

Although Emerson's constant dwelling-place was in the world of lofty thought, he kept his feet securely planted on the solid earth, and was ever ready for the little homely every day duties of his outward surroundings. He was a regular attendant at the town-meetings, where, although he seldom spoke, he listened with interest to the discussions of others and always accorded respect to the practical commonsense of his less gifted neighbors. He was interested in the local schools, and did not disdain the appointment of pound-master.

John Burroughs furnishes evidence of his manner of fulfilling the trust imposed on him as a visitor to the West Point Academy, in June, 1863. "My attention was attracted," he says, "to this eager, alert, inquisitive farmer, as I took him to be. Evidently, I thought, this is a new thing to him; he feels the honor that has been conferred upon him, and he means to do his duty, and let no fact, or word, or thing escape him. When the rest of the Board looked dull or fatigued . . . he was all eagerness and attention."

The ardent abolitionists of his day were at first inclined to censure Emerson's apparent luke warmness, but his movement in this direction, though lower than that of many others, was none the less effectual. He writes in his journal, 1852: "I waked last night and bemoaned myself because I had not thrown myself into this deplorable question of slavery, which seems to want nothing so much as a few assured voices. But then in hours of sanity I recover myself and say, God must govern his own world, and knows his own way out of this pit without my desertion of my post, which has none to guard it but me. I have quite other slaves to free than those negroes, to wit, imprisoned spirits, imprisoned thoughts far back in the brain of man, far retired in the heaven of invention, and which, important to the republic of man, have no watchman or lover

or defender but I." And these imprisoned minds did seem to him an even greater evil than the imprisoned bodies of the southern slaves. When he was hissed during his anti-slavery speech at Harvard, by students and representative citizens of free Boston, he waited in silence, apparently unmoved, and continued with a sweet serenity that was wonderfully impressive. "But" says an intimate friend, "the hurt must have been deep," not at the personal affront, but at the thought of all the highest and best in manhood being smothered by greed and cowardice. He rejoiced at the release from such bondage, even at so frightful a cost as the Civil War.

One of the choicest volumes of the "American Men of Letters" series is the life of Emerson, by Oliver Wendell Holmes. The loving heart that guided the gifted pen, has given expression to nothing more beautiful and touching than his closing tribute. "What was the errand on which he visited our earth, the message with which he came commissioned from the Infinite source of all life? Every human soul leaves its port with sealed orders. These may be opened earlier or later on its voyage, but until they are opened, no one can tell what is to be his course, or to what harbour he is bound. In the year 1832, this young priest, then a settled minister, 'began,' as was said of another, 'to be about thirty years of age.' He had opened his sealed orders, and had read therein:—

'Thou shalt not profess that which thou dost not believe'

'Thou shalt not heed the voice of man, when it agrees not with the voice of God in thine own soul.'

'Thou shalt study and obey the laws of the universe, and they will be thy fellow-servants.'

'Thou shalt speak the truth as thou seest it, without fear, in the spirit of kindness to all thy fellow creatures, dealing with the manifold interests of life and the typical characters of history.'