

GNOTHI SEAUTON (Know Thyself)

1831

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Boston-born Emerson (1803-1882) was the leader of the Transcendentalist movement in the United States during the early- to mid-nineteenth century, and through his essays, poetry, and philosophical writings, exerted considerable influence on the New Thought and allied movements. Inspired by the saying "Know Thyself" above the portal of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, he poetically describes the astounding reality of what will be discovered by following this ancient axiom, so central to the Rosicrucian Tradition.

I

If thou canst bear
Strong meat of simple truth
If thou durst my words compare
With what thou thinkest in my soul's
 free youth,
Then take this fact unto thy soul,—
God dwells in thee.
It is no metaphor nor parable,
It is unknown to thousands, and to thee;
Yet there is God.

II

He is in thy world,
But thy world knows him not.
He is the mighty Heart
From which life's varied pulses part.
Clouded and shrouded there doth sit
The Infinite
Embosomed in a man;
And thou art stranger to thy guest
And know'st not what thou doth invest.



Ralph Waldo Emerson at fifty-one.

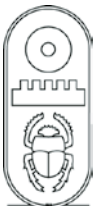
III

The clouds that veil his life within
Are thy thick woven webs of sin,
Which his glory struggling through
Darkens to thine evil hue.

Then bear thyself, O man!
Up to the scale and compass of thy guest;
Soul of thy soul.
Be great as doth beseem
The ambassador who bears
The royal presence where he goes.

IV

Give up to thy soul—
Let it have its way—
It is, I tell thee, God himself,
The selfsame One that rules the Whole,
Tho' he speaks thro' thee with a stifled
 voice,
And looks through thee, shorn of his beams.
But if thou listen to his voice,
If thou obey the royal thought,
It will grow clearer to thine ear,
More glorious to thine eye.
The clouds will burst that veil him now
And thou shalt see the Lord.



γνώθι σεαυτόν
Know Thyself

V

Therefore be great,
 Not proud,----too great to be proud.
 Let not thine eyes rove,
 Peep not in corners; let thine eyes
 Look straight before thee, as befits
 The simplicity of Power.
 And in thy closet carry state;
 Filled with light, walk therein;
 And, as a king
 Would do no treason to his own empire,
 So do not thou to thine.

VI

This is the reason why thou dost recognize
 Things now first revealed,
 Because in thee resides
 The Spirit that lives in all;
 And thou canst learn the laws of nature
 Because its author is latent in thy breast.

VII

Therefore, O happy youth,
 Happy if thou dost know and love this
 truth,
 Thou art unto thyself a law,
 And since the soul of things is in thee,
 Thou needest nothing out of thee.
 The law, the gospel, and the Providence,
 Heaven, Hell, the Judgement, and the
 stores
 Immeasurable of Truth and Good,
 All these thou must find
 Within thy single mind,
 Or never find.

VIII

Thou art the law;
 The gospel has no revelation
 Of peace and hope until there is
 response
 From the deep chambers of thy mind
 thereto,—
 The rest is straw.
 It can reveal no truth unknown before.
 The Providence
 Thou art thyself that doth dispense
 Wealth to thy work, want to thy sloth,
 Glory to goodness, to neglect, the
 moth.
 Thou sow'st the wind, the whirlwind
 reapest,
 Thou payest the wages
 Of thy own work, through all ages.
 The almighty energy within
 Crowneth virtue, curseth sin.
 Virtue sees by its own light;
 Stumbleth sin in self-made night.



Ruins of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Photo from the Rosicrucian Archives.

IX

Who approves thee doing right?
 God in thee.
 Who condemns thee doing wrong?
 God in thee.
 Who punishes thine evil deed?
 God in thee.
 What is thine evil meed?
 Thy worse mind, with error blind
 And more prone to evil
 That is, the greater hiding of the God
 within:
 The loss of peace
 The terrible displeasure of this inmate
 And next the consequence
 More faintly as more distant wro't
 Upon our outward fortunes
 Which decay with vice
 With Virtue rise.

X

The selfsame God
 By the same law
 Makes the souls of angels glad
 And the souls of devils sad
 See
 There is nothing else but God
 Where e'er I look
 All things hasten back to him
 Light is but his shadow dim.

XI

Shall I ask wealth or power of God,
 who gave
 An image of himself to be my soul?
 As well might swilling ocean ask a
 wave,
 Or the starred firmament a dying
 coal,—
 For that which is in me lives in the
 whole.

