

**REPRESENTATIVE  
MEN.  
SEVEN LECTURES**

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Representative Men. Seven Lectures by R. W. Emerson

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**R. W. EMERSON**

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BY

R. W. EMERSON.

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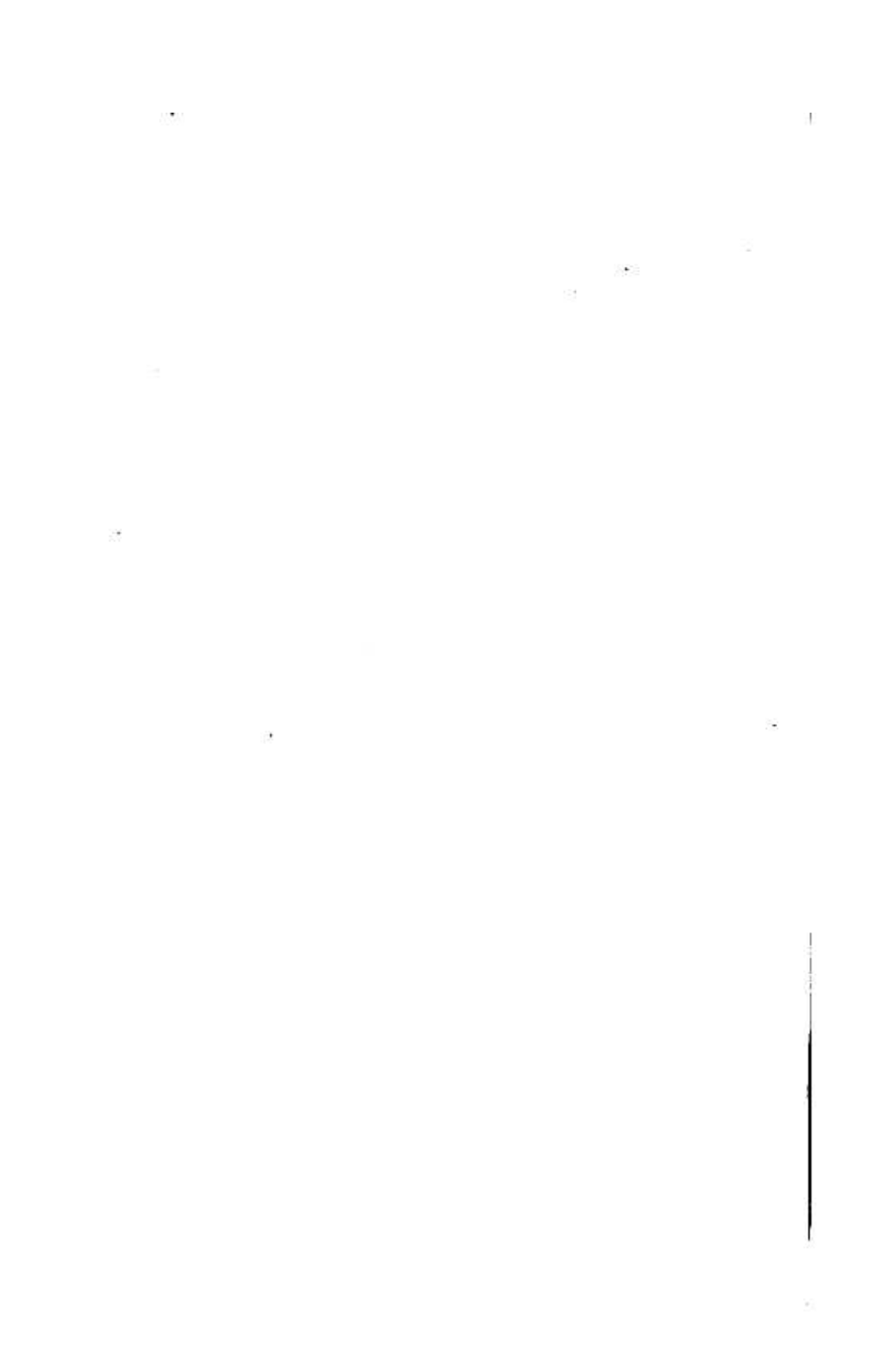
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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
USES OF GREAT MEN . . . . .	1
PLATO; OR, THE PHILOSOPHER . . . . .	27
——— NEW READINGS . . . . .	58
SWEDENBERG; OR, THE MYSTIC . . . . .	67
MONTAIGNE; OR, THE SKEPTIC . . . . .	109
SHAKSPEARE; OR, THE POET . . . . .	139
NAPOLEON; OR, THE MAN OF THE WORLD . . . . .	165
GOETHE; OR, THE WRITER . . . . .	193





## REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

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### USES OF GREAT MEN.

It is natural to believe in great men. If the companions of our childhood should turn out to be heroes, and their condition regal, it would not surprise us. All mythology opens with demigods, and the circumstance is high and poetic, that is, their genius is paramount. In the legend of the Gantama, the first men ate the earth, and found it deliciously sweet.

Nature seems to exist for the excellent. The world is upheld by the veracity of good men. They make the earth wholesome; they who lived with them found life glad and nutritious. Life is sweet and tolerable only in our belief in such society; and actually or ideally, we manage to live with superiors. We call our children and our lands by their names; their names are wrought into the verbs of language; their works and effigies are in our houses, and

every circumstance of the day recalls an anecdote of them.

The search after the great is the dream of youth, and the most serious occupation of manhood. We travel into foreign parts to find his works,—if possible, to get a glimpse of him; but we are put off with fortune instead. You say, the English are practical, the Germans are hospitable; in Valencia, the climate is delicious; and in the hills of the Sacramento, there is gold for the gathering. Yes, but I do not travel to find comfortable, rich and hospitable people, or clear sky, or ingots that cost too much; but if there were any magnet that would point to the countries and the houses where are the persons who are intrinsically rich and powerful, I would sell all to buy it, and put myself on the road to-day.

The race goes with us on their credit. The knowledge that in the city is the man who invented the railroad, raises the credit of all the citizens. But enormous populations, if they be beggars, are disgusting, like moving cheese, like hills of ants, or of fleas,—the more, the worse.

Our religion is the love and cherishing of these patrons. The gods of fable are the shining moments of great men. We run all our vessels into one mould. Our colossal theologies of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Mahometism, are the necessary and structural action of the human mind. The student of history is like a man going into a warehouse to buy cloths or carpets; he fancies he has a new article: if he go into the factory, he shall find that his new stuff still repeats the scrolls and rosettes which are

found on the interior walls of the pyramids of Thebes. Our theism is the purification of the human mind. Man can paint, or make, or think nothing but man. He believes that the great material elements had their origin from his thought, and our philosophy finds one essence collected or distributed.

If now we proceed to enquire into the kinds of service we derive from others, let us be warned of the danger of modern studies, and begin low enough. We must not contend against love, or deny the substantial existence of other people. I know not what would happen to us. We have social strengths. Our affection towards others creates a sort of vantage or purchase which nothing will supply. I can do that by another which I cannot do alone. I can say to you what I cannot first say to myself. Other men are lenses, through which we read our own minds.

Each man seeks those of different quality from his own, and such as are good of their kind; ~~that is, he seeks other men, and the *others*.~~ The stronger the nature, the more it is re-active. Let us have the quality pure. A little genius let us leave alone. A main difference betwixt men, is whether they attend their own affair or not. Man is that noble endogenous plant, which grows, like the palm, from within outward. His own affair, though impossible to others, he can open with celerity and in sport. It is easy to sugar to be sweet, and to nitre to be salt. We take a great deal of pains to waylay and entrap that which will of itself fall into our hand. I count him a great man who inhabits a higher sphere of