

**RALPH WALDO
EMERSON**

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Ralph Waldo Emerson by George Edward Woodberry

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GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

**RALPH WALDO
EMERSON**

ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

RALPH WALDO
EMERSON

BY

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY



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NOTE

THE main sources for Emerson's biography are James Elliot Cabot's *Memoir* and E. W. Emerson's *Emerson in Concord*. These, together with Emerson's works, afford the basis of the present volume, and for the use which has been made of them the author takes pleasure in thanking the publishers, Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., who kindly granted the necessary permission. Other illustrations of Emerson's character and career are found scattered in the reminiscences of his contemporaries, particularly in the volumes by Conway, Ireland, Albee, Alcott, Haskins, Sanborn, and Holmes; but these writers add little except detail. Two other small books deserve mention for their excellent rendering of Emerson's personality in old age,—J. B. Thayer's *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson*, and C. J. Woodbury's *Talks with Ralph Waldo Emerson*. *The Correspondence of Emerson with Carlyle* and his *Letters to a Friend*, both edited by C. E. Norton, and other letters to Hermann Grimm and to a classmate, published respectively in the *Atlantic Monthly*, May, 1903, and the *Century*, July, 1883, complete the list of sources.

G. E. WOODBERRY.

BEVERLY, MASSACHUSETTS,
November 11, 1906.

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON

CHAPTER I

THE VOICE OBEYED AT PRIME

EMERSON leaves a double image on the mind that has dwelt long upon his memory. He is a shining figure as on some Mount of Transfiguration; and he was a parochial man. In one aspect he is of kin with old Ionian philosophers, with no more shreds of time and place than those sons of the morning who first brought the light of intellect into this world; in the other he is a Bostonian, living in a parish suburb of the city, stamped with peculiarity, the product of tradition, the creature of local environment. One is the image to the mind; the other to the senses. One is of the soul, of eternity; the other, of the body, of time. It is difficult to focus such a nature; to find the axis of identity; even the ray of truth is here doubly refracted, on one side into ideality, on the other into incompleteness, the meaninglessness of matters of fact, unconcerning things. But to Emerson himself his life was of one piece, and seemed so, because he looked on it from a point within, from that centre of integrity upon which his being revolved as a personal law unto itself. It is there that the mind must fix its insight. The