

**LITERARY ART. A
CONVERSATION BETWEEN
A PAINTER, A POET
AND A PHILOSOPHER**

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Literary Art. A Conversation Between a Painter, a Poet and a Philosopher by John Albee

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BY

JOHN ALBEE

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1881
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THE scene of the conversation is the margin of the Concord River ; the time, a summer, not long past ; and the speakers three : a Painter, a Poet, and a Philosopher. These three grew up in the country together, went to the same school, academy, and finally, college, maintaining their friendship then and subsequently, unbroken. For upon entering life they had followed different vocations, painting, teaching, and farming ; and no one of them had as yet become so celebrated or prosperous as to make him forgetful of the other.

Almost in their boyhood they had heard something, but indistinctly, of a new movement in thought and philosophy, which at college they came to know more fully of. But never had they visited the seat of the new ideas until the present

time ; when, in a summer vacation, they make together a pilgrimage to Concord ; and having seen the famous men and monuments of the town, they come in the afternoon to the bank of the river. There, near the Old Bridge, under the pleasant shady trees, they sat down, and fell into the conversation, which I, happening to be the guest of one of them in his own home, whom it was awkward to leave behind and scarcely less so to take, having none of their associations or curiosity, listened to in silence, have remembered for a long time, and now attempt to relate.

LITERARY ART.

A CONVERSATION

BETWEEN

A PAINTER, A POET, AND A PHILOSOPHER.

PAINTER.

AT length we have seen the place about which, twenty years ago, we used to speak and think so much. You remember at the country academy where we then were, what a faint but awakening breeze was wafted from the Concord plain to us, and how it stirred us by its strange and indistinct whisperings; as the half-grown plumage of the young bird is

ruffled before he has learned to beat up the wind. Our free minds were excited by the little we could hear or read of the new intellectual activity. And often we talked of a pilgrimage hither, to drink at the fountain, and hear with our own ears the oracles. But, just as the ideas of which we had heard were magnified in our minds because we had few others with which to compare them; so the distance, which was only a good day's walk, seemed immense, because in an unfamiliar direction, and—because we had never traveled so far—almost another country. We never adventured into the longed-for land; but it, and all we supposed it contained, remained a fruitful image, continually enlarging and invigorating our minds. Youth is modest also, and dares not come boldly into the presence of what it most loves; knowing it has little to give, it usually shrinks from those toward whom it is most drawn, and from whom it is receiving most. It cherishes

their images in silence and meditation, and completes its growth at the root before it shoots into the outer air its more sympathetic blossoms.

POET.

We who were born on the other side of the Concord water-shed have been compelled to wander by a more circuitous route to philosophy and poetry than those to whom this region is native.

From village to village, first as schoolboys, then as winter schoolmasters along the margin of the Charles, we came nearer and nearer to its mouth and the seats of culture, finally reaching and staying too long at Cambridge, vainly hoping to realize the usual dreams of early youth. But, ascending the neighbor river, we found, at last, the discipline and light we had been in ardent pilgrimage and apprenticeship for, very near the point of our departure; and discovered too late how much better it would have been to have climbed the inter-

cepting hill, than to have descended through the plain. Before the time of railroads, the inhabitants of river courses moved to their sources or mouths, exploring but a little way from either bank. We knew, at first, no other than the common highway of our fathers and neighbors; and the highway is best as long as you only want what is upon it. When one finds he has other unforeseen necessities, it is more profitable to turn a short angle, and take a mountain trail, or even to mark out one for the first time.

We three have been forced to wander far and long for our natural heritage; sometimes through customary paths, more often untried; without encouragement, until we no longer needed it, and always richer in hope than possession. But we were never happier, it seems to me, than when we had least; when we set to our own music our favorite poetry, or wrote new verses to old tunes; looked at the stars through a home-made telescope; aston-