

**CENTENARY EDITION. THE
COMPLETE WORKS OF
RALPH WALDO EMERSON,
VOL. IV**

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON & EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

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Centenary Edition

**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

**WITH
A BIOGRAPHICAL
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY EDWARD WALDO EMERSON AND
A GENERAL INDEX**

VOLUME

IV

REPRESENTATIVE MEN

SEVEN LECTURES

BY

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



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I
USES OF GREAT MEN

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.¹ All mythology opens with demigods, and the circumstance is high and poetic; that is, their genius is paramount. In the legends of the Gautama, the first man 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 man 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 houses where are the persons who are intrinsically rich and powerful, I would sell all and buy it, and put myself on the road to-day.¹

The race goes with us on their credit. The knowledge that in the city is a 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.²

Our religion is the love and cherishing of these patrons. The gods of fable are the shining moments of great men.³ We run all our vessels into one mould. Our colossal theologies of Judaism, Christism, 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 to the factory, he shall find that his new stuff still re-

peats 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 inquire 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 *otherest*. The stronger the nature, the more it is reactive. Let us have the quality pure. A little genius let us leave alone. A main