



Ralph Waldo Emerson  
(1803-1882)

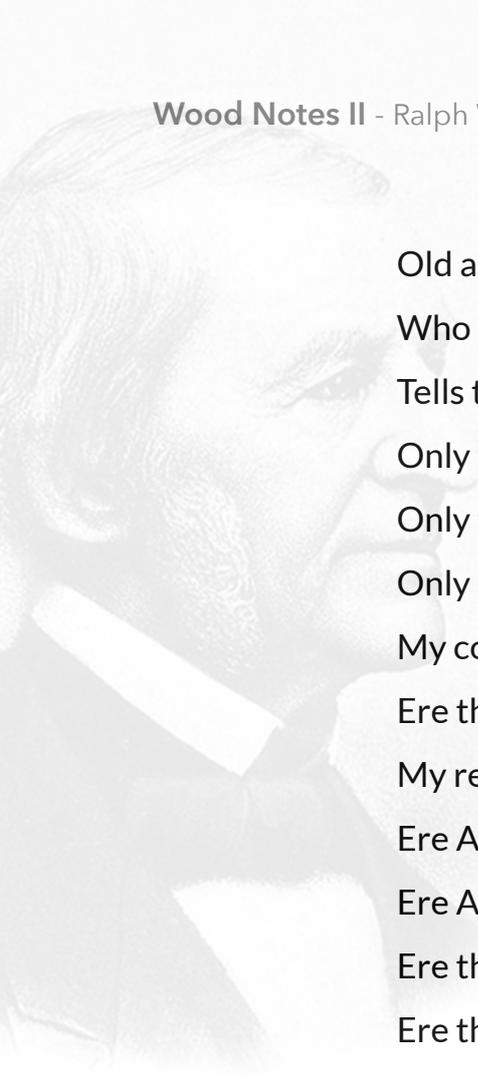
# Wood Notes II

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

---

As sunbeams stream through liberal space,  
And nothing jostle or displace,  
So waved the pine tree through my thought,  
And fanned the dreams it never brought.

"Whether is better the gift or the donor?  
Come to me,"  
Quoth the pine tree,  
"I am the giver of honor.  
My garden is the cloven rock,  
And my manure the snow,  
And drifting sand heaps feed my stock,  
In summer's scorching glow.  
Ancient or curious,  
Who knoweth aught of us?  
Old as Jove,



Old as Love,  
Who of me  
Tells the pedigree?  
Only the mountains old,  
Only the waters cold,  
Only moon and star  
My coevals are.  
Ere the first fowl sung  
My relenting boughs among,  
Ere Adam wived,  
Ere Adam lived,  
Ere the duck dived,  
Ere the bees hived,  
Ere the lion roared,  
Ere the eagle soared,  
Light and heat, land and sea  
Spake unto the oldest tree.  
Glad in the sweet and secret aid  
Which matter unto matter paid,  
The water flowed, the breezes fanned,  
The tree confined the roving sand,  
The sunbeam gave me to the sight,  
The tree adorned the formless light,  
And once again  
O'er the grave of men  
We shall talk to each other again  
Of the old age behind,  
Of the time out of mind,

Which shall come again."

"Whether is better the gift or the donor?

Come to me,"

Quoth the pine tree,

"I am the giver of honor.

He is great who can live by me;

The rough and bearded forester

Is better than the lord;

God fills the scrip and canister,

Sin piles the loaded board.

The lord is the peasant that was,

The peasant the lord that shall be,

The lord is hay, the peasant grass,

One dry and one the living tree.

Genius with my boughs shall flourish,

Want and cold our roots shall nourish;

Who liveth by the ragged pine,

Foundeth a heroic line;

Who liveth in the palace hall,

Waneth fast and spendeth all:

He goes to my savage haunts,

With his chariot and his care,

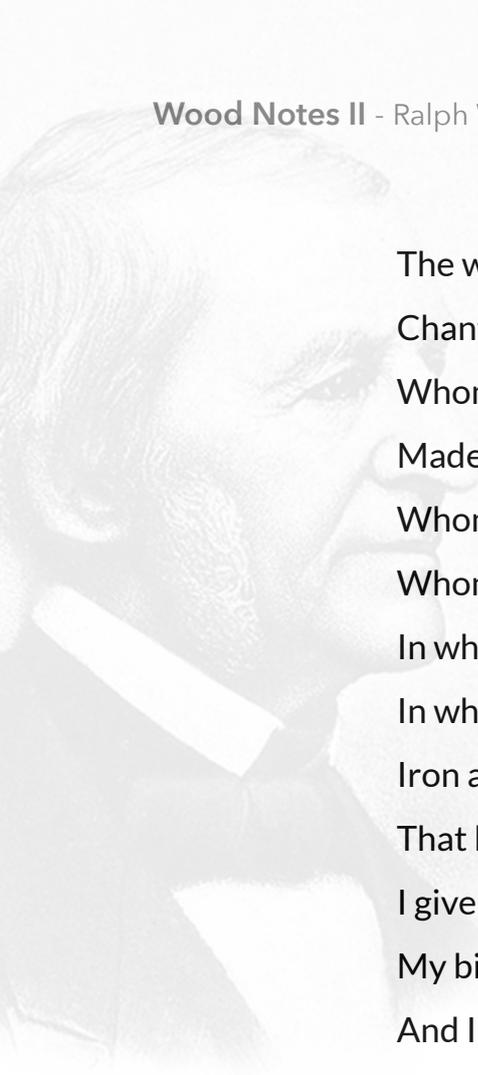
My twilight realm he disenchant,

And finds his prison there.

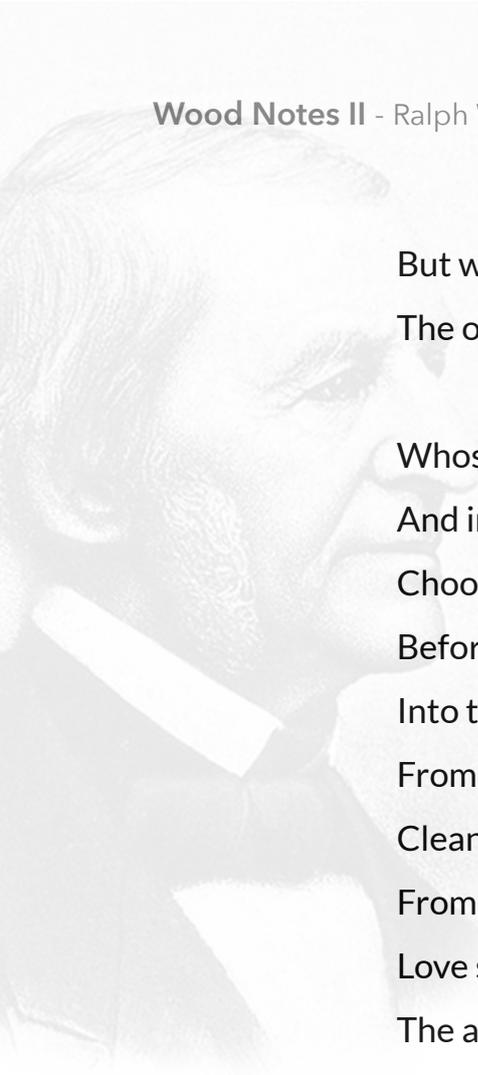
What prizes the town and the tower?

Only what the pine tree yields,

Sinew that subdued the fields,



The wild-eyed boy who in the woods  
Chants his hymn to hill and floods,  
Whom the city's poisoning spleen  
Made not pale, or fat, or lean,  
Whom the rain and the wind purgeth,  
Whom the dawn and the day-star urgeth,  
In whose cheek the rose leaf blusheth,  
In whose feet the lion rusheth,  
Iron arms and iron mould,  
That knew not fear, fatigue, or cold.  
I give my rafters to his boat,  
My billets to his boiler's throat,  
And I will swim the ancient sea  
To float my child to victory,  
And grant to dwellers with the pine,  
Dominion o'er the palm and vine.  
Westward I ope the forest gates,  
The train along the railroad skates,  
It leaves the land behind, like ages past,  
The foreland flows to it in river fast,  
Missouri I have made a mart,  
I teach Iowa Saxon art.  
Who leaves the pine tree, leaves his friend,  
Unnerves his strength, invites his end.  
Cut a bough from my parent stem,  
And dip it in thy porcelain vase;  
A little while each russet gem  
Will swell and rise with wonted grace,

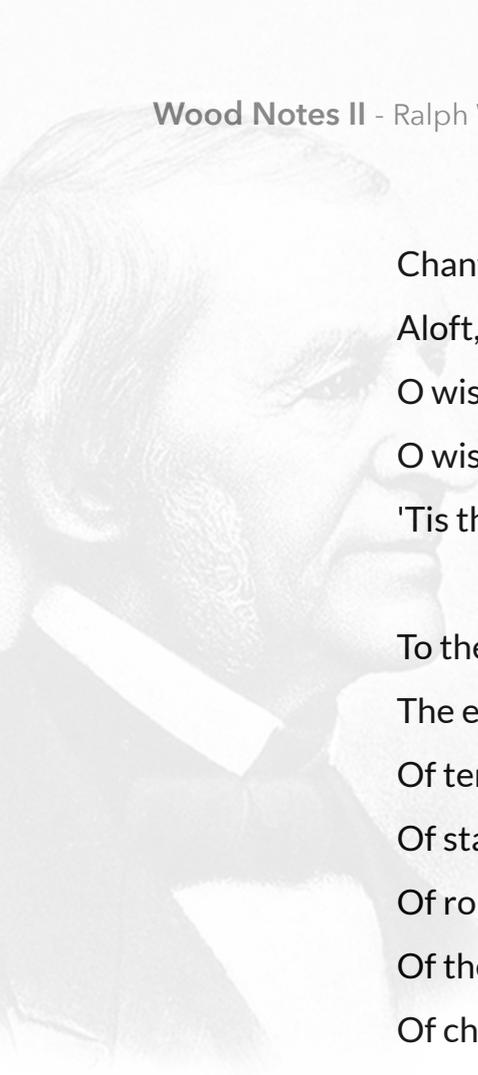


But when it seeks enlarged supplies,  
The orphan of the forest dies.

Whoso walketh in solitude,  
And inhabiteth the wood,  
Choosing light, wave, rock, and bird,  
Before the money-loving herd,  
Into that forester shall pass  
From these companions power and grace;  
Clean shall he be without, within,  
From the old adhering sin;  
Love shall he, but not adulate,  
The all-fair, the all-embracing Fate,  
All ill dissolving in the light  
Of his triumphant piercing sight.  
Not vain, sour, nor frivolous,  
Not mad, athirst, nor garrulous,  
Grave, chaste, contented, though retired,  
And of all other men desired.  
On him the light of star and moon  
Shall fall with purer radiance down;  
All constellations of the sky  
Shed their virtue through his eye.  
Him nature giveth for defence  
His formidable innocence,  
The mountain sap, the shells, the sea,  
All spheres, all stones, his helpers be;  
He shall never be old,

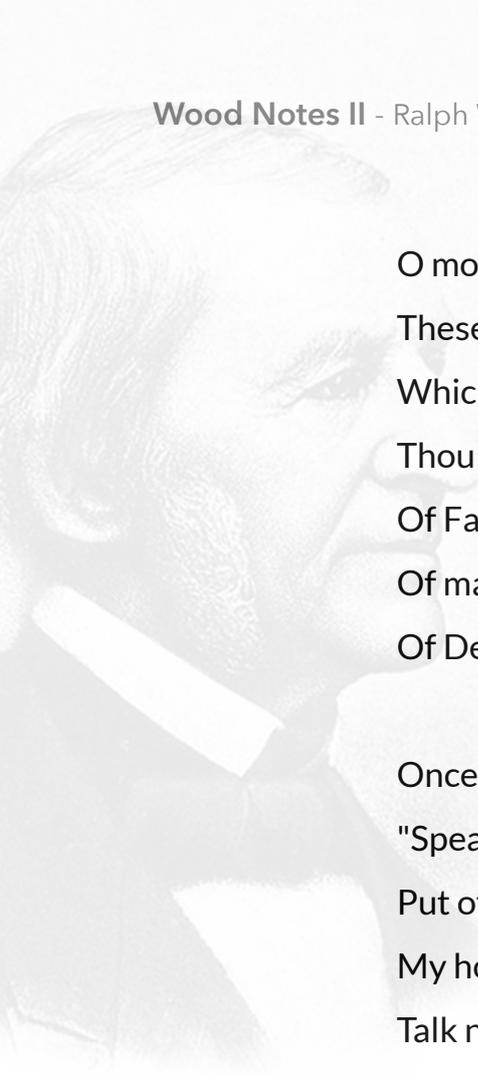


Nor his fate shall be foretold;  
He shall see the speeding year,  
Without wailing, without fear;  
He shall be happy in his love,  
Like to like shall joyful prove.  
He shall be happy whilst he woos  
Muse-born a daughter of the Muse;  
But if with gold she bind her hair,  
And deck her breast with diamond,  
Take off thine eyes, thy heart forbear,  
Though thou lie alone on the ground:  
The robe of silk in which she shines,  
It was woven of many sins,  
And the shreds  
Which she sheds  
In the wearing of the same,  
Shall be grief on grief,  
And shame on shame.  
Heed the old oracles,  
Ponder my spells,  
Song wakes in my pinnacles,  
When the wind swells.  
Soundeth the prophetic wind,  
The shadows shake on the rock behind,  
And the countless leaves of the pine are strings  
Tuned to the lay the wood-god sings.  
Hearken! hearken!  
If thou wouldst know the mystic song



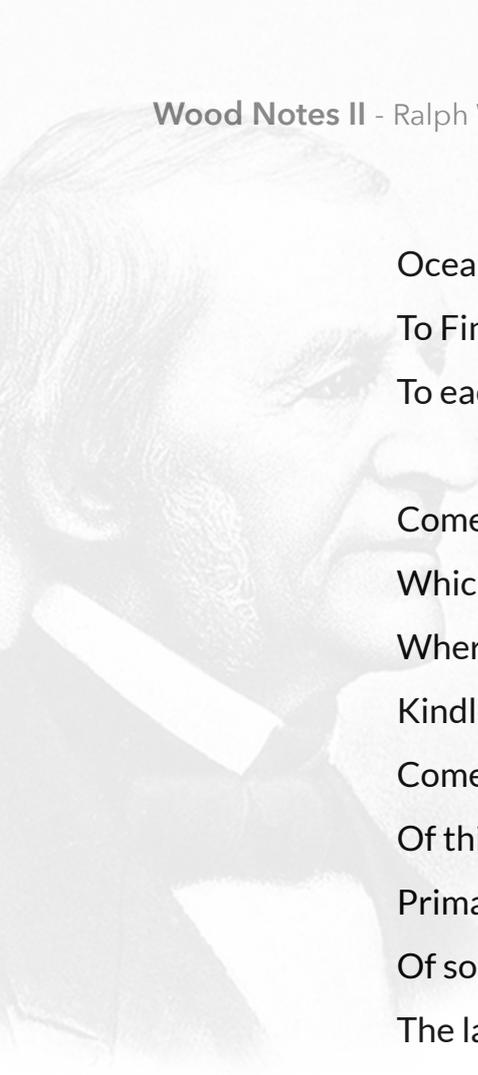
Chanted when the sphere was young,  
Aloft, abroad, the psalm swells,  
O wise man, hear'st thou half it tells?  
O wise man, hear'st thou the least part?  
'Tis the chronicle of art.

To the open ear it sings  
The early genesis of things;  
Of tendency through endless ages,  
Of star-dust, and star-pilgrimages,  
Of rounded worlds, of space, and time,  
Of the old flood's subsiding slime,  
Of chemic matter, force, and form,  
Of poles and powers, cold, wet, and warm,  
The rushing metamorphosis  
Dissolving all that fixture is,  
Melts things that be to things that seem,  
And solid nature to a dream.  
Oh, listen to the under song,  
The ever old, the ever young,  
And far within those cadent pauses,  
The chorus of the ancient Causes.  
Delights the dreadful destiny  
To fling his voice into the tree,  
And shock thy weak ear with a note  
Breathed from the everlasting throat.  
In music he repeats the pang  
Whence the fair flock of nature sprang.



O mortal! thy ears are stones;  
These echoes are laden with tones  
Which only the pure can hear,  
Thou canst not catch what they recite  
Of Fate, and Will, of Want, and Right,  
Of man to come, of human life,  
Of Death, and Fortune, Growth, and Strife."

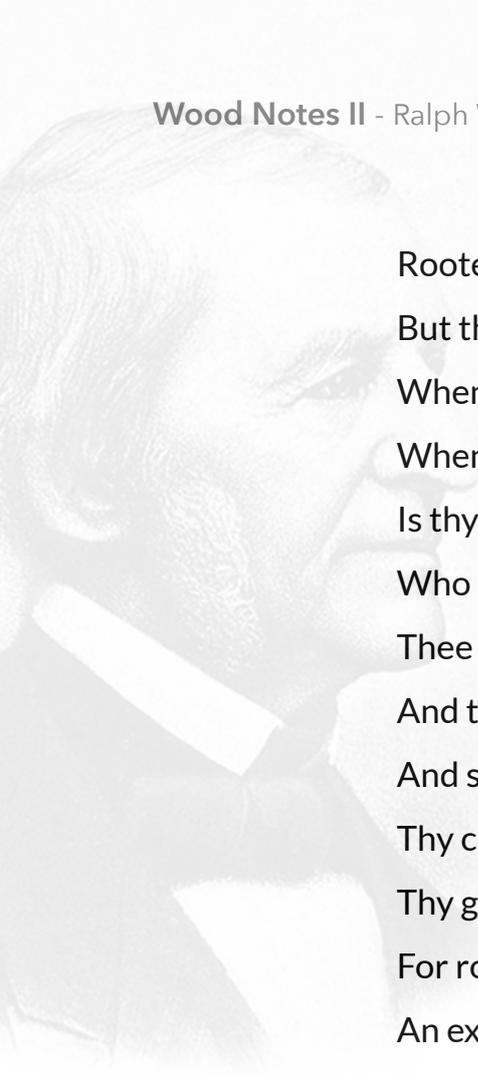
Once again the pine tree sung;—  
"Speak not thy speech my boughs among,  
Put off thy years, wash in the breeze,  
My hours are peaceful centuries.  
Talk no more with feeble tongue;  
No more the fool of space and time,  
Come weave with mine a nobler rhyme.  
Only thy Americans  
Can read thy line, can meet thy glance,  
But the runes that I rehearse  
Understands the universe.  
The least breath my boughs which tossed  
Brings again the Pentecost;  
To every soul it soundeth clear  
In a voice of solemn cheer,  
'Am I not thine? are not these thine?'  
And they reply, 'Forever mine.'  
My branches speak Italian,  
English, German, Basque, Castilian,  
Mountain speech to Highlanders,



Ocean tongues to islanders,  
To Finn, and Lap, and swart Malay,  
To each his bosom secret say.

Come learn with me the fatal song  
Which knits the world in music strong,  
Whereto every bosom dances  
Kindled with courageous fancies:  
Come lift thine eyes to lofty rhymes  
Of things with things, of times with times,  
Primal chimes of sun and shade,  
Of sound and echo, man and maid;  
The land reflected in the flood;  
Body with shadow still pursued.  
For nature beats in perfect tune,  
And rounds with rhyme her every rune,  
Whether she work in land or sea,  
Or hide underground her alchemy.  
Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,  
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,  
But it carves the bow of beauty there,  
And the ripples in rhymes the oar forsake.

The wood is wiser far than thou:  
The wood and wave each other know.  
Not unrelated, unaffied,  
But to each thought and thing allied,  
Is perfect nature's every part,

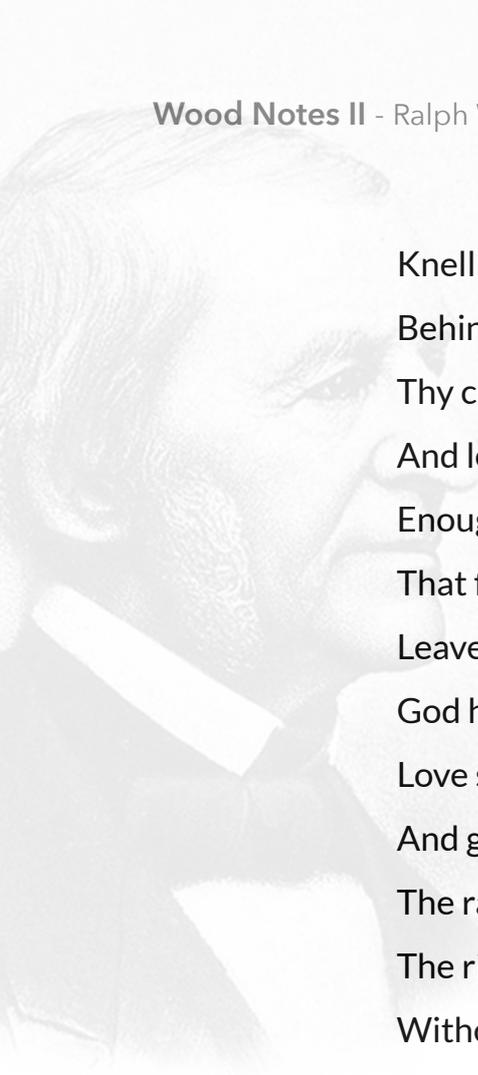


Rooted in the mighty heart.  
But thou, poor child! unbound, unrhymed,  
Whence camest thou, misplaced, mistimed?  
Whence, O thou orphan and defrauded?  
Is thy land peeled, thy realm marauded?  
Who thee divorced, deceived, and left;  
Thee of thy faith who hath bereft,  
And torn the ensigns from thy brow,  
And sunk the immortal eye so low?  
Thy cheek too white, thy form too slender,  
Thy gait too slow, thy habits tender,  
For royal man; they thee confess  
An exile from the wilderness,  
The hills where health with health agrees,  
And the wise soul expels disease.  
Hark! in thy ear I will tell the sign  
By which thy hurt thou mayst divine.  
When thou shalt climb the mountain cliff,  
Or see the wide shore from thy skiff,  
To thee the horizon shall express  
Only emptiness and emptiness;  
There is no man of nature's worth  
In the circle of the earth,  
And to thine eye the vast skies fall  
Dire and satirical  
On clucking hens, and prating fools,  
On thieves, on drudges, and on dolls.  
And thou shalt say to the Most High,



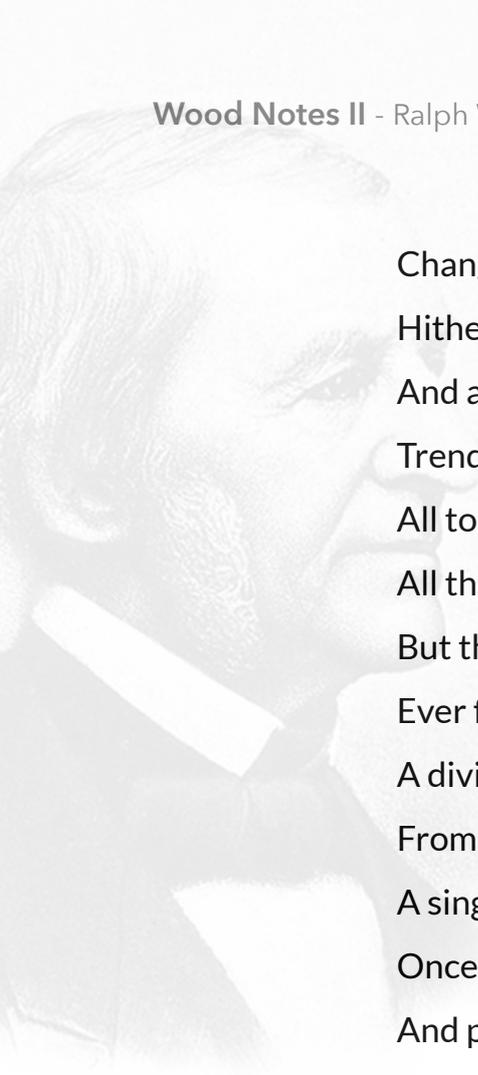
'Godhead! all this astronomy,  
And Fate, and practice, and invention,  
Strong art, and beautiful pretension,  
This radiant pomp of sun and star,  
Throes that were, and worlds that are,  
Behold! were in vain and in vain;  
It cannot be, I will look again,  
Surely now will the curtain rise,  
And earth's fit tenant me surprise;  
But the curtain doth not rise,  
And nature has miscarried wholly  
Into failure, into folly.'

Alas! thine is the bankruptcy,  
Blessed nature so to see.  
Come lay thee in my soothing shade,  
And heal the hurts which sin has made.  
I will teach the bright parable  
Older than time,  
Things undeclarable,  
Visions sublime.  
I see thee in the crowd alone;  
I will be thy companion.  
Let thy friends be as the dead in doom,  
And build to them a final tomb;  
Let the starred shade which mighty falls  
Still celebrate their funerals,  
And the bell of beetle and of bee

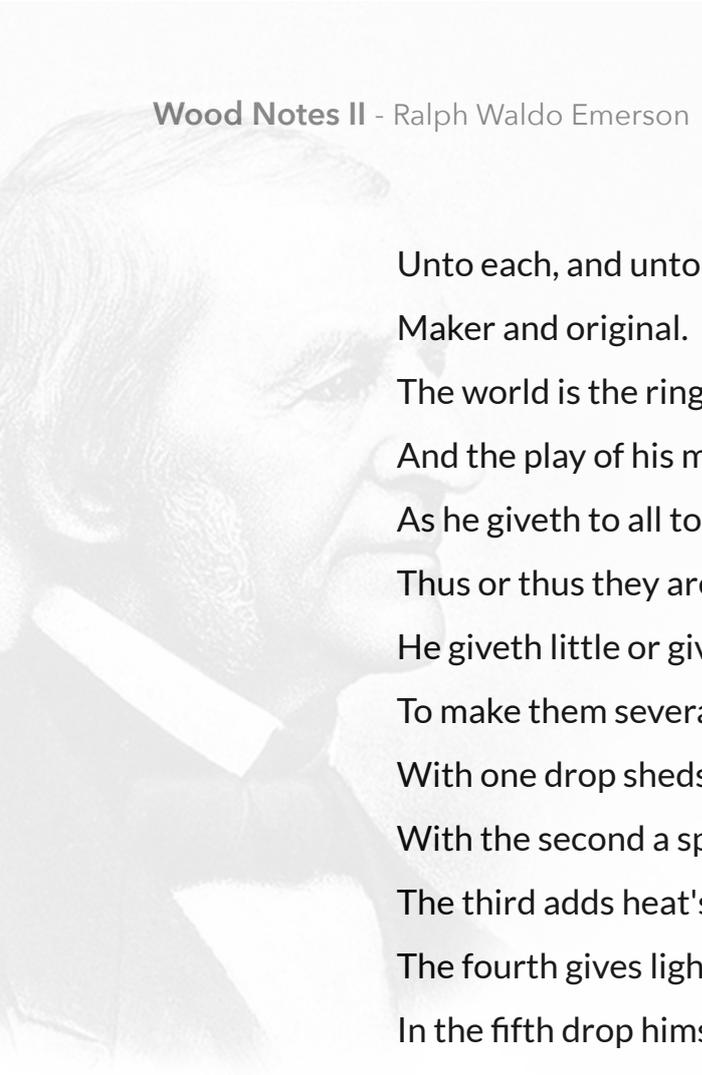


Knell their melodious memory.  
Behind thee leave thy merchandise,  
Thy churches, and thy charities,  
And leave thy peacock wit behind;  
Enough for thee the primal mind  
That flows in streams, that breathes in wind.  
Leave all thy pedant lore apart;  
God hid the whole world in thy heart.  
Love shuns the sage, the child it crowns,  
And gives them all who all renounce.  
The rain comes when the wind calls,  
The river knows the way to the sea,  
Without a pilot it runs and falls,  
Blessing all lands with its charity.  
The sea tosses and foams to find  
Its way up to the cloud and wind,  
The shadow sits close to the flying ball,  
The date fails not on the palm tree tall,  
And thou, go burn thy wormy pages,  
Shalt outsee the seer, outwig the sages.  
Oft didst thou thread the woods in vain  
To find what bird had piped the strain,  
Seek not, and the little eremite  
Flies gayly forth and sings in sight.

Hearken! once more;  
I will tell the mundane lore.  
Older am I than thy numbers wot,

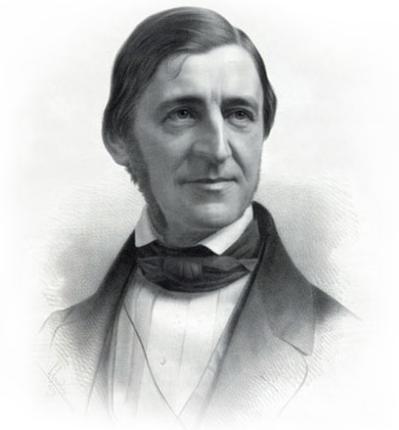


Change I may, but I pass not;  
Hitherto all things fast abide,  
And anchored in the tempest ride.  
Trendrant time behooves to hurry  
All to yeon and all to bury;  
All the forms are fugitive,  
But the substances survive.  
Ever fresh the broad creation,  
A divine improvisation,  
From the heart of God proceeds,  
A single will, a million deeds.  
Once slept the world an egg of stone,  
And pulse, and sound, and light was none;  
And God said, Throb; and there was motion,  
And the vast mass became vast ocean.  
Onward and on, the eternal Pan  
Who layeth the world's incessant plan,  
Halteth never in one shape,  
But forever doth escape,  
Like wave or flame, into new forms  
Of gem, and air, of plants and worms.  
I, that to-day am a pine,  
Yesterday was a bundle of grass.  
He is free and libertine,  
Pouring of his power the wine  
To every age, to every race,  
Unto every race and age  
He emptieth the beverage;



Unto each, and unto all,  
Maker and original.  
The world is the ring of his spells,  
And the play of his miracles.  
As he giveth to all to drink,  
Thus or thus they are and think.  
He giveth little or giveth much,  
To make them several or such.  
With one drop sheds form and feature,  
With the second a special nature,  
The third adds heat's indulgent spark,  
The fourth gives light which eats the dark.  
In the fifth drop himself he flings,  
And conscious Law is King of Kings.  
Pleaseth him the Eternal Child  
To play his sweet will, glad and wild;  
As the bee through the garden ranges,  
From world to world the godhead changes;  
As the sheep go feeding through the waste,  
From form to form he maketh haste.  
This vault which glows immense with light  
Is the inn where he lodges for a night.  
What reck's such Traveller if the bowers  
Which bloom and fade like summer flowers,  
A bunch of fragrant lilies be,  
Or the stars of eternity?  
Alike to him the better, the worse,  
The glowing angel, the outcast corse.

Thou metest him by centuries,  
And lo! he passes like the breeze;  
Thou seek'st in globe and galaxy,  
He hides in pure transparency;  
Thou askest in fountains and in fires,  
He is the essence that inquires.  
He is the axis of the star;  
He is the sparkle of the spar;  
He is the heart of every creature;  
He is the meaning of each feature;  
And his mind is the sky  
Than all it holds more deep, more high."



Ralph Waldo Emerson  
(1803-1882)