

source of his charm. But still let us keep our literary conscience true, and judge every kind of literary work by the laws really proper to it. The kind of work attempted in the "English Traits" and in "Our Old Home" is work which cannot be done perfectly with a bias such as that given by Emerson's optimism or by Hawthorne's chagrin. Consequently, neither "English Traits" nor "Our Old Home" is a work of perfection in its kind.

Not with the Miltons and Grays, not with the Platos and Spinozas, not with the Swifts and Voltaires, not with the Montaignes and Addison's, can we rank Emerson. His work of various kinds, when one compares it with the work done in a corresponding kind by these masters, fails to stand the comparison. No man could see this clearer than Emerson himself. It is hard not to feel despondency when we contemplate our failures and shortcomings; and Emerson, the least self-flattering and the most modest of men, saw so plainly what was lacking to him that he had his moments of despondency. "Alas, my friend," he writes in reply to Carlyle, who had exhorted him to creative work,— "Alas, my friend, I can do no such gay thing as you say. I do not belong to the poets, but only to a low department of literature,— the reporters; suburban men." He deprecated his friend's praise; praise "generous to a fault," he calls it; praise "generous to the shaming of me,— cold, fastidious, ebbing person that I am. Already in a former letter you had said too much good of my poor little arid book, which is as sand to my eyes. I can only say that I heartily wish the book were better; and I must try and deserve so much favor from the kind gods by a bolder and truer living in the months to come,— such as may perchance one day release and invigorate this cramp hand of mine. When I see how much work is to be done;

what room for a poet, for any spiritualist, in this great, intelligent, sensual, and avaricious America,— I lament my fumbling fingers and stammering tongue." Again, as late as 1870, he writes to Carlyle; "There is no example of constancy like yours, and it always stings my stupor into temporary recovery and wonderful resolution to accept the noble challenge. But 'the strong hours conquer us;' and I am the victim of miscellany,— miscellany of designs, vast debility, and procrastination." The forlorn note belonging to the phrase, "vast debility," recalls that saddest and most discouraged of writers, the author of "Obermann," Senancour, with whom Emerson has in truth a certain kinship. He has, in common with Senancour, his pureness, his passion for nature, his single eye; and here we find him confessing, like Senancour, a sense in himself of sterility and impotence.

And now I think I have cleared the ground. I have given up to envious time as much of Emerson as time can fairly expect ever to obtain. We have not in Emerson a great poet, a great writer, a great philosophy maker. His relation to us is not that of one of those personages; yet it is a relation of, I think, even superior importance. His relation to us is more like that of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. Marcus Aurelius is not a great writer, a great philosophy maker; he is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. Emerson is the same. He is the friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit. All the points in thinking which are necessary for this purpose he takes; but he does not combine them into a system, or present them as a regular philosophy. Combined in a system by a man with the requisite talent for this kind of thing, they would be less useful than as Emerson gives them to us; and the man with the

talent so to systematize them would be less impressive than Emerson. They do very well as they now stand;—like “boulders,” as he says;—in “paragraphs incompressible, each sentence an infinitely repellent particle.” In such sentences his main points recur again and again, and become fixed in the memory.

We all know them. First and foremost, character. Character is everything. “That which all things tend to educe,—which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver,—is character.” Character and self-reliance. “Trust thyself! every heart vibrates to that iron string.” And yet we have our being in a not ourselves. “There is a power above and behind us, and we are the channels of its communications.” But our lives must be pitched higher. “Life must be lived on a higher plane; we must go up to a higher platform, to which we are always invited to ascend; there the whole scene changes.” The good we need is forever close to us, though we attain it not. “On the brink of the waters of life and truth, we are miserably dying.” This good is close to us, moreover, in our daily life, and in the familiar, homely places. “The unremitting retention of simple and high sentiments in obscure duties,—that is the maxim for us. Let us be poised and wise, and our own to-day. Let us treat the men and women well,—treat them as if they were real; perhaps they are. Men live in their fancy, like drunkards whose hands are too soft and tremulous for successful labor. I settle myself ever firmer in the creed, that we should not postpone and refer and wish, but do broad justice where we are, by whomsoever we deal with; accepting our actual companions and circumstances, however humble or odious, as the mystic officials to whom the universe has delegated its whole pleasure for us. Massachusetts, Connecticut

River, and Boston Bay, you think paltry places, and the ear loves names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; and if we will tarry a little we may come to learn that here is best. See to it only that thyself is here.” Furthermore, the good is close to us all. “I resist the scepticism of our education and of our educated men. I do not believe that the differences of opinion and character in men are organic. I do not recognize, besides the class of the good and the wise, a permanent class of sceptics, or a class of conservatives, or of malignants, or of materialists. I do not believe in the classes. Every man has a call of the power to do something unique.” Exclusiveness is deadly. “The exclusive in social life does not see that he excludes himself from enjoyment in the attempt to appropriate it. The exclusionist in religion does not see that he shuts the door of heaven on himself in striving to shut out others. Treat men as pawns and ninepins, and you shall suffer as well as they. If you leave out their heart you shall lose your own. The selfish man suffers more from his selfishness than he from whom that selfishness withholds some important benefit.” A sound nature will be inclined to refuse ease and self-indulgence. “To live with some rigor of temperance, or some extreme of generosity, seems to be an asceticism which common good nature would appoint to those who are at ease and in plenty, in sign that they feel a brotherhood with the great multitude of suffering men.” Compensation, finally, is the great law of life; it is everywhere, it is sure, and there is no escape from it. This is that “law alive and beautiful, which works over our heads and under our feet. Pitiless, it avails itself of our success when we obey it, and of our ruin when we contravene it. We are all secret believers in it. It rewards actions after their nature. The reward of a thing well done is to have

done it. The thief steals from himself, the swindler swindles himself. You must pay at last your own debt."

This is tonic indeed! And let no one object that it is too general; that more practical, positive direction is what we want; that Emerson's optimism, self-reliance, and indifference to favorable conditions for our life and growth have in them something of danger. "Trust thyself;" "what attracts my attention shall have it;" "though thou shouldst walk the world over thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble;" "what we call vulgar society is that society whose poetry is not yet written, but which you shall presently make as enviable and renowned as any." With maxims like these, we surely, it may be said, run some risk of being made too well satisfied with our own actual self and state, however crude and imperfect they may be. "Trust thyself?" It may be said that the common American or Englishman is more than enough disposed already to trust himself. I often reply, when our sectarians are praised for following conscience: Our people are very good in following their conscience; where they are not so good is in ascertaining whether their conscience tells them right. "What attracts my attention shall have it?" Well, that is our people's plea when they run after the Salvation Army, and desire Messrs. Moody and Sankey. "Thou shalt not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble?" But think of the turn of the good people of our race for producing a life of hideousness and immense *ennui*; think of that specimen of your own New England life which Mr. Howells gives us in one of his charming stories which I was reading lately; think of the life of that rugged New England farm in "The Lady of the Aroostook;" think of Deacon Blood, and Aunt Maria, and the straight-backed chairs with black horse-hair seats, and Ezra

Perkins with perfect self-reliance depositing his travellers in the snow! I can truly say that in the little which I have seen of the life of New England, I am more struck with what has been achieved than with the crudeness and failure. But no doubt there is still a great deal of crudeness also. Your own novelists say there is, and I suppose they say true. In the new England, as in the old, our people have to learn, I suppose, not that their modes of life are beautiful and excellent already; they have rather to learn that they must transform them.

To adopt this line of objection to Emerson's deliverances would, however, be unjust. In the first place, Emerson's points are in themselves true, if understood in a certain high sense; they are true and fruitful. And the right work to be done, at the hour when he appeared, was to affirm them generally and absolutely. Only thus could he break through the hard and fast barrier of narrow, fixed ideas, which he found confronting him, and win an entrance for new ideas. Had he attempted developments which may now strike us as expedient, he would have excited fierce antagonism, and probably effected little or nothing. The time might come for doing other work later, but the work which Emerson did was the right work to be done then.

In the second place, strong as was Emerson's optimism, and unconquerable as was his belief in a good result to emerge from all which he saw going on around him, no misanthropical satirist ever saw shortcomings and absurdities more clearly than he did, or exposed them more courageously. When he sees "the meanness," as he calls it, "of American politics," he congratulates Washington on being "long already happily dead," on being "wrapt in his shroud and forever safe." With how firm a touch he delineates the faults of your two

great political parties of forty years ago! The Democrats, he says, "have not at heart the ends which give to the name of democracy what hope and virtue are in it. The spirit of our American radicalism is destructive and aimless; it is not loving; it has no ulterior and divine ends, but is destructive only out of hatred and selfishness. On the other side, the conservative party, composed of the most moderate, able, and cultivated part of the population, is timid, and merely defensive of property. It vindicates no right, it aspires to no real good, it brands no crime, it proposes no generous policy. From neither party, when in power, has the world any benefit to expect in science, art, or humanity, at all commensurate with the resources of the nation." Then with what subtle though kindly irony he follows the gradual withdrawal in New England, in the last half century, of tender consciences from the social organizations,—the bent for experiments such as that of Brook Farm and the like,—follows it in all its "dissidence of dissent and Protestantism of the Protestant religion!" He even loves to rally the New Englander on his philanthropical activity, and to find his beneficence and its institutions a bore! "Your miscellaneous popular charities, the education at college of fools, the building of meeting-houses to the vain end to which many of these now stand, alms to sots, and the thousandfold relief societies,—though I confess with shame that I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, yet it is a wicked dollar, which by and by I shall have the manhood to withhold." "Our Sunday schools and churches and pauper societies are yokes to the neck. We pain ourselves to please nobody. There are natural ways of arriving at the same ends at which these aim, but do not arrive." "Nature does not like our benevolence or our learning much better than she likes our frauds and

wars. When we come out of the caucus, or the bank, or the Abolition convention, or the temperance meeting, or the transcendental club, into the fields and woods, she says to us: "So hot, my little sir?"

Yes, truly, his insight is admirable; his truth is precious. Yet the secret of his effect is not even in these; it is in his temper. It is in the hopeful, serene, beautiful temper where-with these, in Emerson, are indissolubly joined; in which they work, and have their being. He says himself: "We judge of a man's wisdom by his hope, knowing that the perception of the inexhaustibleness of nature is an immortal youth." If this be so, how wise is Emerson! for never had man such a sense of the inexhaustibleness of nature, and such hope. It was the ground of his being; it never failed him. Even when he is sadly avowing the imperfection of his literary power and resources, lamenting his fumbling fingers and stammering tongue, he adds: "Yet, as I tell you, I am very easy in my mind and never dream of suicide. My whole philosophy, which is very real, teaches acquiescence and optimism. Sure I am that the right word will be spoken, though I cut out my tongue." In his old age, with friends dying and life failing, his tone of cheerful, forward-looking hope is still the same. "A multitude of young men are growing up here of high promise, and I compare gladly the social poverty of my youth with the power on which these draw." His abiding word for us, the word by which being dead he yet speaks to us, is this: "That which befits us, embosomed in beauty and wonder as we are, is cheerfulness and courage, and the endeavor to realize our aspirations. Shall not the heart, which has received so much, trust the power by which it lives?"

One can scarcely overrate the importance of thus holding

fast to happiness and hope. It gives to Emerson's work an invaluable virtue. As Wordsworth's poetry is, in my judgment, the most important work done in verse, in our language, during the present century, so Emerson's "Essays" are, I think, the most important work done in prose. His work is more important than Carlyle's. Let us be just to Carlyle, provoking though he often is. Not only has he that genius of his which makes Emerson say truly of his letters, that "they savor always of eternity." More than this may be said of him. The scope and upshot of his teaching are true; "his guiding genius," to quote Emerson again, is really "his moral sense, his perception of the sole importance of truth and justice." But consider Carlyle's temper, as we have been considering Emerson's! Take his own account of it! "Perhaps London is the proper place for me after all, seeing all places are improper: who knows? Meanwhile, I lead a most dyspeptic, solitary, self-shrouded life; consuming, if possible in silence, my considerable daily allotment of pain; glad when any strength is left in me for writing, which is the only use I can see in myself,—too rare a case of late. The ground of my existence is black as death; too black, when all void too; but at times there paint themselves on it pictures of gold, and rainbow, and lightning; all the brighter for the black ground, I suppose. Withal, I am very much of a fool."—No, not a fool, but turbid and morbid, wilful and perverse. "We judge of a man's wisdom by his hope."

Carlyle's perverse attitude towards happiness cuts him off from hope. He fiercely attacks the desire for happiness; his grand point in "Sartor," his secret in which the soul may find rest, is that one shall cease to desire happiness, that one should learn to say to one self: "What if thou wert born and

predestined not to be happy, but to be unhappy!" He is wrong; Saint Augustine is the better philosopher, who says: "Act we must in pursuance of what gives us most delight." Epictetus and Augustine can be severe moralists enough; but both of them know and frankly say that the desire for happiness is the root and ground of man's being. Tell him and show him that he places his happiness wrong, that he seeks for delight where delight will never be really found; then you illumine and further him. But you only confuse him by telling him to cease to desire happiness: and you will not tell him this unless you are already confused yourself.

Carlyle preached the dignity of labor, the necessity of righteousness, the love of veracity, the hatred of shams. He is said by many people to be a great teacher, a great helper for us, because he does so. But what is the due and eternal result of labor, righteousness, veracity?—Happiness. And how are we drawn to them by one who, instead of making us feel that with them is happiness, tells us that perhaps we were predestined not to be happy but to be unhappy?

You will find, in especial, many earnest preachers of our popular religion to be fervent in their praise and admiration of Carlyle. His insistence on labor, righteousness, and veracity, pleases them; his contempt for happiness pleases them too. I read the other day a tract against smoking, although I do not happen to be a smoker myself. "Smoking," said the tract, "is liked because it gives agreeable sensations. Now it is a positive objection to a thing that it gives agreeable sensations. An earnest man will expressly avoid what gives agreeable sensations." Shortly afterwards I was inspecting a school, and I found the children reading a piece of poetry on the common theme that we are here to-day and

gone to-morrow. I shall soon be gone, the speaker in this poem was made to say,—

“And I shall be glad to go,
For the world at best is a dreary place,
And my life is getting low.”

How usual a language of popular religion that is, on our side of the Atlantic at any rate! But then our popular religion, in disparaging happiness here below, knows very well what it is after. It has its eye on a happiness in a future life above the clouds, in the New Jerusalem, to be won by disliking and rejecting happiness here on earth. And so long as this ideal stands fast, it is very well. But for very many it now stands fast no longer; for Carlyle, at any rate, it had failed and vanished. Happiness in labor, righteousness, and veracity,—in the life of the spirit,—here was a gospel still for Carlyle to preach, and to help others by preaching. But he baffled them and himself by preferring the paradox that we are not born for happiness at all.

Happiness in labor, righteousness, and veracity; in all the life of the spirit; happiness and eternal hope;—that was Emerson's gospel. I hear it said that Emerson was too sanguine; that the actual generation in America is not turning out so well as he expected. Very likely he was too sanguine as to the near future; in this country it is difficult not to be too sanguine. Very possibly the present generation may prove unworthy of his high hopes; even several generations succeeding this may prove unworthy of them. But by his conviction that in the life of the spirit is happiness, and by his hope that this life of the spirit will come more and more to be sanely understood, and to prevail, and to work for happiness,—by this conviction and hope Emerson was great, and he will surely prove in the end to have been right

in them. In this country it is difficult, as I said, not to be sanguine. Very many of your writers are over-sanguine, and on the wrong grounds. But you have two men who in what they have written show their sanguineness in a line where courage and hope are just, where they are also infinitely important, but where they are not easy. The two men are Franklin and Emerson.¹ These two are, I think, the most distinctively and honorably American of your writers; they are the most original and the most valuable. Wise men everywhere know that we must keep up our courage and hope; they know that hope is, as Wordsworth well says,—

“The paramount duty which Heaven lays,
For its own honor, on man's suffering heart.”

But the very word “duty” points to an effort and a struggle to maintain our hope unbroken. Franklin and Emerson maintained theirs with a convincing ease, an inspiring joy. Franklin's confidence in the happiness with which industry, honesty, and economy will crown the life of this work-day world, is such that he runs over with felicity. With a like felicity does Emerson run over, when he contemplates the happiness eternally attached to the true life in the spirit. You

¹I found with pleasure that this conjunction of Emerson's name with Franklin's had already occurred to an accomplished writer and delightful man, a friend of Emerson, left almost the sole survivor, alas! of the famous literary generation of Boston,—Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. Dr. Holmes has kindly allowed me to print here the ingenious and interesting lines, hitherto unpublished, in which he speaks of Emerson thus:

“Where in the realm of thought, whose air is song,
Does he, the Buddha of the West, belong?
He seems a wingéd Franklin, sweetly wise,
Born to unlock the secret of the skies;
And which the nobler calling—if 'tis fair
Terrestrial with celestial to compare—
To guide the storm-cloud's elemental flame,
Or walk the chambers whence the lightning came
Amidst the sources of its subtle fire,
And steal their effluence for his lips and lyre?”

cannot prize him too much, nor heed him too diligently. He has lessons for both the branches of our race. I figure him to my mind as visible upon earth still, as still standing here by Boston Bay, or at his own Concord, in his habit as he lived, but of heightened stature and shining feature, with one hand stretched out towards the east, to our laden and laboring England; the other towards the ever-growing west, to his own dearly-loved America,—“great, intelligent, sensual, avaricious America.” To us he shows for guidance his lucid freedom, his cheerfulness and hope; to you his dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation.

EDWARD E. HALE



EDWARD EVERETT HALE, distinguished American author and Unitarian clergyman, was born at Boston, Mass., April 3, 1822, and educated at Harvard University. While preparing himself to enter the Unitarian ministry, he taught for two years in the Boston Latin School and in 1842 was licensed to preach. From 1846 to 1856 he was pastor of the Church of the Unity in Worcester, Mass., and pastor of the South Congregational (Unitarian) Church at Boston, from 1856 to 1900. Throughout his entire career he has been active in philanthropic and educational movements. He edited “Old and New,” a monthly magazine, 1869-75, and from 1886 to the present has edited “Lend a Hand,” a journal of organized charity. In 1870, he published “Ten Times One is Ten,” a story which led to the formation of many charitable clubs throughout the United States. As a writer of short stories he has gained an extended reputation, the most noted of these being “The Man Without a Country,” which at the time of its issue, in 1863, did much to stimulate a feeling of patriotism; “In His Name,” “My Double and how He Undid Me.” He has been a voluminous as well as versatile writer: among his many books are “The Ingham Papers” (1869); “His Level Best and Other Stories” (1870); “Ups and Downs,” a novel (1871); “Philip Nolan’s Friends” (1876); “Franklin in France” (1887); “Life of Washington” (1887); “For Fifty Years,” a collection of verse (1893); “A New England Boyhood,” autobiographic in its nature (1893); “Lowell and His Friends” (1899). His collected writings are issued in twelve volumes.

NEW ENGLAND CULTURE

ADDRESS AT THE BANQUET OF THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY,
DECEMBER 22, 1876

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,— You seem to have a very frank way of talking about each other among yourselves here. I observe that I am the first stranger who has crossed the river, which, I recollect Edward Winslow says, divides the continent of New England from the continent of America, and, as a stranger, it is my pleasure and duty at once to express the thanks and congratulations of the invited guests here for the distinguished

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