

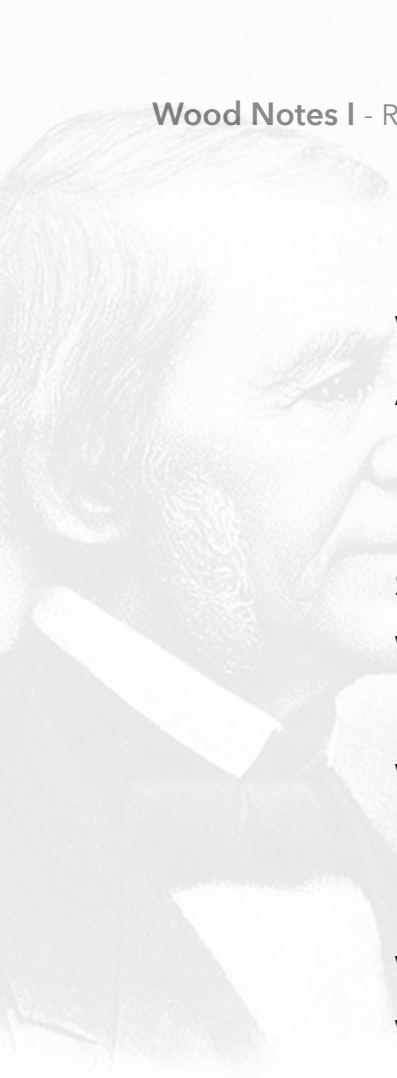


Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1803-1882)

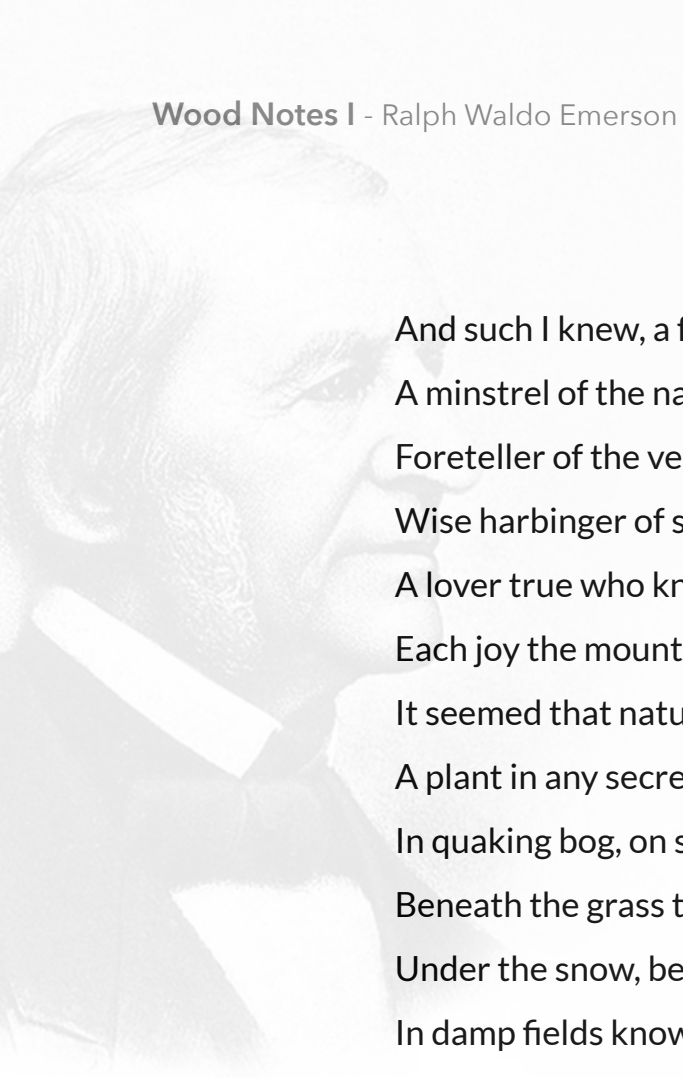
Wood Notes I

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

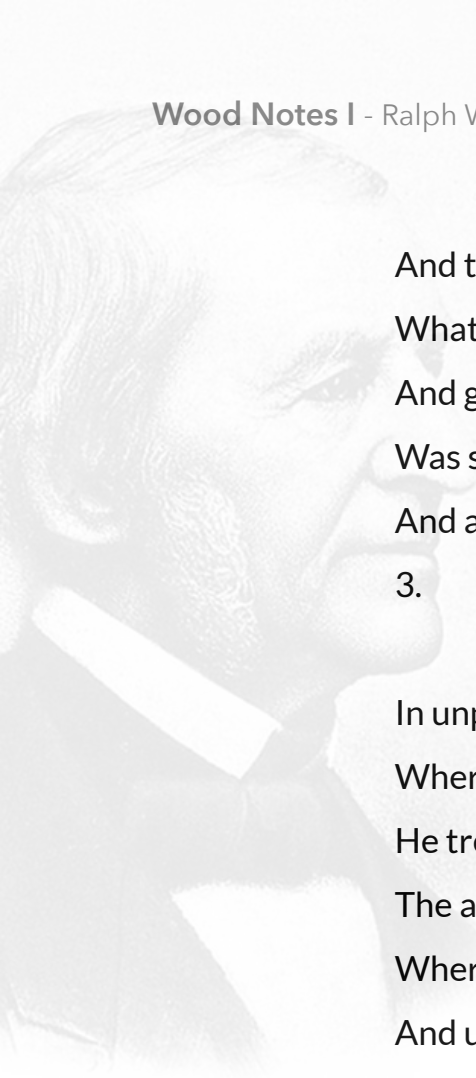
For this present, hard
Is the fortune of the bard
Born out of time;
All his accomplishment
From nature's utmost treasure spent
Booteth not him.
When the pine tosses its cones
To the song of its waterfall tones,
He speeds to the woodland walks,
To birds and trees he talks.
Cæsar of his leafy Rome,
There the poet is at home.
He goes to the riverside,—
Not hook nor line hath he:
He stands in the meadows wide,—



Nor gun nor scythe to see;
With none has he to do,
And none seek him,
Nor men below,
Nor spirits dim.
Sure some god his eye enchants,
What he knows, nobody wants.
In the wood he travels glad
Without better fortune had,
Melancholy without bad.
Planter of celestial plants,
What he knows, nobody wants,—
What he knows, he hides, not vaunts.
Knowledge this man prizes best
Seems fantastic to the rest,
Pondering shadows, colors, clouds,
Grass buds, and caterpillars' shrouds,
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet's petal,
Why nature loves the number five,
And why the star-form she repeats,
Lover of all things alive,
Wonderer at all he meets,
Wonderer chiefly at himself,—
Who can tell him what he is,
Or how meet in human elf
Coming and past eternities?
2.



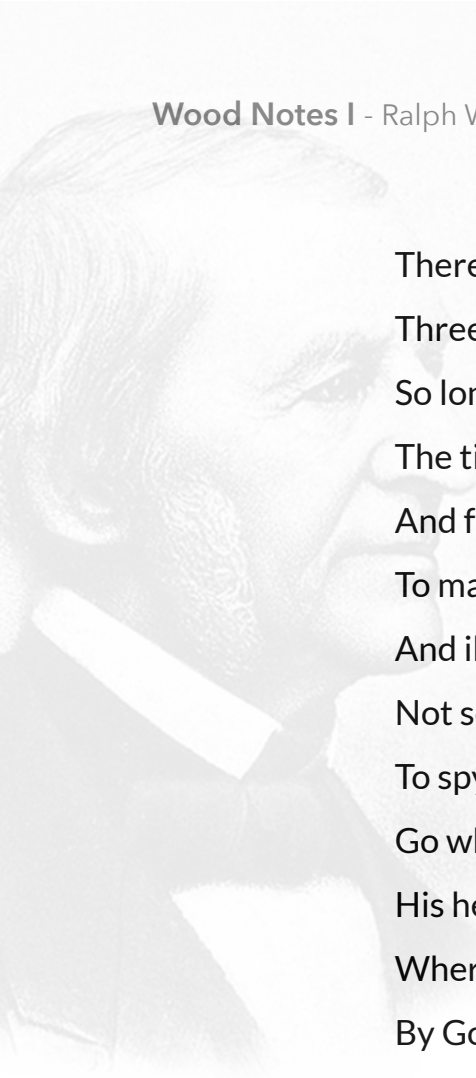
And such I knew, a forest seer,
A minstrel of the natural year,
Foreteller of the vernal ides,
Wise harbinger of spheres and tides,
A lover true who knew by heart
Each joy the mountain dales impart;
It seemed that nature could not raise
A plant in any secret place,
In quaking bog, on snowy hill,
Beneath the grass that shades the rill,
Under the snow, between the rocks,
In damp fields known to bird and fox,
But he would come in the very hour
It opened in its virgin bower,
As if a sunbeam showed the place,
And tell its long-descended race.
It seemed as if the breezes brought him,
It seemed as if the sparrows taught him,
As if by secret sight he knew
Where in far fields the orchis grew.
There are many events in the field
Which are not shown to common eyes,
But all her shows did nature yield
To please and win this pilgrim wise.
He saw the partridge drum in the woods,
He heard the woodcock's evening hymn,
He found the tawny thrush's broods,



And the shy hawk did wait for him.
What others did at distance hear,
And guessed within the thicket's gloom,
Was showed to this philosopher,
And at his bidding seemed to come.

3.

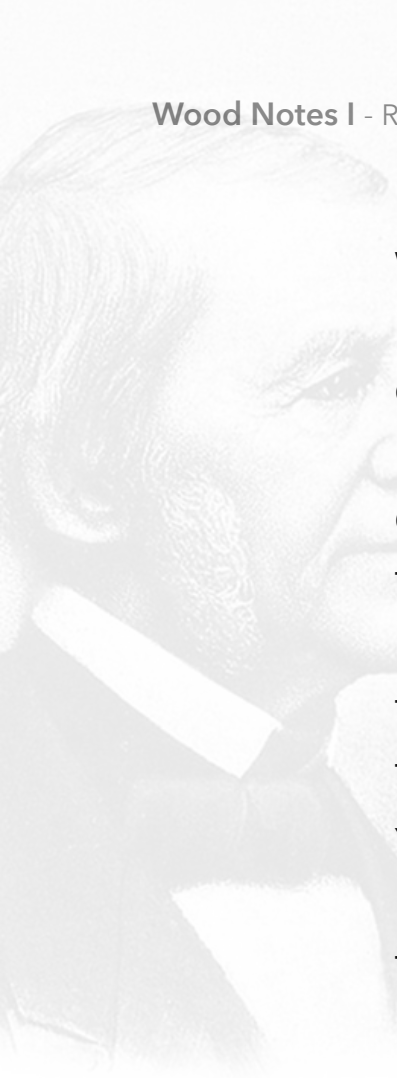
In unploughed Maine, he sought the lumberer's gang,
Where from a hundred lakes young rivers sprang;
He trod the unplanted forest-floor, whereon
The all-seeing sun for ages hath not shone,
Where feeds the mouse, and walks the surly bear,
And up the tall mast runs the woodpecker.
He saw, beneath dim aisles, in odorous beds,
The slight Linnæa hang its twin-born heads,
And blessed the monument of the man of flowers,
Which breathes his sweet fame through the Northern bowers.
He heard when in the grove, at intervals,
With sudden roar the aged pine tree fails,—
One crash the death-hymn of the perfect tree,
Declares the close of its green century.
Low lies the plant to whose creation went
Sweet influence from every element;
Whose living towers the years conspired to build,
Whose giddy top the morning loved to gild.
Through these green tents, by eldest nature drest,
He roamed, content alike with man and beast.
Where darkness found him, he lay glad at night;



There the red morning touched him with its light.
Three moons his great heart him a hermit made,
So long he roved at will the boundless shade.
The timid it concerns to ask their way,
And fear what foe in caves and swamps can stray,
To make no step until the event is known,
And ills to come as evils past bemoan:
Not so the wise; no coward watch he keeps,
To spy what danger on his pathway creeps;
Go where he will, the wise man is at home,
His hearth the earth; – his hall the azure dome;
Where his clear spirit leads him, there's his road,
By God's own light illumined and foreshowed.

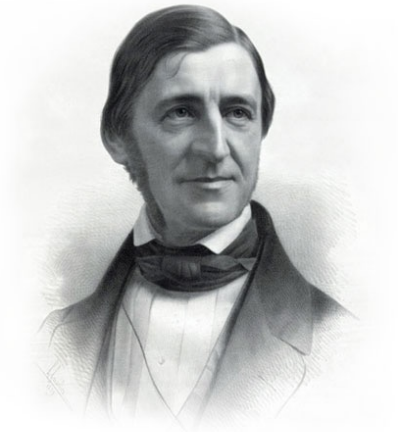
4.

'Twas one of the charmed days
When the genius of God doth flow,
The wind may alter twenty ways,
A tempest cannot blow:
It may blow north, it still is warm;
Or south, it still is clear;
Or east, it smells like a clover farm;
Or west, no thunder fear.
The musing peasant lowly great
Beside the forest water sate:
The rope-like pine-roots crosswise grown
Composed the network of his throne;
The wide lake edged with sand and grass



Was burnished to a floor of glass,
Painted with shadows green and proud
Of the tree and of the cloud.
He was the heart of all the scene,
On him the sun looked more serene,
To hill and cloud his face was known,
It seemed the likeness of their own.
They knew by secret sympathy
The public child of earth and sky.
You ask, he said, what guide,
Me through trackless thickets led,
Through thick-stemmed woodlands rough and wide?
I found the waters' bed:
I travelled grateful by their side,
Or through their channel dry;
They led me through the thicket damp,
Through brake and fern, the beavers' camp,
Through beds of granite cut my road,
And their resistless friendship showed.
The falling waters led me,
The foodful waters fed me,
And brought me to the lowest land,
Unerring to the ocean sand.
The moss upon the forest bark
Was pole-star when the night was dark;
The purple berries in the wood
Supplied me necessary food.
For nature ever faithful is

To such as trust her faithfulness.
When the forest shall mislead me,
When the night and morning lie,
When sea and land refuse to feed me,
'Twill be time enough to die;
Then will yet my mother yield
A pillow in her greenest field,
Nor the June flowers scorn to cover
The clay of their departed lover.



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