

SOME THOUGHTS ON EMERSON

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hero, and had only to submit himself to his better nature or rather to the universal spirit working in him, to become a hero in actual fact. This is certainly the more hopeful belief as it is the more reasonable in view of the emergence of democracy and the universal franchise that has been so apparent of late years. Notwithstanding this and many other differences in creed between Emerson and Carlyle, however, there were a great many things in which they saw eye to eye, and the life-long friendship which existed between them, was one of the truest and most beautiful that ever was. No two men were ever so dissimilar in disposition; the one cheerful, buoyant and hopeful, endowed by nature, as some one has put it with the double prize of a sound mind and a healthy stomach; the other, sour, cynical and despondent, ground down by the pangs of poverty and the prey of a chronic dyspepsia. Each, however, recognized in the other the same consuming desire after truth, the same loftiness of purpose, the same contempt for mere worldly advancement; and this kinship of soul overpowering all lesser disparities brought them together. That Emerson was one of the first to appreciate Carlyle is a matter of common history and he stood sponsor for his "Sartor Resartus" in its introduction into America where it was enthusiastically received before it was read in England. Emerson's disinterested kindness in this was only in keeping with his general disposition.

Emerson, like Carlyle, was a firm believer in the dignity of labor. He would have every man learn to work with his hands and considers that all men, who cannot, are uneducated. In one of his essays, he even seems to regret the general adoption of division of labor in the world because of the discipline each man loses in not having to make his own pots and pans, sow his own crops and grind his own corn. He admits somewhat grudgingly that the scholar may have to dispense with manual labor if he would have time to achieve success in his work, but he adds after all that he would rather have him the better man and the worse scholar.

Emerson has a very exalted idea of the function of the scholar. Division of labor, he says, has deformed the normal man by developing only one limb of him to the impoverishment of all the rest. Now, the scholar's special function, he says, is to think; he is the brain of man if he thinks aright. It is his duty to cheer, elevate and guide him and to point out, amid a world full of shams, the real facts of life.

Emerson, like Carlyle, believes greatly in silence and meditation for the scholar. Let him draw himself apart from men that he may have a chance to think; and then when he feels he has a message for the world, let him testify, no matter what opposition he may encounter, or what shame he may endure. This line of action he prescribes was one which he followed faithfully in his own career and he endured much criticism for his fearless expression of his views. He even had to leave the ministry of the Unitarian Church for promulgating ideas that were too heterodox for even that most broadminded of all denominations.

While the grim "seer of Chelsea," ever groping in "Cimmerian darkness," saw but little in the world about him that was healthy or hopeful, the Concord philosopher on the contrary while recognizing much that was evil remaining, already saw the gleam of the millenium afar off and was glad. In his serene trust in the power of the spirit to redeem mankind, he looked askance on the reforms and reformers of his day because of the incompleteness of the one and the selfishness of the other. There was too much envy, self-interest and strife exhibited among the reformers for him to be in complete sympathy with them. He approves, however, the inclination of the age towards introspection and self-knowledge. This is a time, he says, when men are prying into

the inner meaning of common things and literature itself reflects the tendency; and it is a good omen. Man himself, is the true study. It is the age when the individual is made to feel his own importance and his own rights; as such it tends to greatness.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful of Emerson's writings is his "Essay on Love," in which he espouses Plato's doctrine that the love of the sexes is only initial, and as it were, preparatory to the great universal love which embraces all mankind as its objective.

His argument for this is all the more potent that he describes with such fervor and such insight the initial stage. Perhaps a somewhat lengthy quotation may be permissible here. He says:

"And what fastens attention, in the intercourse of life, like any passage betraying affection between two parties? Perhaps we never saw them before and never shall meet them again. But we see them exchange a glance or betray a deep emotion and we are no longer strangers. We understand them and take the warmest interest in the development of the romance. All mankind loves a lover. The earliest demonstrations of complacency and kindness are nature's most winning pictures. It is the dawn of civility and grace in the coarse and rustic. The rude village boy teases the girls about the school house door; but today he comes running in to the entry and meets one fair child arranging her satchel; he holds her books to help her, and instantly it seems to him as if she removed herself from him infinitely, and was a sacred precinct.

Among the throng of girls he runs rudely enough, but one alone distances him; and these two little neighbours that were so close just now, have learned to respect each other's personality."

One can see from such a description as this that Emerson spoke from a quite impartial standpoint when he said there was a universal love which was higher than that of the sexes; and it is the spirit of this universal love, the same we find in Jesus Christ, that pervades the whole essence of his teachings. It is this alone, and the inspiration of the pure unselfish life from which it springs, that will make the thoughts of Emerson a living power when those of brainier men have passed into oblivion.

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