mineral and animal force," strength of mind, "so that men saw in him combined the natural and intellectual power, as if the sea and land had taken flesh and begun to cipher."\(^{57}\)

Nature has no regard for the individual as such, but she is not impartial in the natural endowment that she bestows upon different persons, for she creates men according to the work which it is intended that each shall do. Mankind, Emerson says, is composed of natural leaders and natural followers. There is a "plus" or active class and a negative or passive class. "Affirmative" or "plus" force is the natural endowment of some and is withheld from others, "as one horse has the spring in him and another in the whip." A "sex of mind," as well as of body, is given to every person and determines whether that individual shall belong in the "inventive or creative class of both men and women" or in the "uninventive or accepting class."\(^{58}\) Individuals of the affirmative type always lead and represent those of the passive sort.\(^{59}\)

\(^{56}\) "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 228-229.
\(^{57}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 229.
\(^{58}\) "power," \textit{Works}, VI, 57.
\(^{59}\) \textit{Ibid.}
Certain men are "born to command," and such men are always endowed with a plus constitution. "A cultivated man, wise to know and bold to perform, is the end to which nature works," but these two qualities are seldom found in an individual. Power is conditioned upon a plus condition of the body, a "strong pulse," which is most often found among men of little civilization or culture. This elemental force is the source of the strength of "explorers, soldiers, and buccaneers," and of uncultivated political leaders of the masses. Still, "vivacity, leadership must be had, and we are not allowed to be nice in choosing. We must fetch the pump with dirty water, if clean cannot be had." It is no more logical to dispense with this natural "energy for originating and executing work" because it is often dangerous than to cease to use steam, fire, or electricity because these sometimes become uncontrollable.

We say that success is constitutional; depends upon a plus condition of mind and body, on power of work, on courage; that it is of main efficacy in carrying on the world, and though rarely found in the right state for an article of commerce, but oftener in the super-saturate or excess which makes it dangerous and destructive, -- yet it cannot be spared, and must be had in that form, and absorbents provided to take off its edge.

60 "Aristocracy," Works, X, 44.
61 "Power," Works, VI, 55.
62 Ibid., p. 70.
63 Ibid., p. 65.
64 Ibid., p. 60.
65 Ibid., p. 71.
"The rule for this whole class of agencies is, — all plus is good; only put in the right place," 66

Natural rulers are men of the affirmative type who are gifted also with the natural advantage of "personal ascendancy." When nature bestows upon a "plus" man this last quality, "which implies neither more nor less of talent, but merely the temperamental or taming eye of a schoolmaster (which one has, and one has not, as one has a black mustache and another a blonde)," then all less vitally endowed persons in the vicinity quite naturally accept the domination of that especially gifted individual. 67 In his essay, "Eloquence," Emerson deals with the quality of personal ascendancy at some length. It is this individual characteristic which determines whether a speaker dominates or is dominated by his audience. 68 Not knowledge, or intelligence, or virtue, but a talent for expression and the quality of personal ascendancy are needed to influence and control an audience. "Strong personality," "overpowering personality," "personal energy," as Emerson variously calls this force, appears in men possessing every degree of talent and genius, but regardless of other gifts, its force is always felt. Caesar and Napoleon and a few other men have possessed personal ascendancy along with such a "rich coincidence of

66Ibid., p. 68.  
67Ibid., p. 58.  
68"Eloquence," Works, VII, 82.
powers, intellect, will, sympathy, organs, and over all, good fortune in the cause, that one can almost believe them "the counterpoise of all other persons." In "Power" Emerson marvels at the possible extent of such a man's influence:

Who shall set a limit to the influence of a human being? There are men who by their sympathetic attractions carry nations with them and lead the activity of the human race. And if there be such a tie that wherever the mind of man goes, nature will accompany him, perhaps there are men whose magnetisms are of that force to draw material and elemental powers, and where they appear, immense instrumentalities organize around them.

In "Eloquence," the essayist says that the secret of the control a man possessing such a plus personality has over other men and himself is the power of Nature running without impediment from the brain and will into his hands. Men and women are his game. Where they are, he cannot be without resources.

Napoleon is such a natural leader, a "natural king," one of the organic aristocracy designed by nature to do her work. This man who was produced to be the leader and representative of the progressive men of the world in the turbulent times during and after the French Revolution was superbly equipped for that work, but Emerson stresses the fact that

69 Ibid., p. 76. 70 "Power," Works, VI, 54.
72 "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," Works, IV, 245.
Napoleon's endowment differs only in degree from that of the ordinary man of the world. One probable reason for the essayist's tremendous interest in the conqueror lies in this belief that Bonaparte possessed only "the qualities and powers of common men" in "transcendent degree," but that unlike most men, the French emperor "went to the edge of his possibilities," thereby achieving a success commensurate with his potentialities.\textsuperscript{74} Seen in this light, Napoleon serves as an inspiration to man, for Emerson says that all men feel sympathetic toward the success of "a grand talent." All reasonable men have an interest in "the prevalence of sense and spirit over stupidity and malversation."\textsuperscript{75} "Whatever appeals to the imagination, by transcending the ordinary limits of human ability, wonderfully encourages and liberates us,"\textsuperscript{76} and for that reason,

We cannot, in the universal imbecility, indecision and indolence of men, sufficiently congratulate ourselves on this strong and ready actor, who took occasion by the beard, and showed us how much may be accomplished by the mere force of such virtues as all men possess in less degree.\textsuperscript{77}

Since the body is "the pipe through which we tap all the succors and the virtues of the material world,"\textsuperscript{78} and since genius, beauty, virtue, and even inspiration,\textsuperscript{79} depend

\textsuperscript{74}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 227,236.  
\textsuperscript{75}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 245.  
\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 245-246.  
\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 246-247.  
\textsuperscript{78}"Aristocracy," \textit{Works}, X, 42,43.  
\textsuperscript{79}"Inspiration," \textit{Works}, VIII, 280.
upon health, the successful man must possess a strong, healthy body. Great men have great bodies. "When nature goes to create a national man, she puts a symmetry between the physical and intellectual powers. She moulds a large brain, and joins to it a great trunk." Napoleon was given a body suited to his capabilities. In him nature created "a man of stone and iron, capable of sitting on horseback sixteen or seventeen hours, of going many days together without rest or food except by snatches, and with the speed and spring of a tiger in action." But on the other hand, Emerson believed that nature intends that every man should be perfect and that bodily imperfections are the result of man's infractions of natural laws. Man, as we know him, is a travesty of what nature intends him to be:

The sacred form of man is not seen in these whimsical, pitiful and sinister masks (masks which we wear and which we meet), these bloated and shrivelled bodies, bald heads, bead eyes, short winds, puny and precarious healths and early deaths. We live in ruins amidst ruins.

The essayist avoids the Procrustean feat of stretching his diminutive "national man" to fit the large mould prescribed for a great man in "Aristocracy" by simply not mentioning the physical size of Napoleon anywhere in the Essays, but it

80"Aristocracy," Works, I, 43.
81"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," Works, IV, 231.
82"Fate," Works, VI, 80.
may well be that he felt that Bonaparte's achievements as a leader of men were made in spite of a physical handicap, and for that reason that the Frenchman's accomplishments should be even more inspirational to the ordinary man.

In his mastery of the art of war, Napoleon possessed that "commanding talent" which men demand of their leaders, but then we have seen that Emerson thought all men are blessed with an "unique and outstanding talent." The degree of material success a given man may attain depends upon the amount of "plus or positive power" possessed by that individual, but in spite of this limitation, any man may succeed by concentrating all of his forces along the lines of his talent toward a goal inherent in that talent. Concentration is the secret of strength in politics, in war, in trade, in short in all management of human affairs; it is one of the reasons for Napoleon's success. Napoleon's absolute concentration commands awe "in every company of men." He paid the price of this "sacrificing of his symmetry to his working powers," but he gained by it a double strength. By renouncing all moral and other influences which might hinder his obtaining the material success he

86 Ibid., p. 76.
88 "Culture," Works, VI, 131.
sought, Bonaparte was able to throw all of his powers and abilities into the fight to gain his end, and this concentration, in turn, caused others to be inspired with "confidence and vigor by the extraordinary unity of his actions." He was "firm, sure, self-denying, self-postponing, sacrificing every thing, -- money, troops, generals, and his own safety also, to his aim."

His victories were only so many doors, and he never for a moment lost sight of his way onward, in the dazzle and uproar of the present circumstance. He knew what to do, and he flew to the mark. He would shorten a straight line to come at his object. Horrible anecdotes may no doubt be collected from his history, of the price at which he bought his successes; but he must not therefore be set down as cruel, but only as one who knew no impediment to his will; not bloodthirsty, not cruel, -- but woe to what thing or person stood in his way! Not bloodthirsty, but not sparing of blood, -- and pitiless. He saw only the object; the obstacle must give way.

Bonaparte's success, like that of every man, is founded upon the exercise of common sense and prudence. A man of the world, Bonaparte did not draw upon those powers of the moral sentiment, inspiration, or imagination which are available to the man of thought or spirit; instead, he guided his actions by that "strong affinity for facts" which characterizes not only the successful merchant, but

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89 "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," Works, IV, 228. See also "Eloquence," Works, VII, 78.


91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., pp. 233-234.

93 "Wealth," Works, VI, 100.
also Aesop, Aristotle, Alfred, Luther, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Franklin, and indeed, "all valid minds."\(^{94}\) Prudence, which is a product of common sense and which "is content to seek health of body by complying with physical conditions, and health of mind by the laws of the intellect,"\(^{95}\) governed the personal conduct of Napoleon during the first part of his career and guarded him from impetuous decisions in warfare and in the conduct of the state.\(^{96}\) His power did not come from any enthusiasm or emotional extreme, but rather from the "exercise of common-sense on each emergency."\(^{97}\) "He never blundered into victories, but won his battles in his head before he won them on the field."\(^{98}\) "Everything depended on the nicety of his combinations, and the stars were not more punctual than his arithmetic."\(^{99}\)

"His very attack was never the inspiration of courage, but the result of calculation,"\(^{100}\) yet he was endowed with the high, sterk courage which comes of absolute self-confidence. As defined by Emerson, courage in its highest and purest form is synonymous with the highest form of self-reliance, or reliance on God; but the degrees of self-reliance and of courage range downward to the physical self-

\(^{95}\) "Prudence," \textit{Works}, II, 222.
\(^{96}\) "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 247, 237.
\(^{97}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 247.
\(^{98}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 232.
\(^{100}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 237.
confidence and sheer ferocity of the savage man or beast. A man is courageous when he feels himself equal to the problem which confronts him. Courage "is the right and healthy state of every man when he is free to do that which is constitutional to him to do," and every man and creature is endowed with a constitutional courage which supports him so long as he depends upon himself and does the work he is born to do.

The reader will not find the selfless, self-reliant, courage of the saint in Emerson's Bonaparte. Had such spiritual heights been attained by Napoleon, he would not have been representative of the man of the world. Nevertheless, Napoleon's self-confident courage is a reproach to all men who doubt themselves:

To what heaps of cowardly doubts is not that man's life an answer. When he appeared it was the belief of all military men that there would be nothing new in war; as it is the belief of men today that nothing new can be undertaken. ... But Bonaparte knew better than society; and moreover knew that he knew better. ... All men know better than they do; know that the institutions we so volubly commend are go-carts and baubles; but they dare not trust their presentiments. Bonaparte relied on his own senses, and did not care a bean for other people's.


103 Ibid., p. 266.


His courage was of a kind and degree suited to the personality of the man and the work he was designed to accomplish. It was a prudent, cool, calculating sort of bravery, founded upon his absolute belief in himself and in his destiny; but when the occasion called for it, Bonaparte dashed into physical danger with as much headlong valor as any of his soldiers.  

The vulgar call good fortune that which really is produced by the calculations of genius. . . . Napoleon, . . . faithful to facts, had also this crowning merit, that whilst he believed in number and weight, and omitted no part of prudence, he believed also in the freedom and quite incalculable force of the soul. A man of infinite caution; . . . yet nevertheless he had a sublime confidence . . . in the sallies of courage, and faith in his destiny, which, at the right moment, repaired all losses.  

In moments when not absorbed in affairs of conquest and kingship, "Napoleon appears as a man of genius directing on abstract questions the native appetite for truth and the impatience of words he was wont to show in war." Emerson felt that this capacity of his representative man of the world to raise his mental eyes above the level of the material horizon was Napoleon’s saving grace. It indicated to Emerson that the French leader had unexercised potentialities. The conduct and thought of the man of the world


109 Twice in the Essays Emerson says that Napoleon was "an intellectual man, . . . and that saves him." See "Memory," Works, XII, 97, and "The Natural History of Intellect," Works, XII, 97.
are governed primarily by common sense and prudence, but the great man comes to realize that there are intellectual and spiritual levels of existence above those of material facts and appearance and that a prudent obedience to the laws of matter is only a means to an end.\(^\text{110}\) The "cast-iron fellows," who cannot think or live above the material plane, are "fools of fate, with whatever powers endowed."\(^\text{111}\) "We must have an intellectual quality in all property and in all action, or they are naught."\(^\text{112}\) Napoleon liked to speculate on abstract subjects, especially religion, and his opinions were "always original and to the point."\(^\text{113}\) He refused to accept without question conventional theological ideas, but his reply to certain men who argued for materialism was to point to the stars and say, "You may talk as long as you please, gentlemen, but who made all that?"\(^\text{114}\) His memoirs are "as good as Caesar's" and show the "good-nature of strength and conscious superiority."\(^\text{115}\)

There is, however, a reverse side to this "brilliant picture." Napoleon had the virtues of the man of the world in transcendent degree, but he also had the limitations and


\(^\text{111}\) "Illusions," \textit{Works}, VI, 317; see also "History," \textit{Works}, II, 32-33.

\(^\text{112}\) "Culture," \textit{Works}, VI, 158.

\(^\text{113}\) "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 249.

\(^\text{114}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 250.

\(^\text{115}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 251.
The world is given into the hands of man with two conditions; it is not for property and not for self-indulgence. When man violates these conditions by attempting to convert the gifts of nature to his own private ends and desires, "this perversion is punished with the instant loss of true wisdom and real power." Even if a man like Bonaparte should "have the earth for his pasture and the sea for his pond, he would be a pauper still."

The fatal quality that we discover in our pursuit of wealth, is that it is treacherous, and is bought by the breaking or weakening of the sentiments; and it is inevitable that we should find the same fact in the history of this champion, who proposed to himself simply a brilliant career, without any stipulation or scruple concerning the means.

"The great depend on their heart, not on their purse."

"Bonaparte was singularly destitute of generous sentiments."

He was dishonest, thoroughly unscrupulous, perfidious, unjust, cynical, selfish, and egotistical. His manners were coarse, and he had the common French passion for stage effect. These are the traits of a mean man, not of a great

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120"Domestic Life," Works, VII, 115.
one, and when one has penetrated through "all the circles of power and splendor" surrounding the legendary Bonaparte, one finds that he has been dealing with "an impostor and a rogue," who "fully deserves the epithet of Jupiter Scapin, or a sort of Scamp Jupiter."\textsuperscript{123}

Here was an experiment, under the most favorable conditions, of the powers of intellect without conscience. Never was such a leader so endowed and so weaponed; never leader found such aids and followers.\textsuperscript{124} But "only by the supernatural is a man strong; nothing is so weak as an egotist."\textsuperscript{125} Napoleon would have been the greatest man of Europe if his aims had not been selfish.\textsuperscript{126} As it was, "men found that his absorbing egotism was deadly to all other men," and his followers, when at last they could no longer identify their own interests with his, fell away from him.\textsuperscript{127} Napoleon was not to blame. "Nature utilizes misers, fanatics, show-men, egotists, to accomplish her ends,"\textsuperscript{128} and Bonaparte "did all that in him lay to live and thrive without moral principle."\textsuperscript{129} He failed, as every man or multitude of men who have a "sensual and selfish aim" must fail, because such is the "nature of things,

\textsuperscript{123}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 256.
\textsuperscript{124}Ibid., p. 257. \textsuperscript{125}"The Young American," \textit{Works}, I, 391.
\textsuperscript{126}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 233.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 257.
\textsuperscript{128}"Success," \textit{Works}, VII, 289.
\textsuperscript{129}"Napoleon; or, The Man of the World," \textit{Works}, IV, 258.
the eternal law of man and of the world." For "only that
good profits which we can taste with all doors open, and
which serves all men."

130 Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

GOETHE, THE WRITER

The scholar or writer represents among men the irresistible urge of the things of nature to report or record themselves. "Nature will be reported," Emerson declares. "All things are engaged in writing their history." The lower creatures and things of nature are driven to a continuous "self-registration," and the result is an exact reproduction of themselves. Man also is subject to this natural impulse, for man "loves to communicate, and that which is for him to say lies as a load on his heart until it is delivered." Man's report of himself, however, is of a higher kind than that of the rest of nature:

In men, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects, is touched with life, and disposes of them in new order. The facts do not lie in it inert; but some subside and others shine; so that we soon have a new picture, composed of eminent experiences. Usually this picture is transmitted to others through conversation, but some men are born to write. These "writers" regard the whole world as subject matter for their pens. There

2Ibid., p. 262.
3Ibid.
is no limit to their reporting. Whatever comes within their experience they are impelled to recreate, and they "would report the Holy Ghost, or attempt it."

Upon its lower levels, the "striving after imitative expression" of this class is "mere stenography," but there are higher degrees, and nature has more splendid endowments for those whom she selects to a superior office; for the class of scholars or writers, who see connection where the multitude see fragments, and who are impelled to exhibit the facts in order, and so to supply the axis on which the frame of things turn. Nature has dearly at heart the formation of the speculative man, or scholar. . . . He is no permissive or accidental appearance, but an organic agent, one of the states of the realm, provided and prepared for from of old and from everlasting, in the knitting and contexture of things.  

Various men and classes of men have naturally designated functions to perform in the world. "In this distribution of functions [among men] the scholar is the delegated intellect. In the right state he is Men Thinking." With absolute self-reliance and with complete personal integrity, the scholar must proclaim the significant truths which come within his experience.

It becomes him to feel all confidence in himself, and to defer never to the popular cry. He and he only knows the world. The world at any moment is the merest appearance. . . . Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom.  

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4Ibid., p. 264. The last sentence of this quotation is repeated in "The Scholar," Works, X, 264.


6Ibid., p. 102.
"He is to hold lightly every tradition, every opinion, every person, out of his piety to that Eternal Spirit which dwells unexpressed with him."7 Men seek money and power because these are the highest goals of which they are aware. It is the function and the destiny of Man Thinking to lead mankind to a gradual realization of man's true relationship to the whole material and spiritual universe.8

The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. . . . Whatevery oracles the human heart, in all emergencies, in all solemn hours, has uttered as its commentary on the world of actions, -- these he shall receive and impart. And whatsoever new verdict Reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day, -- this he shall hear and promulgate.9

The scholar is here to fill others with love and courage by confirming their trust in the love and wisdom which are at the heart of all things; to affirm noble sentiments; to hear them wherever spoken, out of the deeps of ages, out of the obscurities of barbarous life, and to republish them; -- to untune nobody, but to draw all men after the truth, and to keep men spiritual and sweet.10

Society is always in need of "one sane man with adequate powers of expression to hold up each object of monomania in its right relations."11 The multitude is easily led by the ambitious and mercenary into placing false values upon objects and ideas of momentary popularity and prominence. It

is the social function of the scholar or writer to place the
craze of the time before the public in such a manner that its
true relationship to society will be clear to all.\textsuperscript{12}

In "The American Scholar" Emerson outlines in some de-
tail the influences which educate the writer. The scholar,
the essayist says, is educated by nature, by the past, and
by living. From nature the writer must learn to see the
unity in the variety of the material world, to realize that
all things "proceed from one root." His observations should
teach him that the laws of nature are also the laws of his
own mind, so that he will come to recognize that "so much
of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind he
does not yet possess."\textsuperscript{13} The "mind of the Past," in the
form of books, art, institutions, and anything else upon
which that mind may be found to be inscribed, is the second
teacher of the scholar. He must laboriously study History
and the exact sciences, but at all times he should remember
that the past is not comparable in importance with today and
that the purpose of books is to inspire the reader to in-
dependent and creative thought, not to fix in his mind the
thought of another individual. The scholar should resort
to books only in times of idleness, for "when he can read
God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{13}"The American Scholar," \textit{Works}, I, 84-87.
men's transcripts of their readings.\textsuperscript{14} Lastly, the scholar learns by living experience, by action.\textsuperscript{15}

Emerson frequently finds occasion in his writings to defend the scholar against charges that the speculative man is impractical and inactive. The tendency of the man on the street, he says, is to disparage the scholar because he is not a man of action.\textsuperscript{16} Such people simply do not understand the true nature of action. "Real action is in silent moments,"\textsuperscript{17} but the masses give the name "action" only to the activities of commerce and other so-called "practical" affairs.\textsuperscript{18} Others expect of the scholar a senseless activity which they call action --

A petty fingering and running, a senseless repeating of yesterday's fingering and running; an acceptance of the methods and frauds of other men; an over-doing and busy-ness which pretends to the honors of action, but resembles the twitches of St. Vitus.\textsuperscript{19}

The true scholar will refuse to heed any call to action which does not proceed from his own being. The scholar should live an active life, for out of experiences the intellect moulds thought. Without action the scholar "is not

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., pp. 87-91. See also "Literary Ethics," Works, I, 160 and 173.

\textsuperscript{15}"The American Scholar," Works, I, 95.


\textsuperscript{17}"Spiritual Laws," Works, II, 161.

\textsuperscript{18}"The Scholar," Works, X, 267-269.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 267.
yet a man. Without it thought can never ripen into truth, 20 for, true to the principle of polarity, the mind first thinks, then acts, and each process calls the other into being. 21 Actually, the speculative and the creative functions of the mind are one, 22 and when thought and creation are at a low ebb, the scholar should resort to living in accordance with his thoughts and sentiments. 23 The writer should think and then act to reproduce his thought, but he is obligated also to act in every-day living in accordance with the loftiness of his thinking. 24

Always, when he criticizes the common man for his misunderstanding of and failure to appreciate the functions of the scholar, Emerson also castigates the scholar for his failure to live up to the sacred requirements of his lofty office. How can the writer expect to be honored by others "when he does not honor himself; when he loses himself in a crowd; when he is no longer the lawgiver, but the sycophant, ducking to the giddy opinion of a reckless public." 25 While it is true that in America the public seems to be of the opinion that ideas are dangerous to the established order

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21 Ibid., p. 99.
24 Ibid.
and to the comfort of all, this is the speculative man's own fault. The scholar should be "a learner of 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." Once the writer was considered a sacred person. He was the prophet, the lawgiver, the poet, of society. "He wrote without levity and without choice," and every word was true, "and woke the nations to new life." This is no longer so because the writer has succumbed to the worldly influences of the times and to the opinions of the moment. The scholar trains youth to criticize the existing order but lacks the inspiration to offer something in its place:

The objection of men of the world to what they call the morbid intellectual tendency in our young men at present, is not a hostility to their truth, but to this, its shortcoming, that the idealistic views unfit their children for business in their sense, and do not qualify them for any complete life of a better kind. They threaten the validity of contracts, but do not prevail so far as to establish the new kingdom which shall supersede contracts, oaths, and property. "We have seen to weariness what you cannot do; now show us what you can and will do," asks the practical man, and with reason.

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26 Ibid., pp. 266, 269.
"A pound passes for a pound."31 Let the scholar of true genius but appear and the able men of all sorts will recognize him and hear his message. The one question that such men will ask is, "Is he anybody?"32 Able men respect the talent of the man who is a master in his organic field of endeavor,33 and talents are necessary to the scholar. "The descent of genius into talents is part of the natural order and history of the world";34 though "talent alone cannot make a writer. There must be a man behind the book; a personality which by birth and quality is pledge to the doctrines there set forth."35

The scholar . . . is unfurnished who has only literary weapons. He ought to have as many talents as he can: memory, arithmetic, practical powers, manners, temper, lion-heart, are all good things, and if he has none of them he can still manage, if he have the main-mast, -- if he is anything. But he must have the resource of resources, and be planted on necessity.36

Emerson selects Goethe, "German poet, naturalist, and philosopher,"37 as his representative scholar or writer and as his representative of the intellectual and spiritual life of the nineteenth century. Bonaparte, the essayist declares,

32 Ibid., p. 268. 33 Ibid.
37 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 322.
exemplifies the "popular external life and aims" of the century; Goethe is its poet and philosopher.\textsuperscript{38} We have seen that Emerson thought this century to be a period dominated by the man of the world in all material affairs and presided over by the transcendent man of the world, Napoleon. In "Goethe; or, The Writer," the spiritual and intellectual characteristics of the era are shown to have something of the level mediocrity commonly attributed to the class which was ascendant in the material life of the times. It is a period "when a general culture has spread itself and has smoothed down all sharp individual traits."\textsuperscript{39} It is characterized by a wealth of talented, able men working in every field of intellectual endeavor, not by individual leaders of great genius. It is an age which accumulated facts about the world at a prodigious rate.\textsuperscript{40}

Goethe "united in himself, and that in most extraordinary degree, the tendencies of the era. . . . Of all the men of this time, not one has seemed so much at home in it as he."\textsuperscript{41} He was "quite domesticated in the century, breathing its air, enjoying its fruits, impossible at any earlier time."\textsuperscript{42} He wanted to learn everything, and had there been

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 270.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., p. 271.
\textsuperscript{41}"Thoughts on Modern Literature," \textit{Works}, XII, 322.
\textsuperscript{42}"Goethe; or, The Writer," \textit{Works}, IV, 270.
twice as much to learn, he could have assimilated that, too. "He learned as readily as other men breathe." 43 All men of the time worked to bring him knowledge. 44 In Faust he shows himself a master of history, mythology, philosophy, science, literature, geography, geology, and astronomy. 45 He was the soul of his century. If it was learned, and had become, by population, compact organization and drill of parts, one great Exploring Expedition, accumulating a glut of facts and fruits too fast for any hitherto-existing savans to classify, -- this man's mind had ample chambers for the distribution of all. He had the power to unite the detached atoms again by their own law. 46 Goethe "is the king of all scholars," 47 like Plato, "the leader of the mind of a generation." 48 He was completely at home in the world in which he found himself, and "he was not afraid to live." 49 He seems impelled by a feeling that it is his duty to observe and report the whole universe, and his works testify to eighty years of incessant, tremendously fruitful studious activity. 50 "He has the formidable independence which converses with truth gives." 51 He rejected all tradition and conventions, and instead of

43 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 322.
44 Ibid. 45 "Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 272.
46 Ibid., p. 273.
47 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 327.
49 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 322-333.
50 Ibid., p. 327.
confusing him, the complexity and scope of modern knowledge seems only to have inspired him to greater efforts to miss nothing and to accept nothing without question. A "resolute realist," determined to see to the heart of every thing, "he is an appology for the analytic spirit of the period, be-
cause, of his analysis, always wholes were the result."\textsuperscript{52}

"There is a heart-cheering freedom in his speculation."\textsuperscript{53} "It is really of very little consequence what topic he writes upon. He sees at every pore, and has a certain gravitation toward truth."\textsuperscript{54} He sifts everything; sets himself up as the judge of the truth and reality of every fact, custom, and institution. Even the Devil must be real, or Goethe will expose the fact that he does not exist. Can the Devil exist in the guise of a modern gentleman? questions the poet. And Goethe strips the fiend of his tail, cloven hoofs, horns, and smell of brimstone. What is the origin and meaning of this creature of mythology? wonders the writer. And looking within his own mind, Goethe discovered a Satan more terrible and more real than the legendary fiend, for "he found that the essence of this hobgobblin which had hovered in shadow about the habitations of men

\textsuperscript{52} "Thoughts on Modern Literature," \textit{Works}, XII, 323.
\textsuperscript{53} "Goethe; or, The Writer," \textit{Works}, IV, 273.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 275.
ever since there were men, was pure intellect, applied . . .
to the service of the senses."\(^{55}\)

Goethe "felt it his entire right and duty to stand be-
fore and try and judge every fact in nature,"\(^{56}\) and "he has
said the best things about nature that ever were said."\(^{57}\)
Using his powers of observation and his imagination, he
made himself "a prophet among the doctors,"\(^{58}\) and demon-
strated that "eyes are better on the whole than telescopes
or microscopes."\(^{59}\) He "revolted against the science of the
day, . . . and [as] his views were accepted, . . . the re-
volt became a revolution."\(^{60}\) Disregarding the opinions and
methods of the great scientists of the age, he returned to
the method of studying nature followed by the seven wise mas-
ters.\(^{61}\) He "declared war against the great name of New-
ton,"\(^{62}\) by advancing the theory that "every color was the
mixture of light and darkness in new proportions,"\(^{63}\) and he

\(^{55}\)Ibid., pp. 276-277.

\(^{56}\)"Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 323.

\(^{57}\)"Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 274.

\(^{58}\)"Poetry and Imagination," Works, VIII, 10-11.

\(^{59}\)"Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 274. See also


\(^{61}\)"Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 274.


\(^{63}\)"Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 275.
proposed a simple scheme of metamorphosis as the basis of botany and of human and animal anatomy. 64

Emerson's praise of Goethe and his works is always tempered by one primary reservation. Goethe was too much the product of his times to worship humbly at the shrine of absolute Beauty, Truth, and Goodness. In one of the Essays, while admitting Faust to be the greatest poem of the age, Emerson says that the work typifies the negative and sceptical philosophy of the times. 65 In another work the essayist rebukes himself for unjustly criticizing the poet and the poem:

"After taxing Goethe as a courtier, artificial, unbelieving, worldly, -- I took up this book of Helena, and found him an Indian of the wilderness, a piece of pure nature like an apple or an oak, large as morning or night, and virtuous as a brier-rose." 66

In Representative Men Emerson praises the vast learning, the wit, the "superior intelligence," the truth, the restrained style, the imagery, and the deep realism of Faust, 67 and he says that Goethe has given to literature, "in his Mephistopheles, the first organic figure that has been added for some ages, and which will remain as long as the Prometheus"; 68

64 Ibid. 65 "The Man of Letters," Works, X, 244-245.
nevertheless, he declares that Faust and its writer are only
the best poem and poet of the nineteenth century:

These are not wild miraculous songs, but elaborate
forms to which the poet has confided the results of
eighty years of observation. This reflective and
critical wisdom makes the poem more truly the flower
of this time. It dates itself. Still he [Goethe]
is a poet, -- a poet of prouder laurel than any con-
temporary.69

A paragraph of "Poetry and Imagination," published in 1872,
indicates that, ten years before his death, Emerson still
found Faust lacking in ecstatic poetic inspiration and in
moral sentiment. It is, says the essayist,

vexatious to find poets, who are by excellence the
thinking and feeling of the world, deficient in truth
of intellect and of affection. Then is conscience
unfaithful, and thought unwise. To know the merit
of Shakespeare, read Faust. I find Faust a little
too modern and intelligible. We can find such a
fabric at several mills, though a little inferior.
Faust abounds in the disagreeable. The vice is
prurient, learned, Parisian. In the presence of
Jove, Priapus may be allowed as an offset, but here
he is an equal hero. The egotism, the wit, is cal-
culated. The book is undeniably written by a mas-
ter, and stands unhappily related to the whole modern
world; but it is a very disagreeable chapter of lit-
erature, and accuses the author as well as the times.
Shakespeare could no doubt have been disagreeable,
had he less genius, and if ugliness had attracted
him.70

In "Thoughts on Modern Literature," published in the
Dial in 1840, Wilhelm Meister is declared to be characteris-
tic in spirit of Goethe's life and works and is used by
Emerson to measure the true stature of the German writer as

69Ibid., p. 272.
a literary figure and as a man. Goethe, says Emerson, set out in this novel realistically to portray the actual life of man, emphasizing the fact that in this world great successes daily spring from vice and misfortune. In this aim he succeeded. The book is true to actual life; in it are found "actual men and women even too faithfully painted." It teaches also "the possibility of a highly accomplished society" and that great talent and culture may be found beneath an unpretentious exterior. But there is a fundamental error in Goethe's conception of realism, for "the ideal is truer than the actual." The actual is ephemeral, the ideal is external and unchanging. Nature is essentially moral. Complete truth is interchangeable with Beauty and Goodness, so that "the excess of one element over the other, in that degree diminishes the transparency of things, makes the world opaque to the observer, and destroys so far the value of his experience." Goethe allows the artificial limits of society to "stand for all they are worth in the newspaper." "We are never lifted above ourselves, we are not transported out of the dominion of the senses, or cheered

71 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 329.
72 Ibid., p. 330.
73 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 330.
76 Ibid.
with an infinite tenderness, or armed with a grand trust."\(^77\)

*Wilhelm Meister* illustrates the two great failings of Goethe as a writer and a man. In the first place, the poet and his work are representative of the nineteenth century rather than of all time\(^78\) because Goethe "accepts the base doctrine of Fate" and contents himself with being

the poet of the Actual, not of the Ideal; the poet of limitation, not of possibility; of this world, and not of religion and hope; in short, . . . the poet of prose, and not of poetry. Poetry is with Goethe thus external. . . . The muse never assays those thunder-tones which cause to vibrate the sun and the moon, which dissipate by dreadful melody all this iron network of circumstance, and abolish the old heavens and the old earth before the free will or Godhead of man.\(^79\)

In the second place, because his perception of the moral sentiment was not equal to his other powers, it was inevitable that Goethe should fail to draw his inspiration from the highest source and should adopt an aim below his potentialities. Because of this basic defect, the German poet was content to fall into the track of vulgar poets and spend on common aims his splendid endowments, and has declined the office proffered to now and then a man in many centuries in the power of his genius, of a Redeemer of the human mind.\(^80\)

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\(^{77}\)Ibid., pp. 330-331. Compare this passage with the passages on the office of the scholar reproduced on p. 127 of this thesis. Emerson believed that Goethe, by failing "to cheer and to raise" men, failed in his function as a writer.

\(^{78}\)"Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 328.

\(^{79}\)Ibid., p. 331.

\(^{80}\)Ibid., p. 332.
Wilhelm Meister is again criticized in "Goethe; or, The Writer," but with less emotional intensity than is shown by Emerson in "Thoughts on Modern Literature." It is, he says, a very provoking and unsatisfactory novel of character and manners. The reader finds in it neither the pleasure of a romantic story nor the moral lesson of an idealistic plot. Its conclusion is "leme and immoral," and its hero "has so many weaknesses and impurities and keeps such bad company, that the sober English public, when the book was translated, were disgusted." On the other hand, the novel is so crammed with wisdom, with knowledge of the world and with knowledge of laws; the persons so truly drawn, and with such few strokes and not a word too much, -- the book remains ever so new and unexhausted, that we must even let it go its way and be willing to get what good from it we can, assured that it has only begun its office and has millions of readers yet to serve.

Commenting on "some traits of the recent literature" in "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Emerson writes that one of the major trends in modern literature has been the development of a habit of philosophic subjectiveness or introversion among writers. Inspired by a revival of Shakespeare, German writers have led the literary men of other nations in the practice of looking within themselves in an effort to

81 "Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 278.
82 Ibid., pp. 278-279.
83 Ibid., p. 279.
84 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 311.
determine the true meaning and significance of facts which come to their attention. This tendency, which is based upon the instinctive recognition by the human soul of the fundamental unity in the variety of forms in the universe, has had both good and bad results, depending upon the genius of the individual writer who is subject to it. 85

The great always introduce us to facts; small men introduce us always to themselves. . . . The great lead us to Nature, and in our age to metaphysical Nature, to the invisible awful facts, to moral abstractions, which are not less Nature than is a river, or a coal-mine, -- nay they are far more Nature, -- but its essence and soul. 86

The writer of genius shows the facts of the world in their relation to the universal Truth of which his own mind is a part; the man of talent shows the same facts in their relation to his own mind and personality only. 87 In Goethe, who was a leader in this introversive trend, may be seen both the true and the vicious subjectiveness of his nation and age.

With the sharpest eye for form, color, botany, engraving, medals, persons and manners, he never stopped at surface, but pierced the purpose of a thing and studied to reconcile that purpose with his own being. What he could so reconcile was good; what he could not, was false. Hence a certain greatness encircles every fact he treats; for to him it has a soul, an eternal reason why it was so, and not otherwise. This is the secret of that deep realism, which went about among all objects he beheld to find the cause why they must be what they are. 88

85Ibid., pp. 312-313.  
86Ibid., pp. 314-316.  
87Ibid., pp. 315-316.  
88Ibid., p. 324.
There is, however, "a subtle element of egotism in Goethe." \(^{89}\)

Though it does not seem to "deform his compositions," the German lacks the selflessness of Homer, Milton, and Shakespeare. He wants in frankness, and slyly hides himself behind his talent. "No man was permitted to call Goethe brother. He hid himself, and worked always to astonish, which is egotism, and therefore little." \(^{90}\)

In *Representative Men* the subjective tendencies of the nineteenth century as a characteristic of Goethe or the German literary output are not directly mentioned, but Emerson pays homage to Goethe's and other German writers' "habitual reference to interior truth," as contrasted with the more superficial practices of English, French, and American writers. Writers of the last named nations are characterized by talent, understanding, and taste, but the Germans are distinguished by a "certain probity, which never rests in a superficial performance, but asks steadily, *To what end?*" Because of this earnest questioning, "almost all the valuable distinctions which are current in higher conversation have been derived to us from Germany." \(^{91}\)

Goethe, the head and body of the German nation, does not speak from talent, but the truth shines through; he is very wise, though his talent often veils his wisdom. . . . The old Eternal Genius who built the world has confided himself more to this man than to any other. \(^{92}\)

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\(^{89}\)Ibid., p. 326.  
\(^{90}\)Ibid.  
\(^{92}\)Ibid.
"Amid littleness and detail, he detected the Genius of life, the old cunning Proteus, . . . and showed that the dulness and prose we ascribe to the age was only another of his masks."93

In spite of Goethe's refusal to be content with superficial reporting of the mere form of things and his genius in seeing below the surface of life to law and principle, the German poet failed, in Emerson's opinion, to develop into the ideal scholar because of the end toward which Goethe strove. Goethe subscribed to the belief that "a man exists for culture; not for what he can accomplish, but for what can be accomplished in him."94 "He is the type of culture, the amateur of all arts and science and events; artistic, but not artist; spiritual, but not spiritualist."95 "The worldly tone of his tales grew out of the calculations of self-culture."96 There was nothing in the world that Goethe did not seek to know, but he desired this knowledge for a selfish end:

He has no aims less large than the conquest of universal nature, of universal truth, to be his portion; a man not to be bribed, nor deceived, nor over-sowied; for a stoical self-command and self-denial, and having one test for all men, -- What can you teach me? All possessions are valued by him for that only; rank, privileges, health, time, Being itself.97

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93 Ibid., p. 273.  
95 Ibid., p. 284.  
96 Ibid., p. 288.  
97 Ibid., p. 284.
This singleness of aim or ideal gives power to Goethe's works, but the ideal of culture constitutes also an artificial limit which Goethe placed upon his own greatness. There are higher ideals. "The idea of absolute, eternal truth, without reference to my own enlargement by it, is higher. The surrender to the torrent of poetic inspiration is higher."98 The highest culture consists in complete identification of the individual ego with the Absolute.99 Goethe has not ascended to the highest grounds from which genius has spoken. He has not worshipped the highest unity; he is incapable of a self-surrender to the moral sentiment. There are nobler strains in poetry than any he has sounded. There are writers poorer in talent, whose tone is purer and more touches the heart.

Goethe can never be dear to men. His is not even the devotion to pure truth; but to truth for the sake of culture.100

Goethe and Napoleon are representative of Nature's progressive reaction against the dead weight of traditions and conventions. These two "stern realists" and their followers "have severally set the axe at the root of the tree of cant and seeming, for this and for all time."101 Goethe, who is the product of an age when individual genius was smothered beneath the weight of mass opinion and mass learning, shows

98 Ibid., pp. 287-289.
100 "Goethe; or, The Writer," Works, IV, 284.
101 Ibid., p. 289.
that organic individual genius can rise above the disadvantages of any times, and even though his aim is not of the highest, his goal and his accomplishments are superior to those of any other writer of the time. "Thus has he brought back to a book some of its ancient might and dignity." 102 Goethe is the greatest scholar that the world had known, but he is not the final product toward which nature is working. 103 The true scholar will seek absolute Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, and not for himself. Goethe wrote of evil and unpleasant facts of life. The ends of Beauty are served by "what delights, what emancipates, not what scars and pains us." 104 Goethe sought truth for culture, using his great intellectual powers successfully to this end. The true scholar will devote himself "to the highest power and pass, if it be possible, by assiduous love and watching, into the visions of absolute truth." 105 Goethe was driven by a scholarly desire to learn everything the universe contained, but he allowed his interest in countless individual facts to prevent his seeing the whole of nature in true perspective 106 and "in the feeling that the thing itself was so admirable as to leave all comment behind, went up and down, from object

102 Ibid., p. 289.
103 "Thoughts on Modern Literature," Works, XII, 332.
to object, lifting the veil from every one, and did no more."

To the 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 to him of [the] . . . supreme nature which lurks within all. The Moral Sentiment is but its other name. It makes by its presence or absence right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, genius or depravity.\textsuperscript{108}

In spite of his great gifts, Goethe left the world as he found it.\textsuperscript{109}

\begin{quote}
Humanity must wait for its physician still at the side of the road, and confess as this man goes out that they have served it better, who assured it out of the innocent hope in their hearts that a Physician will come, than this majestic Artist, with all the treasuries of wit, of science, and of power at his command.\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{107}"Thoughts on Modern Literature," \textit{Works}, XII, 327-328.  \\
\textsuperscript{108}"Lecture on the Times," \textit{Works}, I, 289.  \\
\textsuperscript{109}"Thoughts on Modern Literature," \textit{Works}, XII, 333.  \\
\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 332.
\end{flushright}
CHAPTER VII

EMERSON AND THE GREAT MAN

In his *Representative Men* Emerson deals with six types of men, using a particular man as an example of each type. Though he might easily have added to this number of types -- for instance, he might have placed his essay on Michael Angelo in the series and called it "Michael Angelo; or, The Artist" -- there can be little doubt that the essayist considered the six types described in *Representative Men* sufficient to represent generally the activities, aspirations, and potentialities of mankind. Such an assumption is borne out by the relation of these six types to Emerson's philosophical concept of the apparent dualism but actual monism of the Cosmos. Though he never forgot the all-embracing Over-Soul, Emerson divides the Universe into dual aspects. There is spirit and matter, unity and variety, substance and form, fact and appearance, throughout his spiritual and material world. Mankind also is divided roughly into two great classes. One class is inclined to be content with the material world as it appears to the senses; the other class is inclined to look beyond the physical and utilitarian aspects of the world and to concern itself with
spiritual and intellectual concepts. Plato, Shakespeare, Swedenborg, and Goethe represent the second of these classes. Montaigne occupies a middle ground between the two classifications. Napoleon represents the first class, the class of the man of the world.

In Emerson's philosophy the great Whole is conceived of as God, from whom emanates as separate though mutually inclusive existences, the Trinity of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. Among the creations of the Universal Spirit which are man, certain types are especially designed to absorb and reflect each of these emanations. The philosopher is the special channel of Truth, the poet is the best receptor and disseminator of Beauty, and the mystic is especially inspired by Good. The emanations, however, pervade the whole material and spiritual universe, and since the material world of nature is a reflection of the spiritual world, the emanations of God are reflected through the spiritual realm into the material. Indeed, Nature is "precipitated" intellect, and upon the face of the world man may read the laws of the mind and spirit. It is the special function of the scholar or writer to learn every portion of Nature and to record natural facts and laws in terms of their true relationship to spiritual facts and laws. Nature's strength, which comes of its spiritual origin and its unvarying obedience to spiritual law, is Power, and since

man is a part of nature, he may, like every natural thing and creature, use the power of nature. The man of the world is designed with special aptitude for drawing upon and employing the strength of God in terms of natural Power. The sceptic serves as a link and a balancing element between the man of the world and men of intellect and spirit.

Two of the types, the scholar and the sceptic, do not rest easily in the niches assigned to them above. Emerson's sceptic represents more a frame of mind than an organic type of mind. Emerson would not admit that a complete sceptic was possible. "We are born believing." On the other hand, one of Emerson's fundamental doctrines is that of nonconformity, which necessarily implies scepticism. In "Montaigne; or, The Skeptic," the essayist says that every worth-while mind passes through a stage of scepticism, and it is possible that the sceptical type was included in Representative Men in order to represent the agnostic phase in the development of the individual mind.

Evidence can be supplied almost without limit to show that when Emerson uses the word "scholar" he generally means any man who concerns himself primarily with the humanities or with religion. In Representative Men the essay on the scholar is designedly called "Goethe; or, The Writer," not "Goethe; or, The Scholar." Yet in this essay Goethe is called "the king of all scholars." The organic function of the writer is reportorial; he is born to write, born to
report truth. But all of Emerson's representative types, except the man of the world, report truth in writing. Goethe is declared to be not only the representative writer and scholar of his age, but also the representative poet and philosopher, and he and the class of the scholar in general are rebuked for not devoting themselves humbly to the reporting of absolute Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. The wise sceptic is the corrector of the excesses and monomanias of mankind; this is also the function of the scholar. The scholar is Man Thinking, but all thinking "is a pious reception," and the source and nature of all intuitions are the same. Once the scholar and the mystics and prophets were of the same class, and this condition must exist again before the world rights itself.²

A second and more obvious indication that Emerson generally intends that the word "scholar" should have a very broad meaning is to be found in the history of the Essays. Many of these compositions were first addressed, in the form of lectures, to groups composed mainly of students, teachers, literary men, and men of religion. For this reason, the term "scholar" was frequently employed in such talks as a form of address to the audience. Because of his habitual use of the word in this manner and because of the catholic nature of the scholar's interests and endeavors, had Emerson

²Ibid., p. 221.
ever settled upon a name for his ideal type, he might have called that type the "scholar." As it is, this term is used more than any other by the essayist as a combinative word describing all men engaged in pursuits other than those which occupy the man of the world.

Emerson calls all of the men dealt with in Representative Men, as well as dozens of other men mentioned in the Essays, "great men"; yet it is plain that no one of these so-called "great men" ever approaches the perfection of the ideal man the essayist has in mind. In his essay, "Greatness," Emerson explains that the quality of greatness is, in some degree, the natural aim and the natural endowment of every man, and he defines the highest degree of greatness as "completeness," adding significantly that completeness will perhaps not be descriptive of any man for ages.\(^3\) The second paragraph of this essay contains the gist of much of what we have seen that Emerson has to say about the great man directly or by implication in Representative Men and elsewhere in the Essays. "Greatness, -- what is it?" asks the essayist. Are not the modern connotations of the word insulting to our civilization? Do not the men whom we call great point to the youth and barbarism of our society? Does not our glorification of men of the world who live and achieve only on the first levels of human potentialities show

\(^3\)"Greatness," Works, VIII, 301.
us to be but little advanced beyond the primitive?

'Tis not the soldier, not Alexander or Bonaparte or Count Moltke surely, who represent the highest force of mankind; not the strong hand, but wisdom and civility, the creation of laws, institutions, letters and art. These we call by distinction the humanities; these, and not the strong arm and brave heart, which are also indispensable to their defense. For the scholars represent the intellect, by which man is man; the intellect and the moral sentiment, -- which in the last analysis can never be separated. Who can doubt the potency of an individual mind, who sees the shock given to torpid races -- torpid for ages -- by Mahomet; a vibration propagated over Asia and Africa? What of Mencu? What of Buddha? of Shakspeare? of Newton? of Franklin?

The passage quoted is characteristic of Emerson's writings concerning the great man. It reflects Emerson's admiration for and gives due credit to the man of the type of the man of the world, saying that his qualities are necessary to man, but in the same sentence it insists that the intellectually and morally strong man is superior to the man great primarily because of physical endowment or material power or achievement. Secondly, the passage develops briefly Emerson's often repeated thesis that the intellect and the moral sentiment are complementary forces and are both necessary to the more complete man. Lastly, the paragraph is climaxed by an enthusiastic exaltation of the potentialities of man.5

4Ibid., p. 302.

5The linking of the word "humanities" with the term "scholars," together with the curious group of "scholars" listed in the last sentence, make this passage one of the more definite indications in the Essays that Emerson makes no important distinction between the various sorts of men engaged in activities concerned with intellectual, cultural, creative, and moral endeavors.
In "The Uses of Great Men" there occurs a passage which is interestingly similar and different from the one quoted above. In this paragraph one sees the same ideas developed more in accord with the Emersonian enthusiasm for achievement of any sort:

I admire great men of all classes, those who stand for facts, and for thoughts; I like rough and smooth, 'Scourges of God,' and 'Darlings of the human race.' I like the first Caesar; and Charles V, of Spain; and Charles XII, of Sweden; Richard Plantagenet; and Bonaparte, in France. I applaud a sufficient man, an officer equal to his office; captains, ministers, senators. I like a master standing firm on legs of iron, well-born, rich, handsome, eloquent, loaded with advantages, drawing all men by fascination into tributaries and supporters of his power. Sword and staff, or talents sword-like or staff-like, carry on the work of the world. But I find him greater when he can abolish himself and all heroes, by letting in this element of reason, irrespective of persons, this subtilizer and irresistible upward force, into our thought, destroying individualism; the power so great that the potentate is nothing. Then he is a monarch who gives a constitution to his people; a pontiff who preaches the equality of souls and releases his servants from their barbarous homages; an emperor who can spare his empire.  

The body of the essay on "Greatness" consists of material already dealt with in other chapters of this work. Its external purpose is to show that material greatness depends upon health, geniality, humanity, and self-respect, founded upon obedience to natural bias and cultivation of natural talents; but the theme of the essay is the idea that the partial greatness of the eminent men of the past and the present represents a promise of the more complete

greatness of men to come:

Scintillations of greatness appear here and there in men of unequal character, and are by no means confined to the cultivated and so-called moral class. . . . It is difficult to find greatness pure. Well I please myself with its diffusion; to find a spark of true fire amid much corruption. It is some guaranty, I hope, for the health of the soul which has this generous blood.7

The essay returns in its last lines to this theme, adding to it the thought, frequently expressed in the Essays, that all men are seeking for the great man: "The man whom we have not seen . . . is whom we seek, encouraged in every good hour that here or hereafter he shall be found."8

The word "greatness," when used by Emerson to describe a man, does not necessarily express the qualities which Emerson would demand of his ideal man, but is used rather as a relative term to indicate the superiority of one individual over another.9 Greatness is a matter of degree to Emerson, for he finds that individual men are only partially great, great in particular qualities. Since the men of Representative Men are representative of the best or greatest qualities which Emerson finds in humanity and since Emerson shows that each one of these men is superior in some particular quality of greatness to all or almost all other men in a degree approaching the limits of human potentialities, it is logical to assume that a composite man embodying the superiorities of each of the six representative types

8 Ibid., p. 320. See also "Character," Works, III, 112-155.
would approach the perfection of Emerson's ideal man.

Such a man would, like Napoleon, be strong with all the power that man derives from his kinship to nature. His natural physical endowment would be unblemished by breaches of natural law ocasioned by his parents' or by his own lack of prudence, so that he would be as adequately equipped physically to perform the function of man in the world as water is to function as water. Our great man would be endowed by nature with the quality of personal ascendancy, so that all men would follow him. His common sense would serve as an unbreacable barrier to any tendency to violate the laws of matter and would teach him that such laws are subsidiary to spiritual laws. Like the great scholar and the great sceptic, this man would be non-conforming in his life and in his habits of thought, and his scepticism would be directed against every institution and custom which did not conform to the basic laws of the spiritual and material universe.

Emerson's ideal man would be a writer, poet, prophet, and philosopher combined in one body. Possessed of the writer's organic urge to discover and to report the truths of the physical universe in their relation to the laws of the spirit, his writings and speech would be direct utterances of the emanations of the Trinity, taking the form of inspired poetry, ringing with the authority of the moral sentiment and truth direct from the source of all Beauty,
Goodness, and Truth. Such a man would conform to the demands of his times. He would serve the needs of his fellow man then and there, but in him would be strong that universality or "wisdom of humanity" which enabled Shakespeare to speak to and for men of all times and places.

Above all, this ideal man would rise above the lesser forms of self-respect to the perfection of absolute "self-reliance." Though a man among men, and bound to nature by limitations of the flesh, this man would be capable of utterly abolishing his individual egotism. Unlike all of Emerson's representative men, the man representative of the potentialities of mankind would be completely and humbly a channel for the influxes of the Spirit. Emerson was convinced that every man is created with an instinctive urge which directs him toward the general field of his work in life. This bias is a highly individual matter and must be trained away by culture and idealized by submission of the individual will to the intuitions of the Over-Soul if a man is to rise above his egotism to the level of true self-reliance. Emerson's man representative of the potentialities of mankind instead of representative of a type of mankind would be so completely a channel for the influxes of the Universal Spirit that his personal peculiarities and will would not intervene in the expression of these intuitions.

Emerson says that "the search after the great man is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of manhood,"
and he acknowledges that he would go to almost any extreme in order to come in contact with a truly great man. 10 "A divine person is the prophecy of the mind." 11 The world has for ages exulted in the sacrifice of Jesus.

This great defeat is hitherto our highest fact. But the mind requires a victory to the senses; a force of character which will convert judge, jury, soldier, and king; which will rule animal and mineral virtues, and blend with the courses of sap, of rivers, of winds, of stars, and of moral agents. 12

Elsewhere Emerson emphasizes what seems to be an essentially anti-democratic belief that there is an organic aristocracy among men. Young men rebel against the superiority they observe in other men. Experience will teach them that such superiority "is not removable, but a distinction in the nature of things," which no political revolution can change. "I affirm," avers the essayist, "that inequalities exist, not in costume, but in the powers of expression and action, a primitive aristocracy." 13

This belief in natural rank among men, this glorification of the great man, this hope for a leader, which is expressed in some of the above lines and in all of the essays in Representative Men, when considered in connection with Emerson's constant insistence upon individual nonconformity and

12 Ibid., p. 114.
13 "Aristocracy," Works, X, 35-36. See also Ibid., p. 46.
self-reliance, indicate that Emerson's ideas are closely related to those of the many hero-worshippers among the eighteenth and nineteenth century European romantic writers and thinkers. For this reason, it is of some moment to point to some of the basic thoughts behind Emerson's delight in the great man. In the first place, it must be understood that the New England essayist makes a distinction between the aim of Nature as related to man and man's ultimate potentialities. Man's body is of nature, as are his senses and his understanding, but man's soul and man's reason are of the creator of Nature, God.\textsuperscript{14} The method of Nature is ecstasy, and the end toward which Nature works is the impartial betterment of herself. The universe was not created especially for man, nor is a better man the special end toward which natural processes work, but so long as men do not go contrary to the laws of Nature, the race will progress along with the universal trend toward melioration.\textsuperscript{15} Because of his faculties of will and understanding, man occupies the most exalted place among natural creatures, but by reason of his spiritual nature man may rise above natural processes.

The fossil strata show us that Nature began with rudimental forms and rose to the more complex as fast as the earth was fit for their dwelling-place; and that the lower perish as the higher appear. Very

\textsuperscript{14}See "Nature," Works, I, 4, 49, 64-65.

few of our race can be said to be finished men. We still carry sticking to us some remains of the preceding inferior quadruped organization. We call these millions men; but they are not yet men. Half engaged in the soil; pawing to get free, man needs all the [culture] . . . that can be brought to bear to disengage him. The age of the quadruped is to go out, the age of the brain and heart is to come in. The time will come when the evil forms we have known can no more be organized. Man's culture can spare nothing, wants all material. He is to convert all impediments into instruments, all enemies into power. The formidable mischief will only make the more useful slave. And if one shall read the future of the race hinted in the organic effort of nature to mount and meliorate, and the corresponding impulse to the Better in the human being, we shall dare affirm that there is nothing he will not overcome and convert, until at last culture shall absorb the chaos and geenna. He will convert the Furies into Muses, and the hells into benefit.16

The final conquest of his environment by man as a race, Emerson regards as the inevitable end of natural evolutionary trends. However, no man need wait out the slow processes of evolution in order to attain the millennium. He may assert his spiritual superiority and rise above nature quickly:

At present man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; and he that works most in it is but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage. His relation to nature, his power over it, is through the understanding, as by manure, or the economic use of fire, wind, water, and the mariner's needle. . . . This is such a resumption of power as if a banished king should buy his territories inch by inch, instead of vaulting at once into his throne. Meanwhile, in the thick darkness, there are not wanting gleams of a better light, -- occasional examples of the action of man upon nature with his entire force, -- with reason

16 "Culture," Works, VI, 165.
as well as understanding. Such examples are, the traditions of miracles in the earliest antiquity of all nations; the history of Jesus Christ; the achievements of a principle, as in religious and political revolutions, and in the abolition of the slave trade; the miracles of enthusiasm, as those reported of Swedenborg, Hohenlohe, and the Shakers. . . . These are examples of Reason's momentary grasp of the sceptre; the exertions of a power which exists not in time or space, but an instantaneous in-streaming causing power. 17

Ecstasy, intuitive contact with the Over-Soul, will one day be learned to be a natural condition, "an example on a higher plane of the same gentle gravitation by which stones fall and rivers run." 18

Thus man as a race is certain to go forward along with the slow trend of Nature, but individual men may at any time transcend this slow movement forward of the race. In this fact lies the secret of Emerson's insistence upon individualism. "The Divine Mind imparts itself to the single person." 19 Absolute reliance upon the God within one's own soul, absolute disregard of counsel contrary to this voice -- and hence, individual "self-reliance" and individual non-conformity -- are a condition of the most effective reception and employment of the transcendent power of the soul. On the other hand, selfish individualism vitiates the reception of or action according to the dictates of the Over-

19 "Character," Works, X, 100.
Soul. "Self-reliance" is reliance on God. The non-conformity of which Emerson writes consists of conformity to a higher voice than that of the world. "The open secret of the world is the art of subliming a private soul with inspirations from the great and public and divine Soul from which we live." 20 Emerson's philosophy, when rightly read, cannot be used to justify any cult based upon principles of individual self-interest or human inequality. On the contrary, humility, complete surrender of the individual will to benevolent intuitions from God, are necessary to true human greatness, and though there be differences in natural endowment among men, "the highest heaven of wisdom is alike near from every point," and at every time. 21 "All that is said of the wise man by Stoic or Oriental or modern essayist, describes to each reader his own idea, describes his unattained but attainable self." 22 All apparent inequalities among men are of relatively little importance in the light of every man's power to call upon the primal source of all Nature:

We affirm that in all men is this majestic perception and command; that it is the presence of the Eternal in each perishing man; that it distances and degrades all statements of whatever saints, heroes, poets, as obscure and confused stammerings before its silent revelations. They report the truth. It is the truth. When I think of Reason, of Truth, of


Virtue, I cannot conceive them as lodged in your soul and lodged in my soul, but that you and I and all souls are lodged in that.23

No individual is indispensable. Had Christ died without giving men his message, another would have come to take His place.24

We assume that there are few great men, all the rest are little; that there is but one Homer, but one Shakespeare, one Newton, one Socrates. But the soul in her beaming hour does not acknowledge these usurpations. . . . 'Tis the good reader that makes the good book; a good head cannot read amiss, in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear.25

Great individual men can advance mankind very little by direct teaching or service, but such men may mean much to the race in terms of inspiration.26 "I cannot even hear of personal vigor of any kind, great power of performance without fresh resolution," declares Emerson.27 Men are inspired by other men as well as by the Divinity.28 Representative Men is a part of the New England essayist's attempt to picture the great, symmetrical, complete man, an endeavor in which he persisted because of his belief in the potentialities of mankind and in the inspirational qualities of superior men. He found no such men had ever existed, but

28"Character," Works, X, 100.
the hope that one day such ideal men might appear is the inspiration behind the writing of Representative Men as well as many of the rest of the Essays.

This hope explains the curious sameness of treatment observable in almost all of Emerson's writings about great men. Almost invariably the essayist points admiringly to the superior qualities of the man of whom he happens to be writing at the moment, shaping for the reader a grand figure of a man; but then, after moulding his subject into a glittering creation of God-like majesty, Emerson, almost scornfully, scrapes the gilt from the statue he has sculptured and reveals the clay beneath. See what this individual has done? proclaims the New England seer. Do not his accomplishments indicate that man is a great and superior being? But notice now that this man's accomplishments were achieved by using only a small part of the potentialities inherent in every man. Think what he might have done, had he used in full the power which was his for the taking by reason of his kinship with Nature and his access to God!

Emerson searches through history and in his own age for a man who approached the perfection of his symmetrical ideal. He finds no one man who embodies this ideal, but each man illustrates to him in some manner new evidence of the tremendous potentialities of all men.²⁹ Embracing the

affirmative,\textsuperscript{30} secure in his belief that a benevolent God intends the eventual perfection of mankind,\textsuperscript{31} Emerson offers his \textit{Representative Men} as a proof and summary of his belief in man's perfectibility and in the hopes that the essays may inspire man to hasten the millennium.\textsuperscript{32}

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\textsuperscript{31}"Nature," \textit{Works}, I, 73-77.

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