

Ann Woodlief—*On Self Reliance, an Introduction to Emerson*

Emerson said, toward the end of his writing career, "I have taught one doctrine, namely, the infinitude of the private man." That's why we begin our study of American transcendentalism with this essay. His basic philosophical faith (one shared by many Americans) is that the ultimate source of truth is within ourselves. We recognize truth outside ourselves, in nature or in others, and the key word here is "recognize," even if only very dimly. We are often not "in touch" with ourselves or trust ourselves enough to find these truths and so must often depend on others, books, etc. to express it for us, but it is somehow within us. Now, there's no particular empirical evidence for this; Emerson is making a great intuitive leap of faith, and you either believe (because you've experienced it to some degree) or you don't. It is this concept of what some critics call the "imperial self" which lies at the heart of romanticism, both positively and negatively.

However, this is not necessarily self-centered, because the truth which lies within is universal, shared and recognized by all (if they only knew it) and generated by Self (God, Over-soul, whatever). All we can really know is within us, but we must assume that other people have the same potential as we do--and assume that they do, in fact, exist (although you really can't prove it!) Presumably, trusting oneself means much more than that; it means trusting that somehow or other we have an innate wisdom which is a projection of the god within, and that every person has that wisdom, although few have much access to it. Those few we often call poets and prophets (but never politicians!) and we cherish the insights into our own truths that we glimpse through them. Theoretically, then, to believe in our selves and our deep capacity to understand and recognize truths is to believe in every self, though we have no access to any other self besides us. Practically it may be another matter, but Emerson is a bit of an idealist and not terribly practical (we can't all be everything!)

One characteristic of Emerson's essays is the gaps he leaves the reader to fill (or to flounder in); it is probably their greatest strength (because you may personalize what you read) and greatest weakness (it can be confusing). For example, at the beginning of the essay he speaks of verses he has read which are original, but he does not tell you what those verses are. You have to imagine what "original" might be. His emphasis is not on these particular verses, or even the definition of originality in poetry, but a discussion on originality and recognizing your own ability to be original and not imitative. After all, he can't say what would be original for you, could he? But he wants you to imagine what that might be. This will happen repeatedly through the essay. Try your best to fill those blanks in ways that make sense to you and your experience, and if you can't, ignore them and keep going.

One problem you may find with this essay is that you feel that he is hitting you over the head with the same idea over and over, like a big hammer labeled "believe in yourself." I'm sure you wished to cry out, "ok Ralphie, I've got it, I've got it!" He makes sure that you consider the implications of this idea in every way possible. It doesn't matter if there are gaps in what you understand; he'll catch up with you somewhere or other in the essay. A little overkill, perhaps. Why? Whom is he trying to convince? Perhaps himself as well as his reader. But the message seems to be one that we all need, especially today when the ever-present media assaults us with ideas and images of how we should live and what we should believe.

Remember that we are reading this 150 years later or so. What seemed like a rather novel idea then has deteriorated into a cliché, embedded in just about every self-help "psychology" book in the local mall bookstore that you can find. It is hard for us to see the original force of this in 1838, when people felt far less secure about themselves, as individuals and as Americans (whatever that was). In many ways, this is as much a cultural/intellectual declaration of independence as it is an exhortation to believe in yourself. Its major power today is probably directed toward the younger reader, struggling with the very powerful forces toward conformity that seem endemic in American high schools. However, it also works in a class like this, where I am, in a sense, forcing you to express your ideas and not giving you such an easy way out as taking notes on what wisdom I might have to impart.

Emerson had his own personal reasons for writing this. He was deeply insecure in many ways (aren't we all?), and a rather revolutionary speech about religion that he delivered at the Harvard Divinity School about this time (asserting the doctrine of the God within) caused a tremendous uproar and criticism from people he respected. There would be no job for him at Harvard! He had left the ministry a few years earlier and had lost his young wife to tuberculosis after 18 months of marriage. He didn't really have a career at that point; he just had the ideas he believed passionately and thought needed to be heard. He was involved in a very deep career crisis (which many of us can relate to). There simply was no way to earn a living doing what his heart told him that he must do--to write and to speak. Except, as it turned out, there were ways to realize his dream, as long as he didn't lose his faith in himself.

The rhetoric of this essay shows signs of his years in the pulpit; it's like he's demanding you to listen and to go out and act. But he may well be exhorting himself just as much as, if not more than, his readers. What he wanted to do--to establish himself a place as a writer and thinker--was extraordinarily difficult to do outside of an institution like the church or the university (so what else has changed!), and it would take all the nerve he could summon. And after all, he was no kid; he was 35 years old and counting.

It all sounds so simple: just make up your mind to trust your deepest instincts and go for it! I know it isn't that simple--and in fact, so did Emerson, and seeing the problems inherent in such a personally energizing idea kept him busy writing for some time. If you look carefully, you can see some awareness of this conflict in the essay, but it doesn't really blossom forth for a while. For one thing, he gives a lot of credit to innate goodness, and almost totally ignores the very crucial environmental shaping factors. He and his readers were raised in an extremely "moral" environment, and though they might rebel against church doctrine, they were deeply "indoctrinated" with those moral codes. This is not necessarily the case in the "murder capital of the world"! Another problem is the extreme "masculinity" of the essay--one of his favorite words is "manliness." I can just visualize this very assertive and muscular male as an underlying ideal (was Emerson insecure about that too? Probably, since writers/thinkers/preachers were considered rather feminized by his society, unlike those competitive, money-making businessmen so idealized by his compatriots.) I don't believe that self-trust is a male-marked trait, although I suspect that he does believe it (though, bless his heart, he doesn't really know it!). I know, I'm reading this from my own perspective, but as Emerson would say, isn't that the only way you can read? Actually, I think

you can try to place yourself in another context, but that must be a work of imagination to some degree (I can try, anyhow; I'll just substitute woman for man and you can do whatever you like!)

Emerson doesn't just keep preaching the same doctrine though, you may be relieved to hear, or at least not with the same simplistic fervour. There is a flip side to this: as exciting and energizing it may be to follow your deepest instincts and do/say what you think is right, it's also depressing to think that maybe all we can know is what is within us. In a sense, we may be imprisoned within our own perceptions and experiences, and can never really know what might be true. We can't even be sure if anyone or anything else exists, because all we can know is what's in our little individual heads. Emerson will come to see this, as well as the many limitations on our power that are imposed by circumstances and environment, which he calls Fate. He gets a lot more interesting when he confronts these conflicting forces.

Wouldn't it be nice if all we had to do is "trust ourselves" and follow our own stars? Actually, it's rather amazing what people can accomplish if they do just that. However, that's not the whole story, and Emerson knew it, especially after life dealt him a few more tough blows--like his beloved 5 year old son dying of scarlet fever. Self-reliance can look like a pretty puny doctrine in light of a tragedy like that, but it did sustain him (although perhaps in a modified form)..

So the important thing is not whether Emerson is right or wrong here. He's both--and we are to draw from the essay what means the most to us. That's one reason it's written as it is. Buried in there are sentences which strike right to the heart of readers, and suggest all kinds of possibilities for them. For example, many students trying to see their way ahead in life have found great comfort in this metaphor:

The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions.

You could interpret this in several ways. When you look at your life, especially when you are young, if you follow your "inner gyroscope" and do things and take courses that just "feel right," it might look to others (parents in particular) as if you just can't make up your mind and are zigzagging all over the place. The coherence will be an inner one, perhaps not even visible to you, but over time, it will probably make sense, just as you have to zigzag when sailing to reach a point most directly. One difference, of course, is that you (unlike the sailor) often haven't a clue where or what that "point" might be, and have to trust that by following your instincts and strengths, you'll actually reach some kind of point. I find that rather profound, as I look at my own life, and the decisions that I made that didn't make a lot of sense, perhaps, to others and seemed inconsistent, but that were in fact quite consistent with who I was and what I wanted to be, although I hadn't a clue what that might be (I never dreamed I'd end up teaching, etc.!)

OK, that's my personal testimony (although I'll admit, I cruised past that passage when I was in college and needed to read it most)--you'll have your own, I imagine. If you'll be patient with Emerson (and his vocabulary and greater reading knowledge), he is likely to speak very personally

to you, if not on this reading then maybe on another. Besides, just think of all the money you can save on those self-help books and therapy groups by going right to the source! ;

Points and questions to consider as you read "Self-Reliance"

Emerson: "the infinitude of the private man"

General: For Emerson, Truth (or Spirit) is indwelling in the Universe, expressed through nature and man and perceived through Reason (or Intuition) rather than just understanding (reason, logic). All things are potentially microcosms, containing the germs of all Truth. Likewise, his sentences and metaphors all explore the same Truth, and so are not to be read as logical arguments. So don't be surprised if his essays seem rather circular, presenting similar ideas from many different angles. In the end, he says, all truth has to do with the "infinitude of the private man."

To read this essay well, you must underline sentences that seem significant and try to put them in your own words.

"Self-Reliance"

How does (and should) a person define his/her place in society? (what does Emerson mean by "society" anyhow?)

What are the two major barriers to self-reliance (in your own words)? Who is the "aboriginal Self," the "Trustee"? How does this concept modify the egotism of self-reliance?

What are the implications of self-reliance for business? for religion (prayers, creeds)? for travelling? for art? for property ownership and government?

Here are some of the key sentences marked in context. How would you put any of them in your own words?

- ["Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense...."](#)
- ["We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents."](#)
- ["Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members."](#)
- ["Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."](#)
- ["What I must do, is all that concerns me, not what the people think."](#)
- ["A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statemens and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do."](#)
- ["The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul."](#)
- ["Life only avails, not the having lived. Power ceases in the instant of repose."](#)
- ["Just as men's prayers are a disease of the will, so are their creeds a disease of the intellect."](#)
- ["Travelling is a fool's paradise."](#)
- ["In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance, and shalt sit thereafter out of fear from her rotations....Nothing can bring you peace but yourself."](#)

ESSAY II *Self-Reliance* (1841)

--Ralph Waldo Emerson [*Excerpt/Abridged*]

I read the other day some verses written by an eminent painter which were original and not conventional. The soul always hears an admonition in such lines, let the subject be what it may. The sentiment they instill is of more value than any thought they may contain. To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost,—— and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. 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. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else, to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact, makes much impression on him, and another none. This sculpture in the memory is not without pre-established harmony. The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

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. ...

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude. ...

The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word, because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them. ...

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.

I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency. Let the words be gazetted and ridiculous henceforward. Instead of the gong for dinner, let us hear a whistle from the Spartan fife. Let us never bow and apologize more. A great man is coming to eat at my house. I do not wish to please him; I wish that he should wish to please me. I will stand here for humanity, and though I would make it kind, I would make it true. Let us affront and reprimand the smooth mediocrity and squalid contentment of the times, and hurl in the face of custom, and trade, and office, the fact which is the upshot of all history, that there is a great responsible Thinker and Actor working wherever a man works; that a true man belongs to no other time or place, but is the centre of things. ... Every true man is a cause, a country, and an age; requires infinite spaces and numbers and time fully to accomplish his design; — and posterity seem to follow his steps as a train of clients. A man Caesar is born, and for ages after we have a Roman Empire. Christ is born, and millions of minds so grow and cleave to his genius, that he is confounded with virtue and the possible of man. An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man; as, Monachism, of the Hermit Antony; the Reformation, of Luther; Quakerism, of Fox;

Methodism, of Wesley; Abolition, of Clarkson. Scipio, Milton called "the height of Rome"; and all history resolves itself very easily into the biography of a few stout and earnest persons.

Let a man then know his worth, and keep things under his feet. Let him not peep or steal, or skulk up and down with the air of a charity-boy, a bastard, or an interloper, in the world which exists for him. But the man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculptured a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these. To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book have an alien and forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, 'Who are you, Sir?' Yet they all are his, suitors for his notice, petitioners to his faculties that they will come out and take possession. The picture waits for my verdict: it is not to command me, but I am to settle its claims to praise. That popular fable of the sot who was picked up dead drunk in the street, carried to the duke's house, washed and dressed and laid in the duke's bed, and, on his waking, treated with all obsequious ceremony like the duke, and assured that he had been insane, owes its popularity to the fact, that it symbolizes so well the state of man, who is in the world a sort of sot, but now and then wakes up, exercises his reason, and finds himself a true prince. ...

Man is timid and apologetic; he is no longer upright; he dares not say 'I think,' 'I am,' but quotes some saint or sage. He is ashamed before the blade of grass or the blowing rose. These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied, and it satisfies nature, in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time. ...

If we cannot at once rise to the sanctities of obedience and faith, let us at least resist our temptations; let us enter into the state of war, and wake Thor and Woden, courage and constancy, in our Saxon breasts. This is to be done in our smooth times by speaking the truth. Check this lying hospitality and lying affection. Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. ... I shall endeavour to nourish my parents, to support my family, to be the chaste husband of one wife, — but these relations I must fill after a new and unprecedented way. I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me, and the heart appoints. If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly. ...

If any man consider the present aspects of what is called by distinction *society*, he will see the need of these ethics. The sinew and heart of man seem to be drawn out, and we are become timorous, desponding whimperers. We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other. Our age yields no great and perfect persons. We want men and women who shall renovate life and our social state, but we see that most natures are insolvent, cannot satisfy their own wants, have an ambition out of all proportion to their practical force, and do lean and beg day and night continually. Our housekeeping is mendicant, our arts, our occupations, our marriages, our religion, we have not chosen, but society has chosen for us. We are parlour soldiers. We shun the rugged battle of fate, where strength is born.

If our young men miscarry in their first enterprises, they lose all heart. If the young merchant fails, men say he is *ruined*. If the finest genius studies at one of our colleges, and is not installed in an office within one year afterwards in the cities or suburbs of Boston or New York, it seems to his friends and to himself that he is right in being disheartened, and in complaining the rest of his life. A sturdy lad from New Hampshire or Vermont, who in turn tries all the professions, who *teams it, farms it, peddles*, keeps a school, preaches, edits a newspaper, goes to Congress, buys a township, and so forth, in successive years, and always, like a cat, falls on his feet, is worth a hundred of these city dolls. ... He has not one chance, but a hundred chances...

It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.

1. In what prayers do men allow themselves! ... Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing his works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. ...

A sort of false prayers are our regrets. Discontent is the want of self-reliance: it is infirmity of will. Regret calamities, if you can thereby help the sufferer; if not, attend your own work, and already the evil begins to be repaired. ... The secret of fortune is joy in our hands. Welcome evermore to gods and men is the self-helping man. For him all doors are flung wide: him all tongues greet, all honors crown, all eyes follow with desire. Our love goes out to him and embraces him, because he did not need it. We solicitously and apologetically caress and celebrate him, because he held on his way and scorned our disapprobation. The gods love him because men hated him. "To the persevering mortal," said Zoroaster, "the blessed Immortals are swift." ...

2. It is for want of self-culture that the superstition of Travelling, whose idols are Italy, England, Egypt, retains its fascination for all educated Americans. They who made England, Italy, or Greece venerable in the imagination did so by sticking fast where they were, like an axis of the earth. In manly hours, we feel that duty is our place. The soul is no traveller; the wise man stays at home, and when his necessities, his duties, on any occasion call him from his house, or into foreign lands, he is at home still, and shall make men sensible by the expression of his countenance, that he goes the missionary of wisdom and virtue, and visits cities and men like a sovereign, and not like an interloper or a valet.

I have no churlish objection to the circumnavigation of the globe, for the purposes of art, of study, and benevolence, so that the man is first domesticated, or does not go abroad with the hope of finding somewhat greater than he knows. He who travels to be amused, or to get somewhat which he does not carry, travels away from himself, and grows old even in youth among old things. In Thebes, in Palmyra, his will and mind have become old and dilapidated as they. He carries ruins to ruins.

Travelling is a fool's paradise. Our first journeys discover to us the indifference of places. At home I dream that at Naples, at Rome, I can be intoxicated with beauty, and lose my sadness. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican, and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go.

3. But the rage of travelling is a symptom of a deeper unsoundness affecting the whole intellectual action. The intellect is vagabond, and our system of education fosters restlessness. Our minds travel when our bodies are forced to stay at home. We imitate; and what is imitation but the travelling of the mind? Our houses are built with foreign taste; our shelves are garnished with foreign ornaments; our opinions, our tastes, our faculties, lean, and follow the Past and the Distant. The soul created the arts wherever they have flourished. It was in his own mind that the artist sought his model. It was an application of his own thought to the thing to be done and the conditions to be observed. And why need we copy the Doric or the Gothic model? Beauty, convenience, grandeur of thought, and quaint expression are as near to us as to any, and if the American artist will study with hope and love the precise thing to be done by him, considering the climate, the soil, the length of the day, the wants of the people, the habit and form of the government, he will create a house in which all these will find themselves fitted, and taste and sentiment will be satisfied also.

Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation; but of the adopted talent of another, you have only an extemporaneous, half possession. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. No man yet knows what it is, nor can, till that person has exhibited it. Where is the master who could have taught Shakspeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton? Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakspeare will never be made by the study of Shakspeare. Do that which is assigned you, and you cannot hope too much or dare too much. There is at this moment for you an utterance brave and grand as that of the colossal chisel of Phidias, or trowel of the Egyptians, or the pen of Moses, or Dante, but different from all these. Not possibly will the soul all rich, all eloquent, with thousand-cloven tongue, deign to repeat itself; but if you can hear what these patriarchs say, surely you can reply to them in the same pitch of voice; for the ear and the tongue are two organs of one nature. Abide in the simple and noble regions of thy life, obey thy heart, and thou shalt reproduce the Foreworld again.

4. As our Religion, our Education, our Art look abroad, so does our spirit of society. All men plume themselves on the improvement of society, and no man improves.

Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other. It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific; but this change is not amelioration. For every thing that is given, something is taken. Society acquires new arts, and loses old instincts. What a contrast between the well-clad, reading, writing, thinking American, with a watch, a pencil, and a bill of exchange in his pocket, and the naked New Zealander, whose property is a club, a spear, a mat, and an undivided twentieth of a shed to sleep under! But compare the health of the two men, and you shall see that the white man has lost his aboriginal strength. If the traveller tell us truly, strike the savage with a broad axe, and in a day or two the flesh shall unite and heal as if you struck the blow into soft pitch, and the same blow shall send the white to his grave.

The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet. He is supported on crutches, but lacks so much support of muscle. He has a fine Geneva watch, but he fails of the skill to tell the hour by the sun. A Greenwich nautical almanac he has, and so being sure of the information when he wants it, the man in the street does not know a star in the sky. The solstice he does not observe; the equinox he knows as little; and the whole bright calendar of the year is without a dial in his mind. His note-books impair his memory; his libraries overload his wit; the insurance-office increases the number of accidents; and it may be a question whether machinery does not encumber; whether we have not lost by refinement some energy, by a Christianity entrenched in establishments and forms, some vigor of wild virtue. For every Stoic was a Stoic; but in Christendom where is the Christian?

There is no more deviation in the moral standard than in the standard of height or bulk. No greater men are now than ever were. A singular equality may be observed between the great men of the first and of the last ages; nor can all the science, art, religion, and philosophy of the nineteenth century avail to educate greater men than Plutarch's heroes, three or four and twenty centuries ago. Not in time is the race progressive. Phocion, Socrates, Anaxagoras, Diogenes, are great men, but they leave no class. He who is really of their class will not be called by their name, but will be his own man, and, in his turn, the founder of a sect. The arts and inventions of each period are only its costume, and do not invigorate men. The harm of the improved machinery may compensate its good. Hudson and Behring accomplished so much in their fishing-boats, as to astonish Parry and Franklin, whose equipment exhausted the resources of science and art. Galileo, with an opera-glass, discovered a more splendid series of celestial phenomena than any one since. Columbus found the New World in an undecked boat. It is curious to see the periodical disuse and perishing of means and machinery, which were introduced with loud laudation a few years or centuries before. The great genius returns to essential man. We reckoned the improvements of the art of war among the triumphs of science, and yet Napoleon conquered Europe by the bivouac, which consisted of falling back on naked valor, and disencumbering it of all aids. The Emperor held it impossible to make a perfect army, says Las Casas, "without abolishing our arms, magazines, commissaries, and carriages, until, in imitation of the Roman custom, the soldier should receive his supply of corn, grind it in his hand-mill, and bake his bread himself."

Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. The same particle does not rise from the valley to the ridge. Its unity is only phenomenal. The persons who make up a nation to-day, next year die, and their experience with them.

And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance. Men have looked away from themselves and at things so long, that they have come to esteem the religious, learned, and civil institutions as guards of property, and they deprecate assaults on these, because they feel them to be assaults on property. They measure their esteem of each other by what each has, and not by what each is. But a cultivated man becomes ashamed of his property, out of new respect for his nature. Especially he hates what he has, if he see that it is accidental, — came to him by inheritance, or gift, or crime; then he feels that it is not having; it does not belong to him, has no root in him, and merely lies there, because no revolution or no robber takes it away. But that which a man is does always by necessity acquire, and what the man acquires is living property, which does not wait the beck of rulers, or mobs, or revolutions, or fire, or storm, or bankruptcies, but perpetually renews itself wherever the man breathes. "Thy lot or portion of life," said the Caliph Ali, "is seeking after thee; therefore be at rest from seeking after it." Our dependence on these foreign goods leads us to our slavish respect for numbers. The political parties meet in numerous conventions; the greater the concourse, and with each new uproar of announcement, The delegation from Essex! The Democrats from New Hampshire! The Whigs of Maine! the young patriot feels himself stronger than before by a new thousand of eyes and arms. In like manner the reformers summon conventions, and vote and resolve in multitude. Not so, O friends! will the God deign to enter and inhabit you, but by a method precisely the reverse. It is only as a man puts off all foreign support, and stands alone, that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is not a man better than a town? Ask nothing of men, and in the endless mutation, thou only firm column must presently appear the upholder of all that surrounds thee. He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles; just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head.

So use all that is called Fortune. Most men gamble with her, and gain all, and lose all, as her wheel rolls. But do thou leave as unlawful these winnings, and deal with Cause and Effect, the chancellors of God. In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance, and shalt sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations. A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.