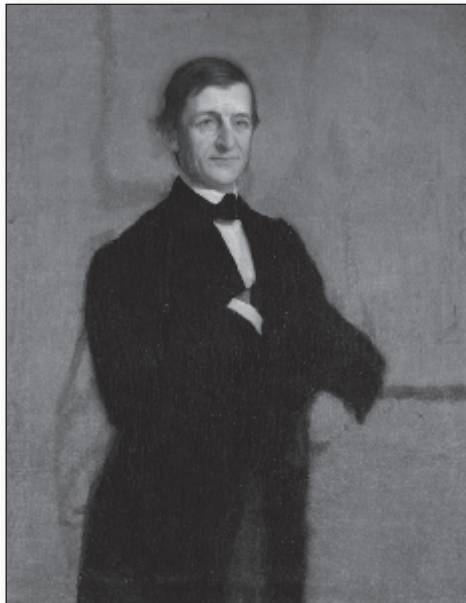


from SELF-RELIANCE

by Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. **A B** The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact makes
10 much impression on him, and another none. This sculpture in the memory is not without preestablished harmony. **C** The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate¹ and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted,² but God will not have his work made manifest by



Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
Gift of Horace Howard Furness.

1. **proportionate:** balanced.
2. **imparted:** revealed.

A LITERARY FOCUS

What is the phrase a “kernel of nourishing corn” a metaphor for?

B VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

Use context clues in this sentence to write a definition for the word *conviction*.

C LITERARY FOCUS

Which type of **figure of speech** is Emerson using in this sentence?

A VOCABULARY

Selection Vocabulary

Emerson sees conformity and self-reliance as opposites and enemies. Considering this, what do you think *aversion* means?

B LANGUAGE COACH

Integrity means "honesty." *Integrity* comes from the word *integer*, which means "whole." In what ways might the concepts of honesty and wholeness relate to each other?

C READING FOCUS

Write a brief explanation of this **figure of speech**.

20 cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope.

Trust thyself: Every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent 30 destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark. . . .

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. **A** It loves not realities 40 and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms³ must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. **B** Absolve⁴ you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage⁵ of the world. . . .

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. **C** With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well

- 3. **He who . . . immortal palms:** he who would win fame. In ancient times, palm leaves were carried as a symbol of victory or triumph.
- 4. **absolve:** pronounce free from guilt or blame.
- 5. **suffrage:** vote; used here to mean approval.



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50 concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today—“Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood”—Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? **D** Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton,⁶ and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. . . . **E**

6. **Pythagoras . . . Newton:** people whose contributions to scientific, philosophical, and religious thought were ignored or suppressed during their lifetimes.

D VOCABULARY

Word Study

Hard has multiple meanings. Which meaning is intended here?

E VOCABULARY

Academic Vocabulary

Emerson lists several well-known people. What does he suggest nonconforming might *transform*, or change, a person into?
