

**ESSAYS: SECOND  
SERIES, PP. 1-274**

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Essays: Second Series, pp. 1-274 by R. W. Emerson

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**R. W. EMERSON**

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ESSAYS:

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BY

R. W. EMERSON.

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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
<b>ESSAY I.</b>	
THE POET, . . . . .	9
<b>ESSAY II.</b>	
EXPERIENCE, . . . . .	49
<b>ESSAY III.</b>	
CHARACTER, . . . . .	91
<b>ESSAY IV.</b>	
MANNERS, . . . . .	119
<b>ESSAY V.</b>	
GIFTS, . . . . .	155
<b>ESSAY VI.</b>	
NATURE, . . . . .	165

## ESSAY VII.

POLITICS, . . . . . 193

## ESSAY VIII.

NOMINALIST AND REALIST, . . . . . 217

## NEW ENGLAND REFORMERS.

LECTURE AT AMORY HALL, . . . . . 243

## THE POET.

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A moody child and wildly wise  
Pursued the game with joyful eyes,  
Which chose, like meteors, their way,  
And rived the dark with private ray :  
They overleapt the horizon's edge,  
Searched with Apollo's privilege ;  
Through man, and woman, and sea, and star,  
Saw the dance of nature forward far ;  
Through worlds, and races, and terms, and times,  
Saw musical order, and pairing rhymes.



Olympian bards who sung  
Divine ideas below,  
Which always find us young,  
And always keep us so.

## ESSAY I.

### THE POET.

---

THOSE who are esteemed umpires of taste, are often persons who have acquired some knowledge of admired pictures or sculptures, and have an inclination for whatever is elegant; but if you inquire whether they are beautiful souls, and whether their own acts are like fair pictures, you learn that they are selfish and sensual. Their cultivation is local, as if you should rub a log of dry wood in one spot to produce fire, all the rest remaining cold. Their knowledge of the fine arts is some study of rules and particulars, or some limited judgment of color or form, which is exercised for amusement or for show. It is a proof of the shallowness of the doctrine of beauty, as it lies in the minds of our amateurs, that men seem to have lost the perception of the instant dependence of form upon soul. There is no doctrine of forms in our philosophy. We were put into our bodies, as fire is put into a pan,

to be carried about; but there is no accurate adjustment between the spirit and the organ, much less is the latter the germination of the former. So in regard to other forms, the intellectual men do not believe in any essential dependence of the material world on thought and volition. Theologians think it a pretty air-castle to talk of the spiritual meaning of a ship or a cloud, of a city or a contract, but they prefer to come again to the solid ground of historical evidence; and even the poets are contented with a civil and conformed manner of living, and to write poems from the fancy, at a safe distance from their own experience. But the highest minds of the world have never ceased to explore the double meaning, or, shall I say, the quadruple, or the centuple, or much more manifold meaning, of every sensuous fact: Orpheus, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Plato, Plutarch, Dante, Swedenborg, and the masters of sculpture, picture, and poetry. For we are not pans and barrows, nor even porters of the fire and torch-bearers, but children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted, and at two or three removes, when we know least about it. And this hidden truth, that the fountains when all this river of Time, and its creatures, floweth, are intrinsically ideal and beautiful, draws us to the consideration of the nature and functions of the Poet, or the