



*Long Island Farmer Husking Corn* (1833–1834) by William Sidney Mount. Oil on canvas mounted on panel (20 $\frac{7}{8}$ "  $\times$  16 $\frac{7}{8}$ ").

The Long Island Museum of American Art, History and Carriages. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ward Melville, 1975.

## from **Self-Reliance**

### Ralph Waldo Emerson

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. Not for nothing one face, one character, one fact makes much impression on him, and another

none. This sculpture in the memory is not without preestablished harmony. ❶ The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray. We but half express ourselves, and are

❶ Emerson believes that each person has unique talents and passions that can be discovered only on one's own.  
? What does he mean by "this sculpture in the memory"?

#### Vocabulary

**conviction** (kən·vik'shən) *n.*: fixed or strong belief.

ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents. It may be safely trusted as proportionate<sup>1</sup> and of good issues, so it be faithfully imparted, but God will not have his work made manifest by cowards. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best; but what he has said or done otherwise, shall give him no peace. It is a deliverance which does not deliver. In the attempt his genius deserts him; no muse befriends; no invention, no hope. <sup>2</sup>

**2**  
? According to Emerson, when is a person relieved and happy?

Trust thyself: Every heart vibrates to that iron string.

Accept the place the divine Providence has found for you; the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so and confided themselves child-like to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating<sup>2</sup> in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark. . . . <sup>3</sup>

**3**  
? Who or what should every person trust?

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.<sup>3</sup> It loves not realities

1. **proportionate** *adj.*: having a correct relationship between parts; balanced.
2. **predominating** *v.* used as *adj.*: having influence or power.
3. **aversion** *n.*: object of intense dislike or opposition.

and creators, but names and customs. <sup>4</sup>

Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist. He who would gather immortal palms<sup>4</sup> must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve<sup>5</sup> you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. . . . <sup>5</sup>

**4**  
? What is the opposite, or "aversion," of self-reliance?

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today—"Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood"—Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton,<sup>6</sup> and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. . . . <sup>6</sup> ■

**5**  
? According to Emerson, what must a person be?

**6**  
? What does Emerson say about "foolish consistency"?

4. **he who . . . immortal palms**: he who would win fame. In ancient times, palm leaves were carried as a symbol of victory or triumph.
5. **absolve** *v.*: pronounce free from guilt or blame.
6. **Pythagoras . . . Newton**: people whose contributions to scientific, philosophical, and religious thought were ignored or suppressed during their lifetimes.

#### Vocabulary

**imparted** (im·pärt'id) *v.*: revealed.  
**manifest** (man'ə·fəst) *adj.*: plain; clear.  
**transcendent** (tran·sen'dənt) *adj.*: excelling; surpassing.  
**integrity** (in·teg'rə·tē) *n.*: sound moral principles; honesty.