

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Emerson was a leader of the transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century in America. He wrote about the many ways in which we encounter the divine in everyday experiences, especially when we see beauty in the natural world.

His two essays on beauty can be found in *Nature* and *The Conduct of Life*.

“The question of beauty takes us out of surfaces, to thinking of the foundation of things.”

“The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself.”

“Truth, and goodness, and beauty, are but different faces of the same All.”

“But beauty in nature is not ultimate. It is the herald of inward and eternal beauty.”

“[Beauty] is properly not in the form, but in the mind.”

“There is no object so foul that intense light will not make beautiful.”

“A man leading a horse to water, a farmer sowing seed . . . is becoming to the wise eye.”

“Chaff and dust begin to sparkle, and are clothed about with immortality.”

“Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue.”

“Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe. God is the all-fair.”

Discussion Questions

1. When is the last time you experienced beauty?
2. Is beauty a property of things or does it reside “in the eye of the beholder?”
3. What are some ways we can bring more beauty into our daily lives?