

**THE WORKS OF RALPH
WALDO EMERSON, VOL.
VI. LETTERS AND SOCIAL
AIMS. [LONDON-1903]**

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The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Vol. VI. Letters and Social Aims. [London-1903] by
Ralph Waldo Emerson

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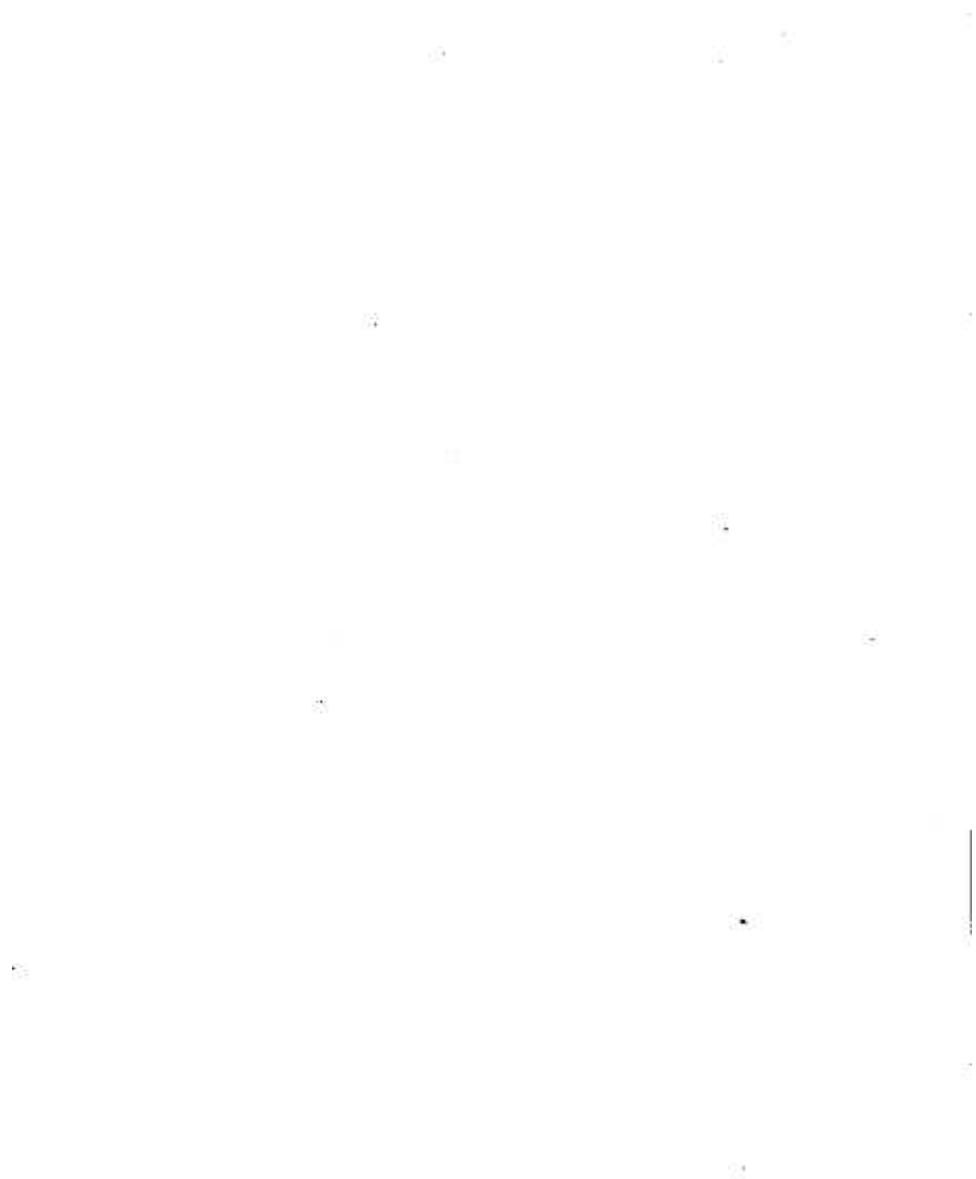
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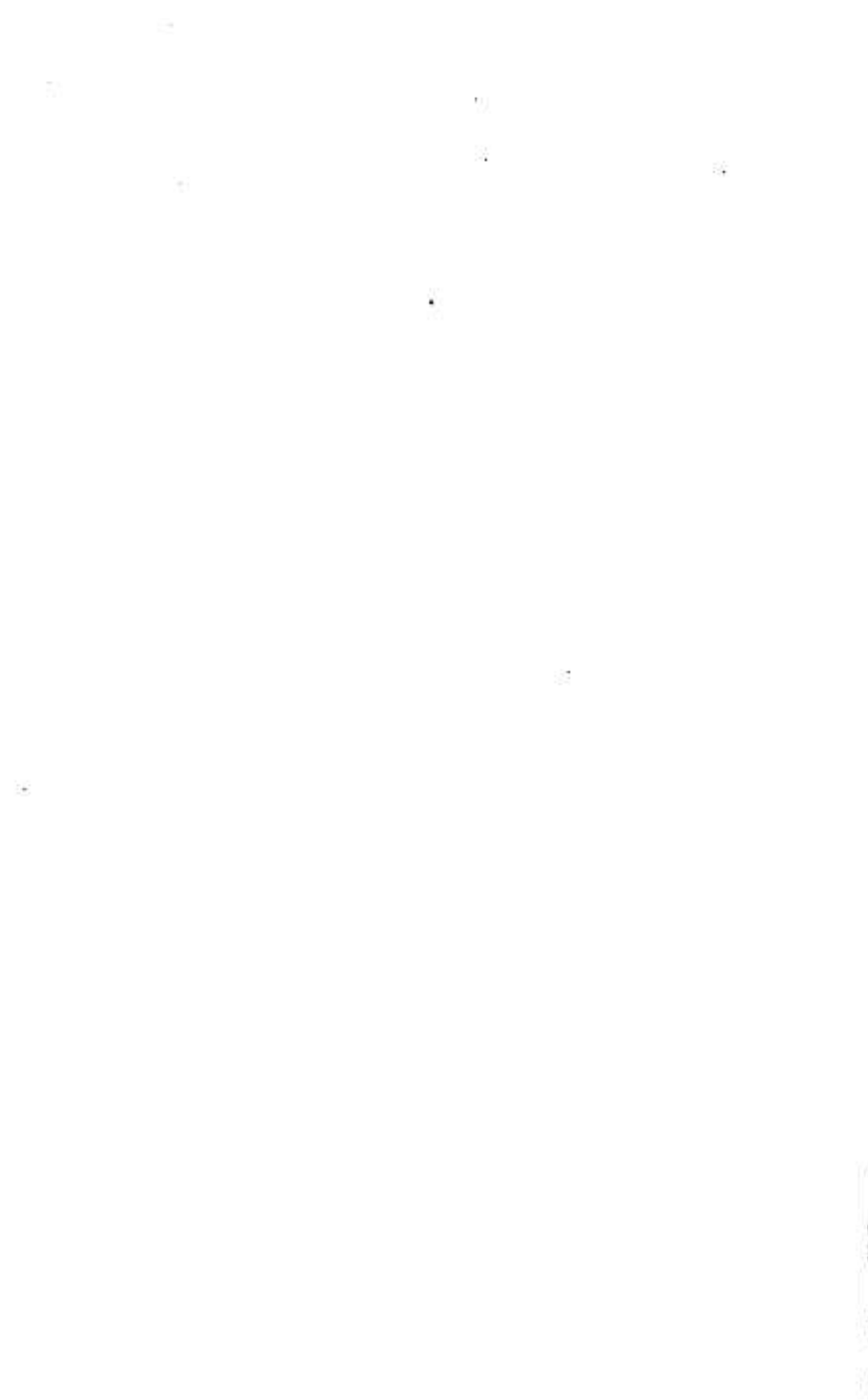
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LETTERS AND SOCIAL AIMS



POETRY AND IMAGINATION.

THE perception of matter is made the common sense, and for cause. This was the cradle, this the go-cart, of the human child. We must learn the homely laws of fire and water; we must feed, wash, plant, build. These are ends of necessity, and first in the order of Nature. Poverty, frost, famine, disease, debt, are the beadles and guardsmen that hold us to common sense. The intellect, yielded up to itself, cannot supersede this tyrannic necessity. The restraining grace of common sense is the mark of all the valid minds,—of *Æsop*, *Aristotle*, *Alfred*, *Luther*, *Shakspeare*, *Cervantes*, *Franklin*, *Napoleon*. The common sense which does not meddle with the absolute, but takes things at their word,—things as they appear,—believes in the existence of matter, not because we can touch it, or conceive of it, but because it agrees with ourselves, and the universe does not jest with us, but is in earnest,—is the house of health and life. In spite of all the joys of poets and the joys of saints, the most imaginative and abstracted person never makes, with impunity, the least mistake in this particular,—never tries to kindle his oven with water, nor carries a torch

into a powder-mill, nor seizes his wild charger by the tail. We should not pardon the blunder in another, nor endure it in ourselves.

But whilst we deal with this as finality, early hints are given that we are not to stay here; that we must be making ready to go;—a warning that this magnificent hotel and conveniency we call Nature is not final. First innuendoes, then broad hints, then smart taps, are given, suggesting that nothing stands still in Nature but death; that the creation is on wheels, in transit, always passing into something else, streaming into something higher; that matter is not what it appears;—that chemistry can blow it all into gas. Faraday, the most exact of natural philosophers, taught that when we should arrive at the monads, or primordial elements (the supposed little cubes or prisms of which all matter was built up), we should not find cubes, or prisms, or atoms at all, but spherules of force. It was whispered that the globes of the universe were precipitates of something more subtle; nay, somewhat was murmured in our ear that dwindled astronomy into a toy;—that too was no finality;—only provisional,—a makeshift;—that under chemistry was power and purpose: power and purpose ride on matter to the last atom. It was steeped in thought,—did everywhere express thought; that, as great conquerors have burned their ships when once they were landed on the wished-for shore, so the noble house of Nature we inhabit has temporary uses, and we can afford to leave it one day. The ends of all are moral, and therefore the beginnings are such.