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The Modern Student's Library. Emerson's Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson & Arthur Hobson Quinn

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON & ARTHUR HOBSON QUINN

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THE MODERN STUDENT'S LIBRARY

EMERSON'S ESSAYS

SELECTED AND EDITED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION BY

ARTHUR HOBSON QUINN

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND DEAN OF THE
COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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INTRODUCTION

AMONG the shifting values in our literary history, Emerson stands secure. As a people we are prone rather to underestimate our native writers in relation to English and continental authors, but even among those who have been content to treat our literature as a by-product of British letters, Emerson's significance has become only more apparent with time. He moves into the circle of those who are realities, not by reason of any detachment from his native conditions, but because of that intense idealism which flowers best in the soil from which he drew his inspiration, the soil which he always left with regret and to which he ever returned with satisfaction.

He was born in Boston, May 25, 1803, of a stock which held high standards of conduct both for themselves and others. On both sides he was descended from clerical ancestors who were ornaments of that theocracy of New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which an admiring congregation took the color of its thought from its minister, and in return demanded of him that he know how to think. His father, William Emerson, was a clergyman of the transition to Unitarianism, and his mother, Ruth Haskins, was of a stoical fibre that made her lie all night with a broken hip rather than disturb the household routine. She needed all her courage, for her husband died in 1811, leaving her with five boys to bring up, of whom one was mentally defective.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the second of the five. He was not particularly distinguished at the Boston Latin School or at Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1821. He had been learning during this period frugality and industry and the other lessons that came naturally to a