

# THOREAU: THE HERMIT OF WALDEN.

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—BY—

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Among the strongest artistic minds,—in a sense of course,—which a century of progress and activity has produced in American civilization and morals, may be named that brilliant one of Henry David Thoreau, who is known to some of you as the Hermit of Walden,—known to the world at large, as the poet-naturalist of the Western hemisphere. He was a philosopher of wide observation, a thinker of great force—second only to Emerson in the range and scope of his powers—and a faithful student of Natural History, in all its branches. He loved nature passionately. He spent months and years under the trees and among flowers and plants, watching the wondrous development of tree and flower and plant life. He passed the sweetest days of his existence in learning the habits and ways of the animals which built their homes about the nooks and corners of Walden pond, and the Walden woods. He gave the most precious hours of his own life to the birds of the air, to the fish of the waters at his feet, and he communed with all the lovely things of nature, animate and inanimate, and made companions of every dead and living thing which met his observing eye or felt the caressing

stroke of his kindly hand. There was no pretence about Henry Thoreau, no false pride, no sham or glittering tinsel. He was a man of thought, a devout lover of the beautiful, the true and the good, and his mind always seemed the amplest and completest, when he stole away to the solitudes of the forest and the glade, and thought out those exquisite fancies and views and creations which the reading and thinking world, may find at any time, in the half dozen witching books, which attest his genius, and show his aims. He was a true artist, though he painted no pictures on canvas, a tender poet, though the few specimens of his muse which we have, reveal no divine afflatus,—as we understand it,—and have not even the merit of Kirke White's collection of verse, which need hardly be dignified by the name of poetry. He wrote poetical pieces, after a fashion, but they are not good poetry. They lack all the grand elements of song, all the passion and fire, the lyric faculty, the stateliness, and that indescribable touch which ever distinguish the better efforts of the true poet. He was a more effective singer out of poetry than in it. Much of his prose writing however is warmly poetic, and the chiefest charm about his literary work is that a good deal of it is epigrammatic, dainty in fancy and free flowing in diction. Thoreau thought out whole poems often, but none of his finest things in that way ever reached the world through any other channel than that of prose composition, the avenue through which he met his public when at his best. His style of writing was natural and easy, and he had a nice choice of phrase always at command. He had the art of graceful expression, without appearing to write artistically merely for art's sake. The style, clear and ornate, seemed to belong to him, to be a direct inspiration, just as many of his sublimer thoughts were inspirations. He wrote fearlessly and independently,

and constantly demanded the utmost freedom and room for the employment of the workings of his mind. "I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion," he said once, and the words tell truly the character and spirit of the man. He never trimmed his opinions to suit a passing wind. He formed his views, felt sure that they were right ones,—and they generally were right from a high moral point,—and then he went on expounding them, expressing them boldly, and maintaining them ever afterwards, even to the very hour of his death. Men admired his sterling honesty, praised his love of principle, and felt that the hermit, whatever faults he might possess, could never do a mean or dishonourable thing. They used to say that people *loved* Thoreau but did not *like* him. "Why," said one of his best friends, a good many years ago, "I would as soon take the arm of an elm tree, as the hermit's. I love him but cannot like him." This idea was held by nearly all of Thoreau's acquaintances, and its truthfulness cannot be disputed or set aside. His nature was certainly not a lovable one, though somehow the children often ran to him in the streets, and watched for his coming and going. For them he had a kindly nod and a smile, and he used, sometimes, to pay them little compliments in the soft way which children of almost any age like and appreciate. With them he would go for a romp in the woods, nutting and berrying, and usually he was the maddest of the rompers. Emerson regretted that he had no ambition, and said that for the want of it, he was the captain of a huckleberry party, when he might have been engineering for all America. The sage hoped better things of Thoreau, and mourned to see so much talent buried in a napkin. But to-day none of us think that Thoreau's talents are so very deeply buried in the earth, after all. For twenty years the possessor of those

talents has lain in the ground, but we are reading his books still, and finding new beauties in them almost every day. "Pounding beans," continues Emerson in his quaint way, "is good to the end of pounding empires one of these days; but if, at the end of years, it is still only beans!" How many, think you, believe in this year of grace, that Thoreau's bean-pounding,—we still employ the metaphor,—had nothing in it, and meant only a little vigorous pestle and mortar work? Our author was a good deal like Carlyle in many ways. He commanded the respect and admiration of his fellows. He was deep, philosophic and calm, and only a few found the way to his heart. He did not have many friends. He formed few companionships. How could it be otherwise? He held himself aloof from mankind and observed vigorous rules of his own, with regard to what associations he thought he ought to make. Towards Emerson he always felt the sincerest respect, and ranked him first among the very moderate number of true friends that he possessed. Mr. Bronson Alcott was another neighbour for whom he had a good deal of admiration. The mystic's talk was always so sweet and sympathetic that Thoreau was quite captivated, and he and Alcott remained on the best of terms, almost from their first meeting to the close of the younger man's career. He had some others on his slender list, kindred souls we may call them, but he cared little for attracting people towards himself, or for keeping up a large circle of friends. He much preferred the silent companionship and love of the animals, the birds and the fishes. Burns, ploughing in the fields of Ayr, turned up a mouse with his plough. His first impulse was to kill it, but he checked himself in time, as his eye watched the little creature, and he said softly, "I'll make that mouse immortal." So Thoreau, in his way, has made the animals which fed from his hand by Walden pond, immortal in

the literature of New England. The fish swam to him at a sign, allowed him to take them from the water, and often they lay in his palm as if asleep. Snakes coiled about his legs and caressed his arms, all the while showing evidence of their affection and good-will. The woodchucks permitted him to pull them out of their holes by the tail, and the frightened fox frequently sought his help, when closely pressed by the huntsmen. Fuller used to say of Butler, who knew more about bees than any living man before his day or since, that "either he had told the bees things or the bees had told him." Of Thoreau, the same may be said. He was on confidential terms with the whole animal kingdom. Dr. A. H. Japp, better known by his literary pseudonyme of "Henry A. Page," wrote a book a few years ago, to prove that Thoreau was a sort of nineteenth century St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis, you know, was regarded as the great enigma of the Middle Ages. He had a sympathetic side for all animals. He was a friend to everything which crept, flew and occupied a place in animal life. He charmed the dumb beasts and brutes, won the affections of the birds and fowls of the air, and the fish glided softly into his hand, with all the confidence of innocence and the consciousness of perfect safety. In this especial art of attracting animals of various degrees, a resemblance between the glorious old father and Thoreau, may, perhaps, be traced with sufficient exactness, but the parallel ends there, one would think. And is it not too much to say, as Dr. Japp advances, that Thoreau's "life, spent for the most part amid the bustle and fervour of American city strife," may be found "to illuminate," in some degree, "one of the puzzles of the Middle Ages?" The book, which strives to impress this view is ingenious, but the argument is weak, and the reasoning is scarcely tenable. Thoreau was a great authority on all marvels

connected with the vegetable kingdom, its wondrous growth and development, its form and architecture. He knew so much about plants that he could tell at a glance how long such and such a specimen had been in bloom, and the precise date on which the others near at hand would yield their flowers. He kept a diary, and in it he carefully jotted down certain data regarding the various plants round about, and often he used to read from its pages, the names of those that would blossom on such and such a day. He had so much confidence in his knowledge of this department of culture, that he thought that if he should at any time, awake suddenly from a trance, in the swamp he knew so well, he could tell by the plants what time of the year it was, within at least two days. He knew, perfectly, all the notes which the birds uttered, and his memory was so good, and served him so faithfully, that as rapidly as the twitterings were made, over his head in the trees, or near his feet on the grass, or on the rocks close at hand, he named the author of the sound without the slightest hesitation, and his verdict was never wrong. His acquaintance with bird-life, in all its forms, was phenomenal, and his patience and perseverance never failed him. None of his rare scholarship in the art he pursued so sympathetically and with such tireless devotion, was gained without constant exercise of those virtues. He would sit perfectly immovable for hours, on a rock, waiting for the reptile, the fish and the bird to come back and resume the habits, which had been interrupted by his dropping in among them. He never went for a stroll without his old music-book under his arm to press plants in. He always carried his diary and pencil, his spy-glass for birds, his jack-knife, ball of twine, and microscope. His outfit comprised, usually, a straw hat, a pair of stout shoes, a pair of strong grey trousers, a thick shirt, and a coarse coat. "If you

have any enterprise before you," he used to say, "try it in your old clothes. Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles. Our moulting season like that of fowls, must be a crisis in our lives. The loon retires to solitary ponds to spend it. Thus also the snake casts its slough, and the caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outmost cuticle and mortal coil. It is desirable that a man be clad so simply that he can lay his hands on himself in the dark, and that he can live in all respects so compactly and preparedly, that, if an enemy take the town, he can, like the old philosopher, walk out the gate empty-handed, without anxiety." In many ways Thoreau was a remarkable man, some might call him eccentric, but he was more than that. He took no degree at college, and was bred to no profession. He lived mostly alone, never married, never went to church, never voted, ate no flesh, drank no wine, and scorned the use of tobacco. He was abstemious to a fault, eschewed the use of a gun and never used a trap in his life. He was an idealist, like Emerson, though he went further than that philosopher in most things. He refused to pay a tax to the State, and because of that refusal, suffered the indignity of imprisonment. He cared nothing for money, loved hard work, and abhorred idleness,—that is aimless idleness. His own mode of living appeared to many as a sort of dreamy idleness,—purposeless idleness. But Thoreau's idleness has done the world much good. By means of it he was able to open many of the hidden storehouses of knowledge, and through it again, he has added materially to our stock of information, in certain directions, which could be gained only as he learned it, by patient and stu-

dious personal investigation. He was often aggressive, self-assertive and always had unbounded faith in his own opinions and method of getting on. He depended solely upon himself. He had few wants to supply, and his habits were thrifty and hardy. When he needed a little money he knew how to earn it, and he was not ashamed to work. He built boats, planted, grafted, made fences, surveyed,—he was an excellent surveyor,—and did anything in fact that was required of him. Everything he did was done well. He always worked with energy and zeal, and the leisure for himself which he secured, was well earned and deserved. When his immediate needs were satisfied, and he thought he had enough to meet his present and future wants for a while, he would go back to his old life, watching the unfolding works of nature, and making studies of what he saw and felt. He was not a self-indulgent man, but he had his whims, and these sometimes led him into difficulties and curious straits. Perhaps, no better or more skilful land-surveyor ever lived in America than Henry Thoreau. He had more surveying than he could do, and there was employment for him whenever he chose to undertake it. He was in constant demand, but he suited his own convenience, and worked only when he wished to. He possessed rare mathematical knowledge, and Emerson tells us that “his habit of ascertaining the measures and distances of objects which interested him, the size of trees, the depth and extent of ponds and rivers, the height of mountains, and the air line distance of his favourite summits,—this, and his intimate knowledge of the territory about Concord, made him drift into the profession,” at last.

So much may be said of Thoreau in a general way. There are details in his life which are very interesting and useful. He came of an ancient French family, and his father who was a manufacturer of lead-pencils, emigrated



to America from the Isle of Guernsey, early in the present century. The subject of this paper was born in Concord, Mass., on the 12th July 1817. He went to Harvard and graduated there in 1837, but without taking a degree or earning any especial distinction. After this, in company with his brother, he engaged in teaching a small private school. He soon gave up this employment, however, and entered his father's establishment, and applied himself diligently for a while, to the art of making lead-pencils. He believed in his own mind that he could make a better pencil than was then in use, and he actually performed that feat. He took his work to Boston, showed it to the chemists there, obtained their certificates to the value and excellence and quality of his pencils, and then returned home, not to make more of them, as we might suppose, but to renounce the craft altogether. His friends rallied around him, and told him how fortunate he was, and what a fine prospect in the way of money-getting, lay before him. But Henry astonished them all by saying that he should never make another pencil as long as he lived. "Why should I," said he, "I would not do again what I have done once." So it was, and he left the factory, and went on with his studies which were of a miscellaneous sort, and took his long walks in the silent woods. He loved solitude for its own sake, and when he wanted a companion, he preferred an Indian. He was often invited out, and dinner-party invitations were frequently sent to him, but he declined such favours regularly and promptly. He would not go to dinners because there each was in every one's way, and he could not meet the individuals present to any purpose. "They make their pride," he said, "in making their dinner cost much; I make my pride in making my dinner cost little." Once or twice he did accept an invitation to dine, and when asked at table what dish he preferred, he

answered "the nearest." Of course such a man was better alone, or with his good Indian, roaming the forest, and communing with nature in her varied and seductive haunts. He never used tobacco, as has been said, but in his youth he sometimes smoked dried lily-stems,—this in his æsthetic days, and long before he was a man. Afterwards in speaking of those same lily-stems, he said "I have never smoked anything more noxious."

The first number of the *Dial*,—Margaret Fuller's paper, and the organ of the Transcendentalists,—was published in July, 1840. It was a quarterly, and its aims were high, and its policy independent and courageous. The initial issue contained contributions by Emerson, Miss Fuller, Ripley, C. P. Cranch, Bronson Alcott, John S. Dwight,—afterwards the editor of the *Journal of Music*,—Theodore Parker, W. H. Channing and Thoreau. The latter wrote for it the poem of "Sympathy." Among his contributions to this serial, were a number of papers about the Natural History of Massachusetts, and some translations of Pindar and of Æschylus. In the first volume there appeared three of his pieces, in the second he published two, in the third sixteen, and in the fourth five. Thoreau may be said to have made his first public appearance through the *Dial*. He was only 23 years of age when his poem of "Sympathy" came out, and as it gave token of promise, many read and praised it. His first prose production given to the public, and reprinted as the first paper of "*Excursions*," was in the third volume. The fourth volume contained his *Walk in Winter*. Emerson encouraged Thoreau to write, introduced him to literature, and on going away once for a short time, permitted him, during his absence, to edit No. 3 of the third volume of *The Dial*. Indeed, he acted as a friend and adviser to him always.

The great event in Thoreau's life occurred in 1845, when

he seceded from the world, and went to live by the shores of Walden Pond, and built himself a frame house, with his own hands. For two years he lived in solitude, devoting himself to study, the investigation of the habits of animals, natural history pursuits, and the performance of such labour as he deemed necessary. The story of that adventure is curious. He had nothing when he began it save a borrowed axe and a few dollars in his pocket. He was a squatter in every sense of the word. He settled on somebody's land, cut down a few pines, hewed timber, and bought an old shanty, for the sake of the boards, from James Collins, an Irish labourer, on the adjacent Fitchburg Railroad. For the he was paid exactly \$4.25. At the raising of his house boards he assisted by Emerson, George W. Curtis, the polite and refined "Easy Chair" of *Harper's Magazine*, and some other distinguished members of Concord society. He began building in the spring. By the opening of winter, as the result of his own labour, he had secured a tight shingled and plastered house, 10 feet wide by 15 long, and 8 feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap-doors, one door at the end, and a brick fire-place opposite. The cost of this establishment is thus set down by the builder himself, and his remarks on the same appear in the margin.

Boards.....	\$ 8 03½	Mostly shanty boards.
Refuse shingles for roof and sides....	4 00	
Laths.....	1 25	
Two second-hand windows with glass..	2 43	
One thousand old brick.....	4 00	
Two casks of lime.....	2 40	That was high.
Hair.....	0 31	More than I needed.
Mantle-tree, iron.....	0 15	
Nails.....	3 90	
Hinges and screws.....	0 14	
Latch.....	0 10	
Chalk.....	0 01	
Transportation.....	1 40	I carried a good part on my back.
In all.....	<hr/> \$28 12½	

Rather a moderate price for a house, and adds the builder, “these are all the materials, excepting the timber, stones and sand, which I claimed by squatter’s right. I have also a small wood-shed adjoining, made chiefly of the stuff which was left after building the house.”

Now let us look a little into our hermit’s family expenses, or house-keeping account, to speak more correctly. His wants were few, and he lived economically, but how many of us would be content to go and do likewise? Let us see what he did, and how he lived. He leaves this record:—

“By surveying, carpentry, and day labour of various other kinds in the village in the meanwhile, for I have as many trades as fingers, I had earned \$13.34. The expense of food for eight months, namely, from July 4 to March 1, the time when these estimates were made, though I lived there more than two years,—not counting potatoes, a little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor considering the value of what was on hand at the last date, was:—

Rice .....	\$1 73½		
Molasses .....	1 73	Cheapest form of saccharine.	
Rye meal .....	1 04½		
Indian meal .....	0 99½	Cheaper than rye.	
Pork .....	0 22		
Flour .....	0 88	Cost more than Indian meal, both money and trouble.	} All experiments which failed.
Sugar .....	0 80		
Lard .....	0 65		
Apples .....	0 25		
Dried apples .....	0 22		
Sweet potatoes .....	0 10		
One pumpkin .....	0 06		
One watermelon .....	0 02		
Salt .....	0 03		

Yes, I did eat \$8.74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were equally guilty with myself, and that

their deeds would look no better in print. The next year I sometimes caught a mess of fish for my dinner, and once I went so far as to slaughter a woodchuck which ravaged my beanfield,—effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say,—and devour him, partly for experiment's sake; but though it afforded me a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavour, I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice, however it might seem to have your woodchucks ready dressed by the village butcher.

Clothing and some incidental expenses within the same dates, though little can be inferred from this item, amounted to...	\$8 40 $\frac{3}{4}$
Oil and some household utensils.....	2 00

So that all the pecuniary outgoes, excepting for washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house, and their bills have not yet been received,—and these are all and more than all the ways by which money necessarily goes out in this part of the world,—were :—

House.....	\$28 12 $\frac{1}{2}$
Farm, one year.....	14 72 $\frac{1}{2}$
Food, eight months.....	8 74
Clothing, &c., eight months.....	8 40 $\frac{3}{4}$
Oil, &c., “ “.....	2 00
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In all.....	\$61 99 $\frac{3}{4}$

I address myself now to those of my readers who have a living to get, and to meet this I have for

Farm produce sold.....	\$23 44
Earned by day-labour.....	13 34
	<hr/>
In all.....	\$36 78

which, subtracted from the sum of the outgoes, leaves a balance of \$25.21 $\frac{3}{4}$  on the one side,—this being very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred,—and on the other, beside the leisure and independence and health thus secured, a comfortable house for me as long as I chose to occupy it.”

This life at Walden pond was very pleasant to him, and he made the most of it. Every natural fact which he discovered, and he found out very many of them, was a constant source of delight. "He was no pedant of a department," writes Emerson, "his eye was open to beauty and his ear to music. He found these, not in rare conditions, but wheresoever he went. He thought the best of music was in single strains; and he found poetic suggestion in the humming of the telegraph wire." And Alcott says of him, at about this time,—“he united the qualities of sylvan and human in a more remarkable manner than any whom it has been my happiness to know. Lover of the wild, he lived a borderer on the confines of civilization, jealous of the least encroachment upon his possessions. He came nearer the antique spirit than any of our native poets, and touched the fields and groves and streams of his native town with a classic interest that shall not fade.” And again says this equally remarkable genius, “his presence was tonic, like ice-water in dog-days to the parched citizen pent in chambers and under brazen ceilings. Welcome as the gurgle of brooks and dipping of pitchers,—then drink and be cool! There was in him sod and shade, wilds and waters manifold,—the mould and mist of earth and sky. Self-poised and sagacious as any denizen of the elements, he had the key to every animal's brain, every plant; and were an Indian to flower forth and reveal the scents hidden in his cranium, it would not be more surprising than the speech of our Sylvanus.” William Ellery Channing thus describes his personal appearance:—“in height he was about the average. In his build, spare with limbs that were rather longer than usual, or of which he made a longer use. His face once seen could not be forgotten; the features quite marked, the nose aquiline, or very Roman, like one of the portraits of Cæsar (more like a beak, as was

said), large overhanging brows above the deepest set blue eyes that could be seen,—blue in certain lights, and in others grey,—eyes expressive of all shades of feeling, but never weak or near-sighted; the forehead not unusually broad or high, full of concentrated energy and purpose; the mouth, with prominent lips, pursed up with meaning and thought when shut, and giving out when open a stream of the most varied and unusual and instructive sayings. His hair was a dark brown, exceedingly abundant, fine and soft, and for several years he wore a comely beard. His whole figure had an active earnestness as if he had not a moment to waste. The clenched hand betokened purpose. In walking he made a short cut if he could, and when sitting in the shade, or by the wall-side, seemed merely the clearer to look forward into the next piece of activity. Even in the boat he had a wary, transitory air, his eyes on the look out; perhaps there might be ducks or the Blondin turtle, or an otter, or sparrow. He was a plain man in his features and dress,—one who could not be mistaken, and this kind of plainness is not out of keeping with beauty. He sometimes went as far as homeliness, which again, even if there be a prejudice against it, shines out at times beyond a vulgar beauty.”

One quotation more, and this completes the best description which contemporaries have left of Thoreau. George William Curtis says in his graceful way, “his knowledge was original. He has a fine-ear and a sharp-eye in the woods and fields; and he added to his knowledge the wisdom of the most ancient times and of the best literature.” Almost all the critics give our author credit for great originality of mind. It was his misfortune as well as his advantage to have lived as the contemporary and intimate of Emerson. For a while he saw the greater man almost every day, and soon he learned to think like him, to pursue

the same way of thought, and to hold similar tenets with him on many of the problems which occupied men's minds, especially between the years 1840 and 1860. I think, he imbibed many of the better thoughts of Emerson, unconsciously, though there have been writers who have had grave doubts on the subject, and have not hesitated to denounce Thoreau as a plagiarist. His own writings were undoubtedly coloured by his contact with the completer mind, and he never could quite rid them of the deep tinge which so many declared to be the Emerson influence and the result of the Emerson cult. *Apropos* of this, a story is related in a famous literary circle in Boston. It is told at the expense of Thoreau's mother, who, it is said, remarked once to a neighbour, that Mr. Emerson wrote marvelously like her son. Lowell, who is as skilful a critic as Whipple, as well as a most delightful poet, and whose opinions on books and authorship are worthy of the highest praise, does not give Thoreau the place his admirers would like to see assigned him. In his "Fable for Critics," Mr. Lowell speaks thus freely :—

“ There comes —, for instance ; to see him's rare sport,  
Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short ;  
How he jumps, how he strains, and gets red in the face,  
To keep step with the mystagogue's natural pace !  
He follows as close as a stick to a rocket,  
His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket.  
Fie, for shame, brother bard ; with good fruit of your own,  
Can't you let neighbour Emerson's orchards alone ?”

This is severe, but Lowell either failed to appreciate Thoreau or he felt a contempt for his talents. He once wrote an essay about him,—it may be read in his "My Study Windows,"—and acute critic as he is, he disappointed everybody in the estimate which he produced. It was inappreciative, unsympathetic and cold. Emerson himself had great respect always for Thoreau. He thought him a grand soul and a superior genius. In an unpublished letter



to a friend, he once wrote, "I read his books and manuscripts always with new surprise at the range of his topics and the novelty of his thought. A man of large reading, of quick perception, of great practical courage and ability, who grew greater every day, and, had his short life been prolonged, would have found but few equals to the power and wealth of his mind."

Thoreau quitted his hut in two years' time. He exhausted its special advantages, and having no further use for it, he abandoned it to its fate. By living there in the manner he did he proved certain things, made certain discoveries, and studied certain subjects. These aims accomplished, he turned his back on the hermitage and went home to civilization and taxes. He went there in the first place because he was ready to go. He left for the same reason. The little odd house can no longer be seen. It has disappeared entirely and the site is now occupied by the sumac and the pine. Of course, the locality remains historic, and the Concord people still love to escort visitors to Thoreau's old haunt and tell the quaint story of his wilderness life, at "blue-eyed Walden."

He returned to town in 1847. One day he received a tax-bill. He did not like it. He found fault with the way in which the public funds were being administered and expended, and he told the tax-gatherer that he could not conscientiously pay a tax which was obnoxious to him. He was promptly arrested and lodged in jail. A friend came forward, the next day, and paid the tax, and Thoreau was released. The friendly act gave him annoyance however, and he did not scruple to say so, but there was no help for it. The tax was paid, and the delinquent walked out of prison, a free man. He had spent one night in jail, and his impressions are recorded and form some of the best reading to be found in his books. There is some-

thing quite delicious in his description of his prison experiences; something so fantastic, and withal so thoroughly like Thoreau in every respect. Note this bit for example:—

“As I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use to put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in any way. I saw that if there was a stone wall between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder, for they thought that my chief desire was to stand on the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at any person at whom they have a grudge, will abuse his dog.”

When he entered the prison, he found the prisoners in their shirt-sleeves enjoying a social chat. Salutations were exchanged between the new-comer and the “jail-birds,” and soon after this the turnkey said pleasantly, “Come, boys, it is time to lock up.” The men and half-grown lads filed off

to their cells, and Thoreau was introduced to his roommate,—“a first-rate fellow and a clever man,” as the jailor called him. He appeared to be at home in the place, and kindly pointed out to the hermit the peg upon which he might hang his hat. After a while the two became very friendly with each other, and the man told Thoreau he had been put in the “lock-up” on a charge of burning a barn, but that he was innocent of the crime. “I pumped my fellow-prisoner as dry as I could,” says our author, “for fear I should never see him again, but at length he showed me which was my bed, and left me to blow out the light.”

His further impressions are thus detailed :—

“It was like travelling into a far country, such as I had never expected to behold, to lie there for one night. It seemed to me that I never had heard the town clock strike before, nor the evening sounds of the village ; for we slept with the windows open, which were inside the grating. It was to see my native village in the light of the Middle Ages ; and our Concord was turned into a Rhine stream, and visions of knights and castles passed before me. They were the voices of old burghers that I heard in the streets. I was an involuntary spectator and auditor of whatever was done and said in the kitchen of the adjacent village inn,—a wholly new and rare experience to me. It was a closer view of my native town. I was fairly inside of it. I never had seen its institutions before. \* \* \* In the morning our breakfasts were put through the hole in the door, in small, oblong, square tin pans, made to fit, and holding a pint of chocolate, with brown bread, and an iron spoon. When they called for the vessels again, I was green enough to return what bread I had left ; but my comrade seized it, and said that I should lay that up for a lunch or dinner.”

In this light and airy fashion he goes on and tells the whole story of his incarceration, and explains, by the way, that there was no particular item in his tax-bill which he had refused to pay. He had never declined to pay the highway tax, because he was as desirous of excelling as a good neighbour, as he was of appearing before the authorities as a bad subject. Next year, the question came up again. Thoreau firmly declined to pay the tax, and the good offices of a friend were called into requisition. The same performance was enacted for some years after this, when finally Thoreau, who probably saw that his spirit of independence did not quite harmonize with the line of conduct he was pursuing in the matter, and fearing lest he was really becoming a burden to his friends, ceased to offer resistance to the law, and paid the tax.

If he had lived in England in Wilkes' time, he would probably have sided with that agitator in all his views. He was an extreme radical, and the uncompromising opponent of every form of government. If he had had the power he would have abolished all administrations from the face of the earth. He had as much fight in him as Wendell Phillips had in his young and lusty days, and was never so happy as when he was arrayed against strong men and stronger isms. In our time, when radicalism has become a force, and is no longer regarded as a crime, when its leaders have developed into administrators of departments in the public service, and have helped to carr on the great affairs of State in the governments of countries, Thoreau, even with unchanged opinions would not be looked upon as an attainted man. He might form no part of a government, but there are other portfolios than those belonging to cabinets, and the Walden philosopher strengthened by the possession of one of these, and speaking for and to the people, might find his views very

sensibly taking shape and volume, and influencing the progressive march of events. In his day he was an abolitionist, and sternly opposed to all tariffs, and every variety of slavery, political as well as human. The traffic in the black man, which disgraced his country, was an abomination which he could not denounce in terms of sufficient severity. He joined the Anti-slavery party, when to do so was to incur the bitter hatred of many good men. Thoreau did not care. He felt a burst of sympathy tugging at his heart, when old John Brown succumbed to the tap of authority on his shoulder. The hero was arrested, and Thoreau felt the mad, radical, rebellious, hot blood in his veins warming every pulse and fibre, and burning into his brain. He sent out notices to nearly every house in Concord, and told the people he would speak on the great question in the Public Hall on Sunday evening, and he invited all to come and hear him. Even the Abolitionist Committee trembled at his daring, and the Republican Committee felt a sinking at the heart. They put their heads together, and advised Henry Thoreau not to be too premature in the matter. It was not advisable to speak publicly of John Brown, and his character and condition. The time was not ripe, they thought, just yet. They counselled delay ; wait, they all said. Wait,—and these men advised Henry Thoreau to wait. Henry Thoreau, think of it, Henry Thoreau who had his opinions, and cared not a rush for any man's counsel or advice,—advised Henry Thoreau who held to principle as if his life depended on it ! His mind was made up. Not speak next Sunday night, and the people mad to know the story of John Brown ? Why, the thing was absurd ! What, think you, was the reply this sturdy radical of the radicals sent back to the trembling Anti-slavery people ? Why this, " I did not send to you for advice, but to announce that I am

to speak." And he did speak, and the hall had never held such an audience as he addressed on that memorable night. The crowds came from far and near, and Thoreau's earnest eulogy of the grand old martyr of Harper's ferry, was listened to with a sympathy and a respect which surprised the Abolitionists themselves. Some of them took courage from this exhibition, and Thoreau's speech was a first gun fired in Concord, in behalf of the black man's cause.

Among other things which he said on that occasion, were these: "I am here to plead his cause with you. I plead not for his life, but his character,—his immortal life; and so it becomes your cause wholly, and not his in the least. I see now that it was necessary that the bravest and humanest man in the country should be hung. Perhaps he saw it himself. *I almost fear* that I may yet hear of his deliverance, doubting if a prolonged life, if any life, can do as much good as his death."

And after the splendid old hero,—one of the grand martyrs of the world, if ever there was one,—had been hanged, Thoreau said tenderly and feelingly:—

"On the day of his translation I heard, to be sure, that he was hung, but I did not know what that meant; I felt no sorrow on that account; but not for a day or two did I even *hear* that he was *dead*, and not after any number of days shall I believe it. Of all the men who were said to be my contemporaries, it seemed to me that John Brown was the only one who *had not died*. I never hear of a man named Brown now—and I hear of them pretty often,—I never hear of any particular brave and earnest man, but my first thought is of John Brown, and what relation he may be to him. I meet him at every turn. He is more alive than he ever was. He has earned immortality. He is not confined to North Elba nor to Kansas. He is no

longer working in secret. He works in public in the clearest light that shines in the land.”

Thoreau lacked geniality and sunniness of disposition, charms which never fail to win friends and lovers. He had too much acid in his nature,—and he did not always succeed in keeping the acid out of his books either,—ever to become one of the world’s heroes. He was a bookish man, as well as a naturalist. He had more intellect than soul, and he was too sincere to dissemble. He had no *finesse*. The animals of the brush possessed more of his heart than the men he met in the streets, or the women at whose homes he dropped in, now and then, for a talk. Yet cold as he was to people, he contrived to be happy, and was always on particularly good terms with himself. “I love my fate to the core and rind,” he used to say. Even when he lay dying of that dread disease, consumption,—which carried him off in 1862, he feebly said to some one at his bedside, “you ask particularly after my health. I *suppose* that I have not many months to live, but of course know nothing about it. I may say that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing.”

As a writer of books, Thoreau must always occupy an acknowledged place in American letters. He wrote about eight medium-sized volumes, but all of them are not equal in point of merit. Each in turn exhibits a wealth of observation, some satire, a certain dry humour, much force of character, and a clear insight into human affairs and nature. He wrote pretty much as he talked, thought often while on his feet, and some of the acutest things in his works were composed during the long walks which he took in the country. “The length of his walk uniformly made the length of his writing,” as was once said. Some of his writings are exaggerative, and he measured everything by a rule of his own, which recognized Concord as

the centre of the universe. Even the North Pole had few phenomena which he could not find in his own little town and neighbourhood. The meridian of Concord was the main base of operations for the whole civilized world, and in his eyes it was doubtless Naples, London, Paris and Venice, all rolled into one sublime entity.

A pleasant book of his is *The Week*, which is really a record of a delightful journey along the banks of the Concord and Merrimack rivers, which was taken by the author and his brother in the month of August, 1839. They sailed about in a boat which was built by themselves after a model of their own design, and at night they camped out on the shore. The book is full of their adventures, by land and water, and contains many excellent bits of descriptive and essay writing, strengthened by philosophical dissertations, and some interesting studies in botany and in literature. A few affectations in religious thought, peculiarly Thoreauesque, abound here and there, but one may forgive such weaknesses in a work which is so meritorious in all other directions. *Walden*, which treats of life in the woods, in a most enjoyable and reflective way, ranks next. It tells the story of Thoreau's own career in the forest, and on that account, as well as from its value as an authority on certain features of New England civilization, it is likely to be oftener read and quoted than any of his other writings. *A Yankee in Canada* is well worth dipping into, though it certainly does not show its author at his best. He confesses that he failed to get much of himself into it. Still, it has some humour, and a good deal of observation, and the reader will not find it either dull or stupid. You will pardon me, perhaps, for reading to you, a page or two out of this sketchy volume. Thoreau made the trip to Canada in 1850. He travelled with but slight incumbrance, in the way of baggage. His boast was that



he could be independent of it. He set out early, and carried only a small parcel in his hand, which contained the few articles which he absolutely needed for his journey. He says :—

“ My pack, in fact, was soon made, for I keep a short list of those articles which, from frequent experience, I have found indispensable to the foot traveller ; and, when about to start, I have only to consult to be sure that nothing is omitted, and, what is more important, nothing superfluous inserted. Most of my fellow-travellers carried carpet-bags, or valises. Sometimes one had two or three tremendous yellow valises in his clutch, at each hitch of the cars, or if we were going to have a rush in earnest—and there were not a few—I would see my man in the crowd, with two or three affectionate lusty fellows pressing close, the strap along each side of his arm, between his shoulder and his valises, which held them tight to his back. I could not help asking in my mind, what so great cause for shewing Canada to those valises, when perhaps your very nieces had to stay at home for want of an escort? I should have liked to be present when the custom-house officer came aboard of him, and asked him to declare upon his honour if he had anything but wearing apparel in them. Even the elephant carries but a small trunk on his journeys. The perfection of travelling is to travel without baggage. After considerable reflection and experience, I have concluded that the best bag for a foot-traveller is made with a handkerchief, or, if he study appearances, a piece of stiff brown paper, well tied up, with a fresh piece within to put outside when the first is torn. That is good for both town and country,—a bundle which you can carry literally under your arm, and which will shrink and swell with its contents. I never found the carpet-bag of equal capacity, which was not a bundle of itself. We styled ourselves the

Knights of the Umbrella and the Bundle ; for wherever we went, whether to Notre-Dame or Mount Royal, or the Champ-de-Mars, to town mayor's or the bishop's palace, to the citadel, with a bare-legged Highlander for our escort, or to the Plains of Abraham, to dinner or to bed, the umbrella and the bundle went with us ; for we wished to be ready to digress at any moment. We made our haven nowhere in particular, but everywhere where our umbrella and bundle were. It would have been an amusing circumstance if the mayor of one of those cities had politely asked us where we were staying. We could only have answered that we were staying with His Honour for the time being. I was amused when, after our return, some green ones enquired if we found it 'easy to get accommodated,' as if we went abroad to get accommodated, when we can get that at home."

And of Canada and its people, he writes thus :—

"To a traveller from the old world, Canada East may appear like a new country, and its inhabitants like colonists ; but to me, coming from New England, and being a very green traveller withal, it appeared as Normandy itself, and realized much that I had heard of Europe and the Middle Ages. Even the names of the humble Canadian villages affected me as if they had been those of the renowned cities of antiquity. To be told by a habitant when I asked the name of a village in sight, that it is *St. Féréole* or *Ste. Anne*, the *Guardian Angel* or the *Holy St. Joseph's* ; or of a mountain that it was *Bélange* or *St. Hyacinthe* ! As soon as we leave the States these saintly names begin. *St. John* is the first town you stop at (fortunately we did not see it), and henceforward the names of the mountains, and streams, and villages reel, if I may so speak, with the intoxication of poetry : *Chambly*, *Longueuil*, *Pointe-aux-Trembles*, *Bartholomy*, etc., etc., as if it needed only a little

foreign accent, a few more liquids and vowels perchance in the language to make or locate our ideals at once. I began to dream of *Provence* and the *Troubadours*, and of places and things which have no existence on the earth. They veiled the Indian and the primitive forest, and the woods towards Hudson's Bay were only as the forests of France and Germany. I could not at once bring myself to believe that the inhabitants who pronounced daily those beautiful, and to me significant, words led as prosaic lives as we of New England. In short, the Canada which I saw was not merely a place for railroads to terminate in, and for criminals to run to. When I asked a man if there were any falls on the *Rivière-au-Chien*—for I saw that it came over the same high bank with the *Montmorenci* and *Ste. Anne*—he answered that there were. "How far?" I enquired. "*Trois-quarts de lieue.*" "How high?" "*Je pense, quatre-vingt-dix pieds*"—that is ninety feet. We turned aside to look at the falls of the *Rivière du Saut à la Puce*, half-a-mile from the road, which before we had passed in our haste and ignorance, and we pronounced them as beautiful as any that we saw; yet they seemed to make no account of them there, and when first we enquired the way to the falls, directed us to *Montmorenci*, seven miles distant. It was evident that this was the country for waterfalls; that every stream that empties into the St. Lawrence, for some hundreds of miles, must have a great fall or cascade on it, and in its passage through the mountains was for a short distance a small Saguenay, with its upright walls. This fall of *La Puce*, the least remarkable of the four which we visited in this vicinity, we had never heard of till we came to Canada, and yet, so far as I know, there is nothing of the kind in New England to be compared to it. Most travellers in Canada would not hear of it, though they might go so near as hear it. Since my return I find that

in the topographical description of the country, mention is made of "two or three romantic falls" on this stream, though we saw and heard of but this one. Ask the inhabitants, respecting any stream, if there is a fall on it, and they will perchance tell you of something as interesting as Bashpish or the Catskill, which no traveller has ever seen, or, if they have not found it, you may possibly trace up the stream and discover it yourself. Falls there are "a drug," and we became quite dissatisfied in respect to them. We had too much of them. Besides those which I have referred to, there are a thousand other falls on the St. Lawrence and its tributaries which I have not seen or heard of, and above all there is one which I have heard of called Niagara, so that I think this river must be the most remarkable for its falls of any in the world.

"At a house near the western boundary of Château Richier, whose master was said to speak a very little English, having recently lived at Quebec, we got lodging for the night. As usual we had to go down alone to get round to the south side of the house, where the door was, away from the road; for these Canadians' houses have no front door; properly speaking every part is for the use of the occupant exclusively, and no part has reference to the traveller or to travel. Every New England house, on the contrary, has a front and a principal door opening to the great world, though it may be on the cold side, for it stands on the highway of nations, and the road which runs by it comes from the old world and goes to the far West; but the Canadian's door opens into his back yard and farm alone, and the road which runs behind his house leads only from the church of one saint to that of another."

"*Excursions*" is a very good book, and full of quotable extracts. My own copy is marked on every page. It is in *Excursions* where we find such bits as these, "It is the

three-inch swing of a pendulum in a cup-board, which the great pulse of nature vibrates by and through each instant." "The beauty there is in mosses must be considered from the holiest, quietest nook." "What is any man's discourse to me, if I am not sensible of something in it as steady and cheery as the creak of crickets." "I would keep some book of natural history always by me as a sort of elixir, the reading of which should restore the tone of the system." "Their tongues had a more generous accent than ours, as if breath was cheaper where they wagged." One more, "Cape Cod, the right arm of the Commonwealth." It would be easy to multiply the number of quotations, but enough have been given, I think, to show the manner and style of Thoreau's thought, his power of expression, and peculiar turn for humour. His other books are *Letters*—full of strong individuality and robust thought,—*The Maine Woods*, *Cape Cod*, and *Early Spring in Massachusetts*, the latter a collection of shrewd observations from the author's journal. This work, bequeathed in 1876 to Mr. H. G. O. Blake by Sophia Thoreau, sister of the naturalist, was published in book-form in 1881.

Thoreau died at Concord on the 6th of May, 1862. Take him for all in all, he was a good and true man. He led a life which was full of beautiful lessons for the young as well as for the old. We cannot all become hermits, perhaps few of us would care for such a self-denying state of existence,—but we may all lead useful lives, if we will. And may we not learn something noble and enduring, from the simple career of this self-sacrificing naturalist, who gave some of the best years of his life to the birds of the air, the animals which ran to him for protection, the fish which swam into his hand, and the plants which whispered their secrets into his ear? A man who lived as Thoreau lived could do great good to his fellows were he so

minded, and Thoreau, we all feel, accomplished much that was purposeful and excellent. We need not think of him as a Transcendentalist merely, though of course the tenets of that doctrine coloured his views, and shaped the action of his mind ; we need not quarrel with his way of religious thought, but we may believe in him as a man and a brother-worker in an honest cause. We may admire the thousand good qualities with which God enriched his mind and endowed his heart. We may accept the influencing tendency of his splendid manhood, and read spirited lessons for our guidance in most of the acts which he performed. His morality was high. He had almost an excess of it. His scholarship, his love of nature, his grandeur of soul, his pride of independence, his ripe and mature judgment on all the great concerns of life and activity, found ample development in the intellectual life which he followed. The career of such a man marks out a line of beauty which many of us would do no wrong to accept, if not in its entirety, at least in part. Thoreau has passed away, but his genius lives. In fiction he rests immortalized in Hawthorne's study of "The Marble Faun;" in real life he has a firm hold on our affections, an ever living place in our hearts. His rank in American letters is assured, and his memory will not soon fade away, or sink out of the minds of thinking and of reading men.

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At the conclusion of the lecture, John Harper, Esq., B.A., Rector of the High School, arose and moved a vote of thanks to the lecturer in a neat speech. At the same time he moved the following resolutions, Mr. LeMoine leaving the Chair, and H. S. Scott, Esq., assuming it :

*Whereas* it has been publicly announced that the organization of the Royal Society of Canada has been completed, under the distinguished

patronage of His Excellency the Governor-General, and through the significant co-operation of those of our countrymen who have attained to some degree of eminence in literary and scientific studies ;

*And whereas* it has likewise been announced that J. M. LeMoine, Esq., President of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, has had conferred upon him, with the unhesitating approbation of his literary associates, a mark of His Excellency's favour, in being appointed to the high and influential position of Preses of the French Historical section of the said Royal Society ;

*And whereas* it has also been announced that Mr. Faucher de St. Maurice, a member of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, and for many years its efficient librarian, has accepted a similar position as Preses of the French Literature section of the said Royal Society ;

*And whereas* it is likewise known that Mr. George Stewart, jr., a member of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, and an associate of its Council, has been notified of his appointment as Fellow of the said Royal Society, an honour suggested by His Excellency and approved of by his associate Fellows ;

*Be it therefore resolved*, that the congratulations of the members of the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, as represented by this meeting, be tendered to Mr. LeMoine, who has so long and ably filled the position of President of this Society, and whose name is so intimately associated with everything pertaining to the history of the Province of Quebec and the River St. Lawrence ; to Mr. Faucher de St. Maurice, upon whom honours, political as well as literary, have lately fallen ; and likewise to Mr. Stewart, whose efforts in connection with our Society have been of the most praiseworthy character, and whose literary fame is in the mouths of all who proudly recognize the development of a Canadian literature.

*And be it further resolved*, that a copy of this resolution be inserted in the books of our Society.

The Hon. Judge Routhier seconded the resolutions, and vote of thanks, in an eloquent and highly complimentary speech.

Mr. Scott then addressed a few remarks to the audience and put the vote, which was carried amid great enthusiasm.

Mr. LeMoine resumed his position, when he and Mr. Stewart acknowledged the honours paid them.

