

### **Emerson Original:**

The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature. A boy is in the parlor what the pit is in the playhouse; independent, irresponsible, looking out from his corner on such people and facts as pass by, he tries and sentences them on their merits, in the swift, summary way of boys, as good, bad, interesting, silly, eloquent, troublesome. He cumpers himself never about consequences, about interests; he gives an independent, genuine verdict. You must court him: he does not court you. But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this. Ah, that he could pass again into his neutrality! Who can thus avoid all pledges, and having observed, observe again from the same unaffected, unbiased, unbribable, unaffrighted innocence, must always be formidable. . . .

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 everyone 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. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs. (21)

### **Paraphrase:**

People ought to behave like boys who simply expect their dinner and would never beg for it. A boy in the living room is like the rowdy people who occupy the pit area of a theater. He is independent and does not feel responsibility toward other peoples' opinions. He sits in the corner, like people in the theater pit watching a play, and simply and easily judges what he sees, deciding whether something is good, bad, foolish, etc. He doesn't worry about what others think or about what he **should** say. He states his own true and independent opinions. If you want to speak with him, you must take the initiative, because he's not trying to impress you or anyone else.

But people, when they grow up, become prisoners of their self-consciousness. As soon as an adult says or does something original that other people admire, he becomes tied to that admiration. Now he has to worry what hundreds of other people think about him since he wants them to continue to like him. An adult cannot simply forget his past behavior. Wouldn't it be nice if he could go back to the time before he had to try to please others? A person who could escape these worries and still behave and speak bravely and impartially would be strong and powerful.

When we're alone, we tend to think like this—truly, forcefully, and without consideration for other peoples' good opinion. But we begin to forget this way of thinking when we spend time around other people. Society itself makes people less forceful and

honest. It's as if we're all shareholders in a company. To make sure everyone gets a small benefit, we've agreed to give up our individual freedom—our personal opinions and feelings-- and accept the corporate culture instead. The company's highest moral value is conformity. It hates people who rely on their own ideas. It values labels over reality and traditions over creativity.