



Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)

Monadnoc

from: Emerson, Ralph Waldo. Early Poems of Ralph Waldo Emerson. New York, Boston, Thomas Y. Crowell & Company: 1899. Introduction by Nathan Haskell Dole.

Thousand minstrels woke within me,
"Our music's in the hills;"—
Gayest pictures rose to win me,
Leopard-colored rills.
Up!—If thou knew'st who calls
To twilight parks of beech and pine,
High over the river intervals,
Above the ploughman's highest line,
Over the owner's farthest walls;—
Up!—where the airy citadel
O'erlooks the purging landscape's swell.
Let not unto the stones the day
Her lily and rose, her sea and land display;
Read the celestial sign!
Lo! the South answers to the North;
Bookworm, break this sloth urbane;

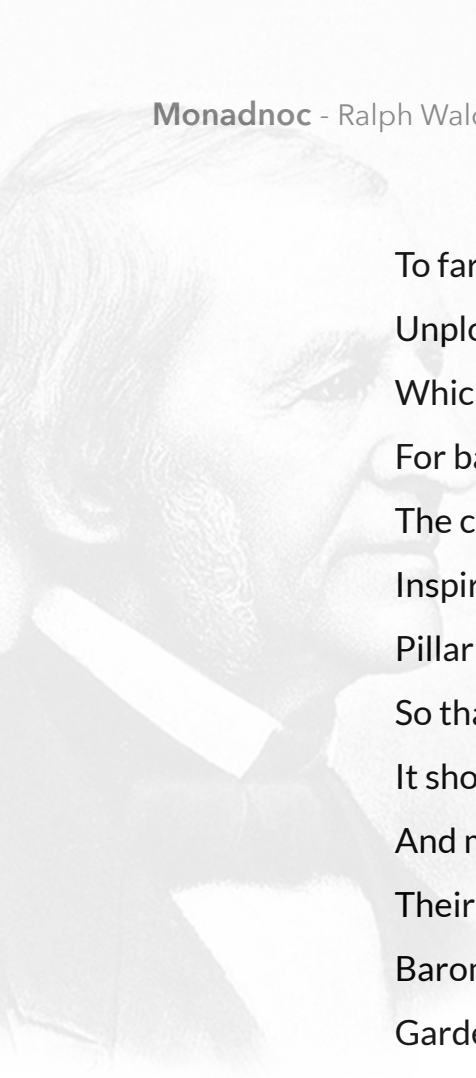
A greater Spirit bids thee forth,
Than the gray dreams which thee detain.

Mark how the climbing Oreads
Beckon thee to their arcades;
Youth, for a moment free as they,
Teach thy feet to feel the ground,
Ere yet arrive the wintry day
When Time thy feet has bound.
Accept the bounty of thy birth;
Taste the lordship of the earth.

I heard and I obeyed,
Assured that he who pressed the claim,
Well-known, but loving not a name,
Was not to be gainsaid.

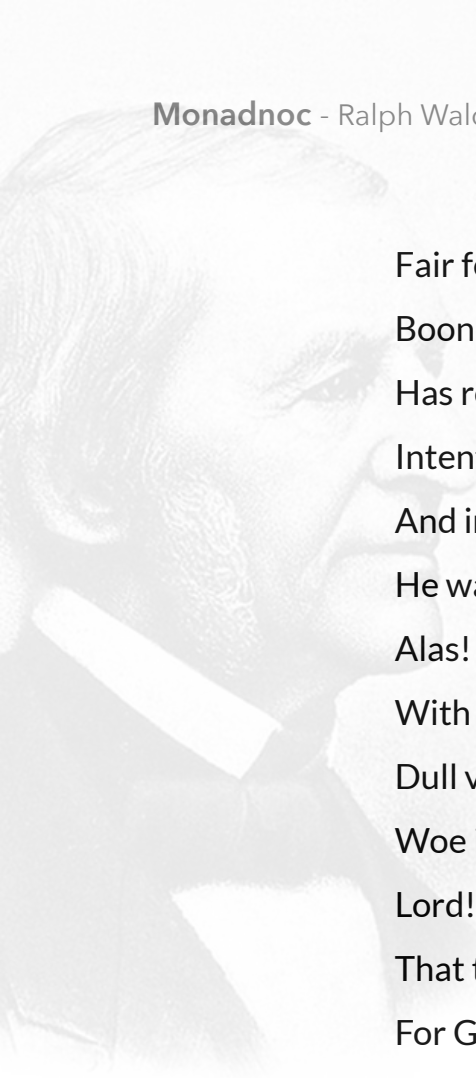
Ere yet the summoning voice was still,
I turned to Cheshire's haughty hill.
From the fixed cone the cloud-rack flowed
Like ample banner flung abroad
Round about, a hundred miles,
With invitation to the sea, and to the bordering isles.

In his own loom's garment drest,
By his own bounty blest,
Fast abides this constant giver,
Pouring many a cheerful river;

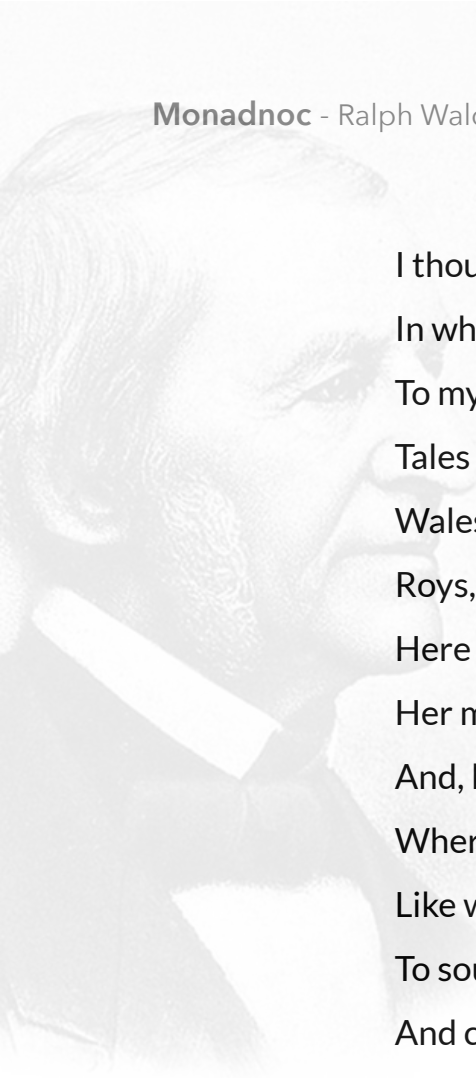


To far eyes, an aërial isle,
Unploughed, which finer spirits pile,
Which morn and crimson evening paint
For bard, for lover, and for saint;
The country's core,
Inspirer, prophet evermore,
Pillar which God aloft had set
So that men might it not forget,
It should be their life's ornament,
And mix itself with each event;
Their calendar and dial,
Barometer, and chemic phial,
Garden of berries, perch of birds,
Pasture of pool-haunting herds,
Graced by each change of sum untold,
Earth-baking heat, stone-cleaving cold.

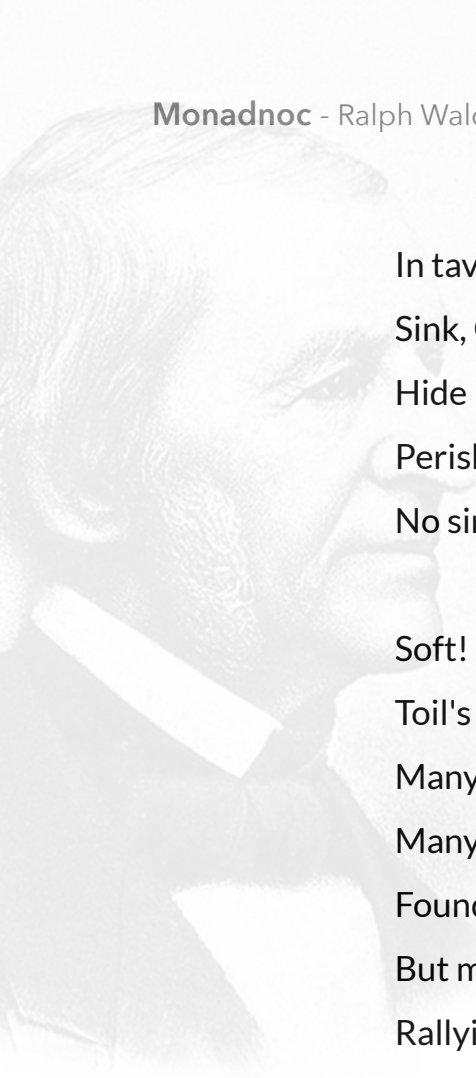
The Titan minds his sky-affairs,
Rich rents and wide alliance shares;
Mysteries of color daily laid
By the great sun in light and shade,
And, sweet varieties of chance,
And the mystic seasons' dance,
And thief-like step of liberal hours
Which thawed the snow-drift into flowers.
O wondrous craft of plant and stone
By eldest science done and shown!
Happy, I said, whose home is here,



Fair fortunes to the mountaineer!
Boon nature to his poorest shed
Has royal pleasure-grounds outspread.
Intent I searched the region round,
And in low hut my monarch found.
He was no eagle and no earl,
Alas! my foundling was a churl,
With heart of cat, and eyes of bug,
Dull victim of his pipe and mug;
Woe is me for my hopes' downfall!
Lord! is yon squalid peasant all
That this proud nursery could breed
For God's vicegerency and stead?
Time out of mind this forge of ores,
Quarry of spars in mountain pores,
Old cradle, hunting ground, and bier
Of wolf and otter, bear, and deer;
Well-built abode of many a race;
Tower of observance searching space;
Factory of river, and of rain;
Link in the alps' globe-girding chain;
By million changes skilled to tell
What in the Eternal standeth well,
And what obedient nature can,—
Is this colossal talisman
Kindly to creature, blood, and kind,
And speechless to the master's mind?

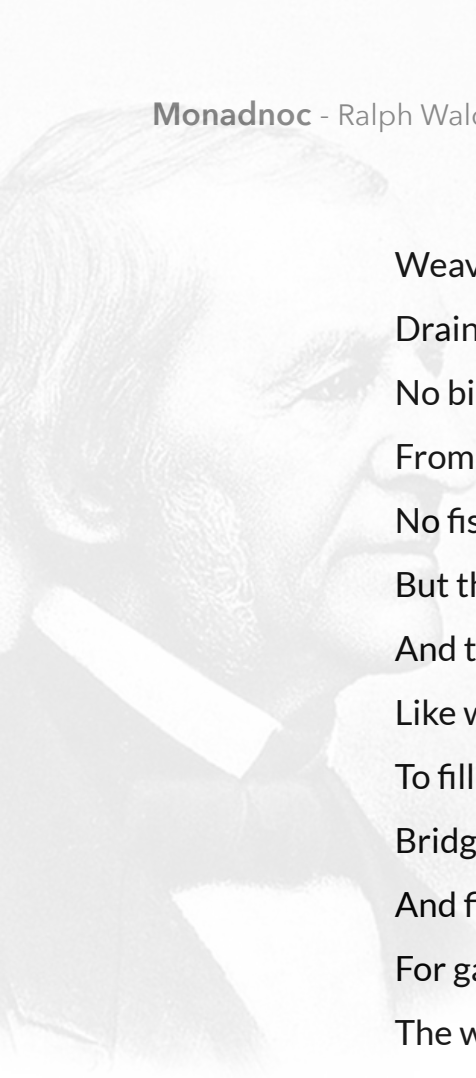


I thought to find the patriots
In whom the stock of freedom roots.
To myself I oft recount
Tales of many a famous mount.—
Wales, Scotland, Uri, Hungary's dells,
Roys, and Scanderbegs, and Tells.
Here now shall nature crowd her powers,
Her music, and her meteors,
And, lifting man to the blue deep
Where stars their perfect courses keep,
Like wise preceptor lure his eye
To sound the science of the sky,
And carry learning to its height
Of untried power and sane delight;
The Indian cheer, the frosty skies
Breed purer wits, inventive eyes,
Eyes that frame cities where none be,
And hands that stablish what these see:
And, by the moral of his place,
Hint summits of heroic grace;
Man in these crags a fastness find
To fight pollution of the mind;
In the wide thaw and ooze of wrong,
Adhere like this foundation strong,
The insanity of towns to stem
With simpleness for stratagem.
But if the brave old mould is broke,
And end in clowns the mountain-folk,



In tavern cheer and tavern joke,—
Sink, O mountain! in the swamp,
Hide in thy skies, O sovereign lap!
Perish like leaves the highland breed!
No sire survive, no son succeed!

Soft! let not the offended muse
Toil's hard hap with scorn accuse.
Many hamlets sought I then,
Many farms of mountain men;—
Found I not a minstrel seed,
But men of bone, and good at need.
Rallying round a parish steeple
Nestle warm the highland people,
Coarse and boisterous, yet mild,
Strong as giant, slow as child,
Smoking in a squalid room,
Where yet the westland breezes come.
Close hid in those rough guises lurk
Western magians, here they work;
Sweat and season are their arts,
Their talismans are ploughs and carts;
And well the youngest can command
Honey from the frozen land,
With sweet hay the swamp adorn,
Change the running sand to corn,
For wolves and foxes, lowing herds,
And for cold mosses, cream and curds;



Weave wood to canisters and mats,
Drain sweet maple-juice in vats.
No bird is safe that cuts the air,
From their rifle or their snare;
No fish in river or in lake,
But their long hands it thence will take;
And the country's iron face
Like wax their fashioning skill betrays,
To fill the hollows, sink the hills,
Bridge gulfs, drain swamps, build dams and mills,
And fit the bleak and howling place
For gardens of a finer race,
The world-soul knows his own affair,
Fore-looking when his hands prepare
For the next ages men of mould,
Well embodied, well ensouled,
He cools the present's fiery glow,
Sets the life pulse strong, but slow.
Bitter winds and fasts austere.
His quarantines and grottos, where
He slowly cures decrepit flesh,
And brings it infantile and fresh.
These exercises are the toys
And games with which he breathes his boys.
They bide their time, and well can prove,
If need were, their line from Jove,
Of the same stuff, and so allayed,
As that whereof the sun is made;

And of that fibre quick and strong
Whose throbs are love, whose thrills are song.

Now in sordid weeds they sleep,
Their secret now in dulness keep.
Yet, will you learn our ancient speech,
These the masters who can teach,
Fourscore or a hundred words
All their vocal muse affords,
These they turn in other fashion
Than the writer or the parson.
I can spare the college-bell,
And the learned lecture well.
Spare the clergy and libraries,
Institutes and dictionaries,
For the hardy English root
Thrives here unvalued underfoot.
Rude poets of the tavern hearth,
Squandering your unquoted mirth,
Which keeps the ground and never soars,
While Jake retorts and Reuben roars,
Tough and screaming as birch-bark,
Goes like bullet to its mark,
While the solid curse and jeer
Never balk the waiting ear:
To student ears keen-relished jokes
On truck, and stock, and farming-folks,—
Nought the mountain yields thereof

But savage health and sinews tough.

On the summit as I stood,
O'er the wide floor of plain and flood,
Seemed to me the towering hill
Was not altogether still,
But a quiet sense conveyed;
If I err not, thus it said:

Many feet in summer seek
Betimes my far-appearing peak;
In the dreaded winter-time,
None save dappling shadows climb
Under clouds my lonely head,
Old as the sun, old almost as the shade.
And comest thou
To see strange forests and new snow,
And tread uplifted land?
And leavest thou thy lowland race,
Here amid clouds to stand,
And would'st be my companion,
Where I gaze
And shall gaze
When forests fall, and man is gone,
Over tribes and over times
As the burning Lyre
Nearing me,
With its stars of northern fire,

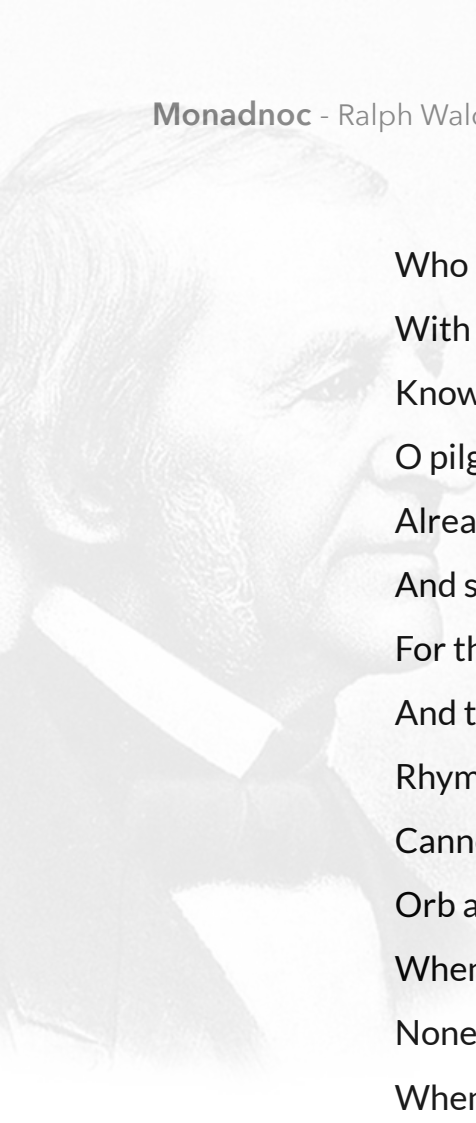
In many a thousand years.

Ah! welcome, if thou bring
My secret in thy brain;
To mountain-top may muse's wing
With good allowance strain.

Gentle pilgrim, if thou know
The gamut old of Pan,
And how the hills began,
The frank blessings of the hill
Fall on thee, as fall they will.

'Tis the law of bush and stone—
Each can only take his own.
Let him heed who can and will,—
Enchantment fixed me here
To stand the hurts of time, until
In mightier chant I disappear.

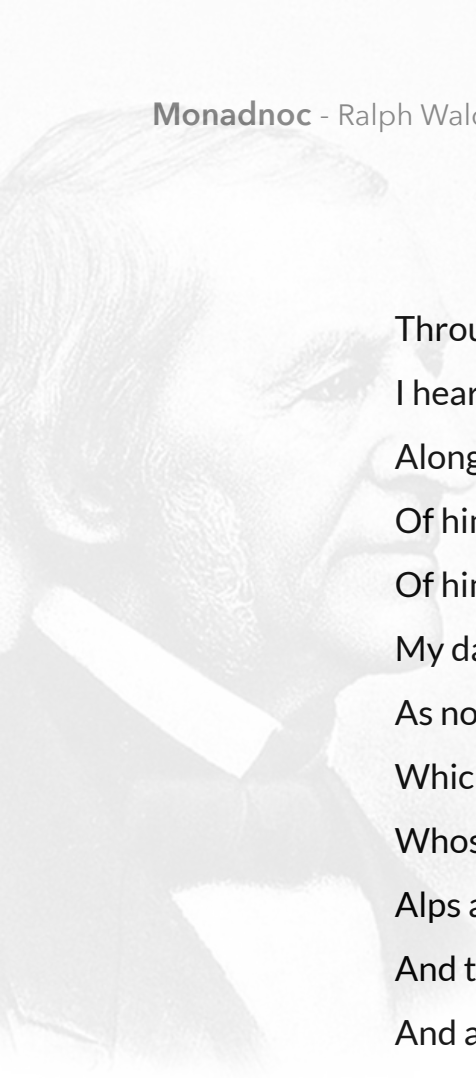
If thou trowest
How the chemic eddies play
Pole to pole, and what they say,
And that these gray crags
Not on crags are hung,
But beads are of a rosary
On prayer and music strung;
And, credulous, through the granite seeming
Seest the smile of Reason beaming;
Can thy style-discerning eye
The hidden-working Builder spy,



Who builds, yet makes no chips, no din,
With hammer soft as snow-flake's flight;
Knowest thou this?

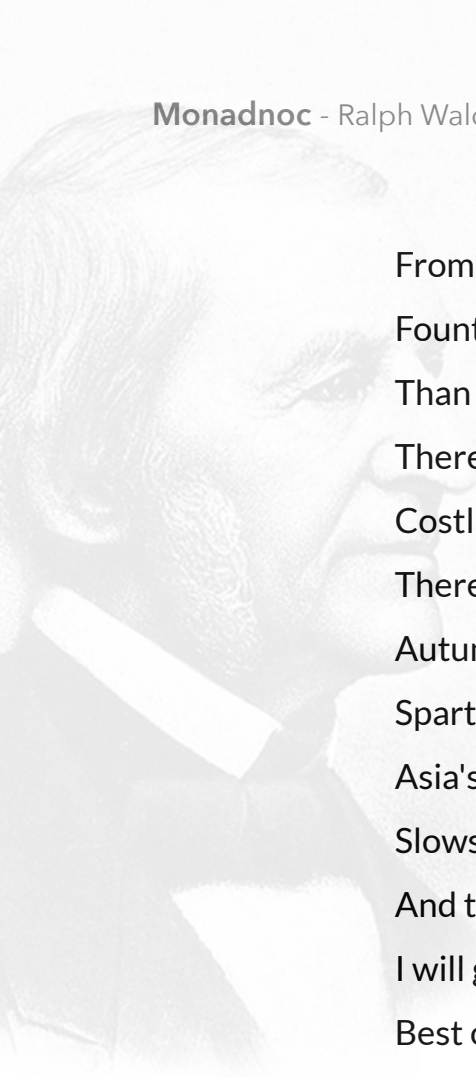
O pilgrim, wandering not amiss!
Already my rocks lie light,
And soon my cone will spin.
For the world was built in order,
And the atoms march in tune,
Rhyme the pipe, and time the warder,
Cannot forget the sun, the moon.
Orb and atom forth they prance,
When they hear from far the rune,
None so backward in the troop,
When the music and the dance
Reach his place and circumstance,
But knows the sun-creating sound,
And, though a pyramid, will bound.

Monadnoc is a mountain strong,
Tall and good my kind among,
But well I know, no mountain can
Measure with a perfect man;
For it is on Zodiack's writ,
Adamant is soft to wit;
And when the greater comes again,
With my music in his brain,
I shall pass as glides my shadow
Daily over hill and meadow.



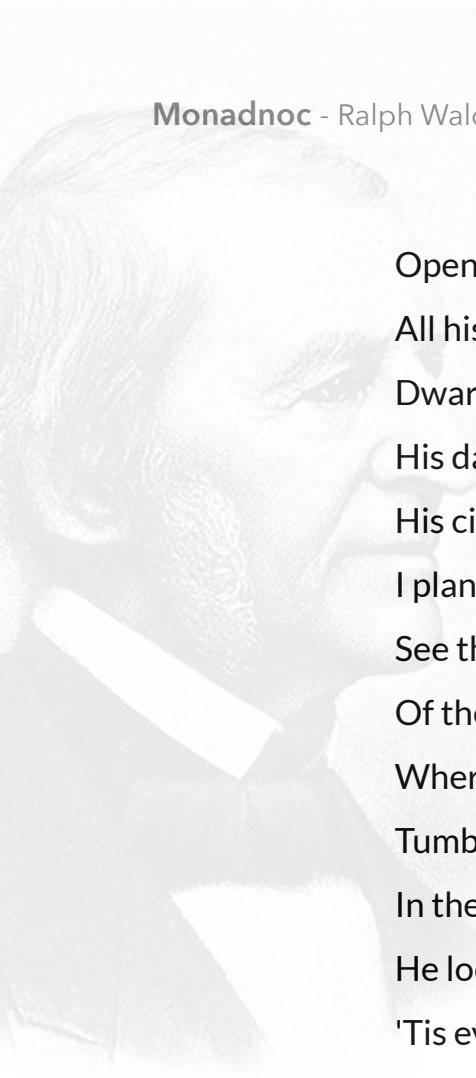
Through all time
I hear the approaching feet
Along the flinty pathway beat
Of him that cometh, and shall come,—
Of him who shall as lightly bear
My daily load of woods and streams,
As now the round sky-cleaving boat
Which never strains its rocky beams,
Whose timbers, as they silent float,
Alps and Caucasus uprear,
And the long Alleghanies here,
And all town-sprinkled lands that be,
Sailing through stars with all their history.

Every morn I lift my head,
Gaze o'er New England underspread
South from Saint Lawrence to the Sound,
From Katshill east to the sea-bound.
Anchored fast for many an age,
I await the bard and sage,
Who in large thoughts, like fair pearl-seed,
Shall string Monadnoc like a bead.
Comes that cheerful troubadour,
This mound shall throb his face before,
As when with inward fires and pain
It rose a bubble from the plain.
When he cometh, I shall shed

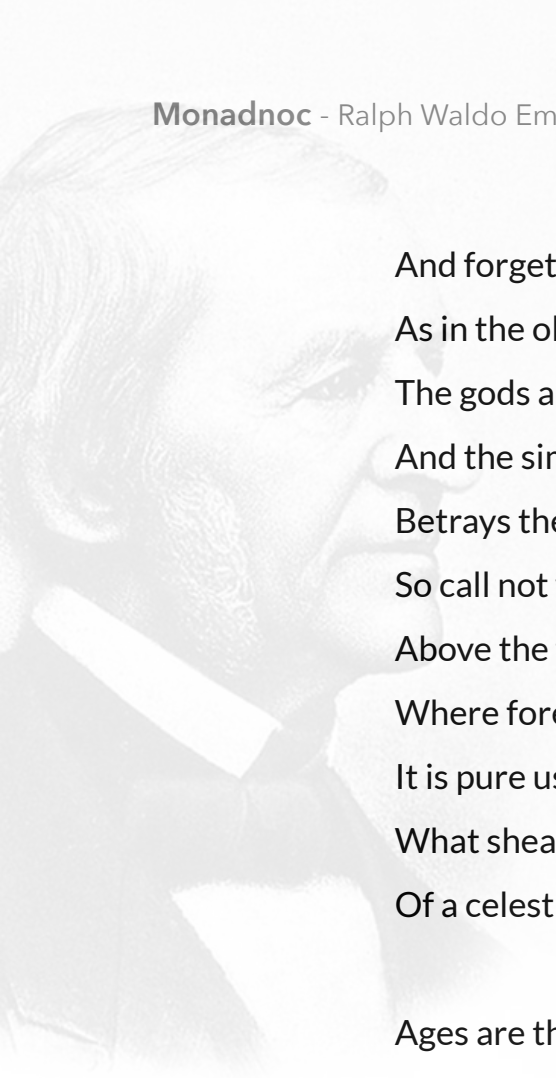


From this well-spring in my head
Fountain drop of spicier worth
Than all vintage of the earth.
There's fruit upon my barren soil
Costlier far than wine or oil;
There's a berry blue and gold,—
Autumn-ripe its juices hold,
Sparta's stoutness, Bethlehem's heart,
Asia's rancor, Athens' art,
Slowsure Britain's secular might,
And the German's inward sight;
I will give my son to eat
Best of Pan's immortal meat,
Bread to eat and juice to drink,
So the thoughts that he shall think
Shall not be forms of stars, but stars,
Nor pictures pale, but Jove and Mars.

He comes, but not of that race bred
Who daily climb my specular head.
Oft as morning wreathes my scarf,
Fled the last plumule of the dark,
Pants up hither the spruce clerk
From South-Cove and City-wharf;
I take him up my rugged sides,
Half-repentant, scant of breath,—
Bead-eyes my granite chaos show,
And my midsummer snow;

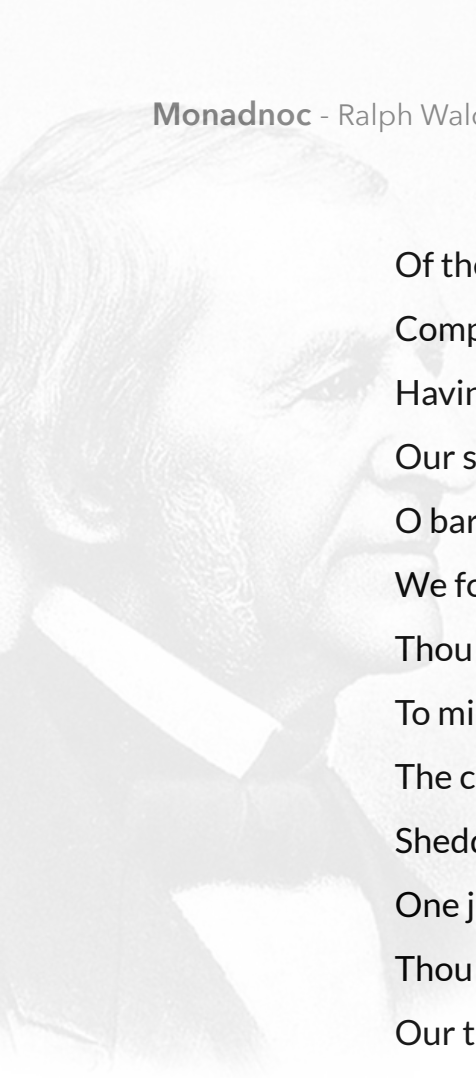


Open the daunting map beneath,—
All his county, sea and land,
Dwarfed to measure of his hand;
His day's ride is a furlong space,
His city tops a glimmering haze:
I plant his eyes on the sky-hoop bounding;—
See there the grim gray rounding
Of the bullet of the earth
Whereon ye sail,
Tumbling steep
In the uncontinented deep;—
He looks on that, and he turns pale:
'Tis even so, this treacherous kite,
Farm-furrowed, town-incrusted sphere,
Thoughtless of its anxious freight,
Plunges eyeless on for ever,
And he, poor parasite,—
Cooped in a ship he cannot steer,
Who is the captain he knows not,
Port or pilot trows not,—
Risk or ruin he must share.
I scowl on him with my cloud,
With my north wind chill his blood,
I lame him clattering down the rocks,
And to live he is in fear.
Then, at last, I let him down
Once more into his dapper town,
To chatter frightened to his clan,



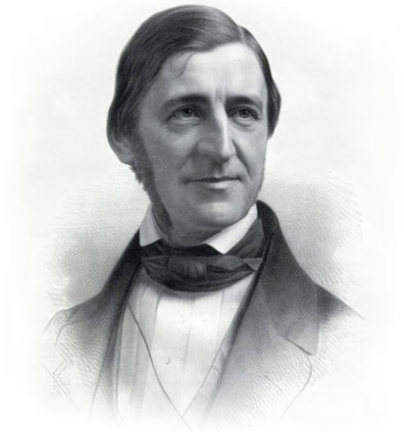
And forget me, if he can.
As in the old poetic fame
The gods are blind and lame,
And the simular despite
Betrays the more abounding might,
So call not waste that barren cone
Above the floral zone,
Where forests starve:
It is pure use;
What sheaves like those which here we glean and bind,
Of a celestial Ceres, and the Muse?

Ages are thy days,
Thou grand expressor of the present tense,
And type of permanence,
Firm ensign of the fatal Being,
Amid these coward shapes of joy and grief
That will not bide the seeing.
Hither we bring
Our insect miseries to the rocks,
And the whole flight with pestering wing
Vanish and end their murmuring,
Vanish beside these dedicated blocks,
Which, who can tell what mason laid?
Spoils of a front none need restore,
Replacing frieze and architrave;
Yet flowers each stone rosette and metope brave,
Still is the haughty pile erect



Of the old building Intellect.
Complement of human kind,
Having us at vantage still,
Our sumptuous indigence,
O barren mound! thy plenties fill.
We fool and prate,—
Thou art silent and sedate.
To million kinds and times one sense
The constant mountain doth dispense,
Shedding on all its snows and leaves,
One joy it joys, one grief it grieves.
Thou seest, O watchman tall!
Our towns and races grow and fall,
And imagest the stable Good
For which we all our lifetime grope,
In shifting form the formless mind;
And though the substance us elude,
We in thee the shadow find.
Thou in our astronomy
An opaker star,
Seen, haply, from afar,
Above the horizon's hoop.
A moment by the railway troop,
As o'er some bolder height they speed,—
By circumspect ambition,
By errant Gain,
By feasters, and the frivolous,—
Recallest us,

And makest sane.
Mute orator! well-skilled to plead,
And send conviction without phrase,
Thou dost supply
The shortness of our days,
And promise, on thy Founder's truth,
Long morrow to this mortal youth.



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