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Reporters Preface

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REPORTER'S PREFACE

The announcement made to your correspondent this morning, that Ralph Waldo Emerson would lecture to the law students of Howard University, was received with great incredulity. Could it be the Emerson, the sweet-hearted philosopher and poet? But the bare possibility of seeing and hearing the Sage of Concord speaking to an audience of colored students was a bait too strong to be resisted. So, conquering all incredulity, I went to the lecture-hall. An audience of 150 people, composed of professors, teachers, and law students, and a number of young lady students from the academical department, filled the body of the room. Nearly all the faces were dark as night, with here and there a pale contrast or a compromise between the two extremes. On a slightly raised platform, in an arm-chair, sat Ralph Waldo Emerson. There was no mistaking that calm, serene, and thoughtful face. It seemed more than usually full of interest. Perhaps never before had the sage addressed such an audience. I soon learned that it was not a lecture we were to hear, but a simple, informal talk, fresh and new-born.

Mr. Emerson was introduced by Professor John M. Langston. Without rising from his chair, and without note or manuscript, he began his talk. He seemed a little embarrassed at first for want of a text, but soon found one on which he could talk from now till doomsday—Books. He has a horror of extempore speaking, and never speaks in public without preparation, when he can avoid it. He has a further horror of reporters, who seize and slaughter his fresh utterances. On this account, I suppose, no public notice was given except to students and teachers, and all unnecessary formality was dispensed with. He spoke with deliberation, with now and then a pause in his delivery, and his face lighted with a radiant smile as kindly and benignant as his speech. Mr. Alvard hit the nail when he said, afterward, that it was a pleasure to sit and see him think.