

# from Nature

Ralph Waldo Emerson

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber<sup>1</sup> as from society. I am not solitary while I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and vulgar things. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime.<sup>2</sup> Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are!

If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown!

But every night come out these envoys<sup>3</sup> of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile. ❶

The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are always inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man extort all her secrets, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected all the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the

1. **chamber** *n.*: room.

2. **sublime** *adj.* used as *n.*: something that inspires awe. Here, Emerson refers to the divine.

3. **envoys** *n. pl.*: messengers.

mind. We mean the integrity of impression made by manifold<sup>4</sup> natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the woodcutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably<sup>5</sup> made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet.

This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty deeds<sup>6</sup> give no title. ❷

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. ❸ Nature says—he is my creature, and

4. **manifold** *adj.*: many and varied.

5. **indubitably** *adv.*: without a doubt.

6. **warranty deeds** *n. pl.*: legal documents showing ownership of property.

## Vocabulary

**admonishing** (ad·män'ish·in) *v.* used as *adj.*: gently warning.

**integrate** (in'tə·grāt') *v.*: unify.

❶ According to this first paragraph, how would people respond if the stars came out only one night every thousand years?

❷ What can the poet's eye do when he or she looks at nature?

❸ How does Emerson define the "lover of nature"?