

The Minute Man

An Aphorism of the True American Spirit

by

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He shows presence! It is a statue by Daniel Chester French at the Minute Man Park in Concord, Massachusetts, a small town west of Boston. It represents the self-confident American settler who resisted the repressive colonial domination of England. In Concord the first shot was fired to free America from the English yoke, a shot, as it is written in stone there: 'that was heard around the world'.

In fact the results were the wars for freedom and independence leading especially to the French Revolution but also the European independence wars—the revolution of 1848 and the development of democracy well into the twentieth century. The first shot fired at that time in small Concord was the starting shot, so to speak, or a kindling flame, in to an explosive new level of consciousness.

The statue by French is of a young man standing erect, well balanced.¹ He makes one step forward and his weight is on his left leg. The right one has not completed a step yet but is in the process of it. The left hand is resting lightly on a plow—more touching than resting. He is carrying in his right hand a rifle pointing somewhat upwards to show his capability of defending himself.

The figure is lean and youthful, nothing oppressive about him. Plow and rifle are two symbols of his activity. He is standing on the side of the plow and in spite of his steadfastness, it shows lightness in the way he treats the earth with his plow. There is no weight or burden as today our western civilization burdens the earth! The right side of the man—in the process of walking—is the stronger side, here shown in the moment of armed fitness, from which slowly emerges the effect that he is ready to fight if he has to. There is nothing aggressive in the posture only preparedness! He looks straight ahead, with an open face and clear eyes, expectant and cautious. His eyes look neither up nor down but straight ahead. The whole posture shows presence.

The settlers in those earlier days were not only busy as farmers and artisans but also defenders of their land and their rights. The rifle was always nearby, and in a minute they could be defending warriors. The abilities to make a quick change

and a clear assessment of the situation were necessary. This is a true expression of ‘presence of mind!’

It is no accident that the first shot was fired in Concord: as small as the place may be by today’s standards, even a town perhaps, as important were the spiritual deeds of its citizens. Here lived early on what was given form later on in the Declaration of Independence Here was the birthplace of the ‘school of philosophy’ whose members brought forward the most important representatives of the American spiritual life (e.g., the Alcotts, Emerson, Thoreau, etc.). Until the late nineteenth century, the ‘American spirit’ was cultivated here.

Interestingly, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s most important work *The Natural History of the Spirit* lost for the last 130 years, was found very recently in the Harvard Library, many hundreds of pages, tightly written, which had to be painstakingly deciphered. What may be the meaning of it—that one of the most important works of American spiritual history was lost for so long and in these 100 years (since the Spanish-American War) the United States has tried consequential politics and reached a status of imperial power not seen since the old Rome.

What may it mean that at the basest point of these politics, Emerson’s writings were newly found? It seems that within total darkness, about which everybody has complained, someone lit a light and the darkness will have to vanish.

Emerson lit this light after 130 years of silence and gives those lost in darkness, the opportunity to find a new way. His spirituality, honesty and straightforwardness toward a modern Christian spiritual life—all typically American characteristics—could be a saving grace for the United States and show a way into the future. The young, over-bubbling strength of this nation needs the curbing spirituality and depths of this master. (Emerson had a deep spiritual bond with Goethe, who did this deed for middle Europe!)

The American will find his equilibrium in his soul as represented in the Minute Man. The spirit of freedom that is obvious to everyone who has visited America, and that in its depths is like love, will reemerge in the future through presence of mind.

1. The sculptor Daniel French also carved the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.