



ABSTRACT

HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND HIS LIFETIME

This thesis concerns a study of Henry David Thoreau's life and works. It has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter is about his biography, his friends and how his philosophy was incorporated in action. Thoreau belonged to the Transcendental Movement, where he established a relationship with other great thinkers. His philosophy, “small is beautiful,” is one of the principles which he applied in his life.

The second chapter refers to Walden and “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.” These works try to show us some of his theories about nature and its connection with men. Walden is considered one of his masterpieces due to its message to protect the surrounding world. “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers” was dedicated to his adventures during a canoe-trip with his brother, John.

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The third chapter deals with an essay called “Civil Disobedience,” where Thoreau expressed his dislikes against obeying government’s laws and paying taxes. The second point in this chapter is “Life Without Principle,” where living a life without complications, spending our time on useful and constructive things, and enjoying our world, were the reasons which motivated Thoreau to write it.

The fourth chapter has information about his influences from the nineteenth century to the presents. The impact that he has produced on our society is considerable, although at the very beginning he was not a well-known writer.

The last chapter is the conclusion. It is the end of a deep analysis of Thoreau’s life and writings.



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“HENRY DAVID THOREAU: HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND LITERATURE”

KEY WORDS

TRANSCENDENTALISM, WALDEN, GOVERNMENT,
NATURE, LIFE, PEOPLE, THOREAU, BELIEFS

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DEDICATORY

Humility and devotion are some of my parents’

characteristics. They

and my siblings have been my help and inspiration.

This thesis is dedicated to them because they are always with me in good and difficult moments. The unconditional

support and love, have been the most important things

that Jose and Elvira have given to me to live happily

every day. They are my guides and my best friends.

And in a special way, I also want to dedicate this work to people who were with me during the course of this thesis.

They are my dear brother, Jose, and my

boyfriend, Roman.

ROCIO

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“HENRY DAVID THOREAU: HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND LITERATURE”
Effort and perseverance have been my parents’

advice.

These have served me to overcome the obstacles in
my life.

All the time they have been the ones who guided my
path and helped me to achieve my goals.

I want to dedicate this work to them as gratitude for
their big endeavor.

But I cannot forget my loved husband, Geovanny, who
was with me each moment that I needed him. He was my
support. He gave me strength to continue.

MAYRA



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We want to express our sincere acknowledgment, respect, and gratitude to a special man, who helped us too much sharing his knowledge and his valuable time to develop this thesis, Dr. Ion Ocean Youman. Thank you for your patient, tender, good will, and guidance. You are a brilliant teacher and an unforgettable friend. With your help this work has become something interesting and enjoyable. At the same time our consideration to all our teachers from the English career.

Thanks God because we are alive, and we can live free to do what we consider proper. Without your help we would not have been able to do anything. **God**, you are our best friend who never will forget us.



INTRODUCTION

Literature is the weapon that human beings have to express their feelings, emotions, ideas, beliefs, and *beauty* through the power of words. Thus, during many centuries people have tried to use this art to give to their lives and their surroundings a special sense, but it has not been easy. Thousands of poets have made an effort to transform their works into big accomplishments in the different epochs through years. Some has gotten their objectives, but others have remained working to achieve their purpose without getting it.

The way of success and fame requires constant effort and work; this is what the three giants of Literature, Geoffrey Chaucer (1340), William Shakespeare (1564), and John Milton (1608), with their masterpieces, “*The Canterbury Tales*,” “*Romeo and Juliet*,” and “*Paradise Lost*,” respectively, have showed us.

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Unfortunately, history cannot change, and there will be always three great poets in literature. Nevertheless, according to our criteria HENRY DAVID THOREAU should be the fourth giant because of his geniality with words, his different perspectives about life, his imagination, his ways to appreciate things, his relation with nature, and his original belief “small is beautiful.”

Henry David Thoreau was a poet different from others, unique and special for his thoughts. He could reflect his ideas and beliefs in all his works. His love for nature was his main inspiration. So there are innumerable reasons which convert him into the poet that we have chosen to be the theme of our thesis. Thoreau has provoked a huge impact because he revealed another aspect of man, a different prototype of human, and a model for people, towns, and movements. We believe that it is important to pay attention



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to the life, works, influences, and ideas of this important thinker.

Thoreau lived a life without complications. He enjoyed what he did, accompanied by nature. He thought that money and luxuries were not indispensable to live. The most important thing for him was to have a harmonious connection with the environment. He did not care about wealth; for this reason he was able to live two years in his cabin at Walden Pond, eating what the soil offered him.

Henry David Thoreau was one of the poets who belonged to the transcendental circle. His principles and ideas were based on this philosophy. The idea of living in a harmonious relationship with nature, preferring simplicity rather than luxuries, and considering the power that each individual has upon reason were some of the aspects which motivated Thoreau to be part of the transcendental society.

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Although Thoreau was considered as the shadow of Ralph Waldo Emerson, he had his own ideas and thoughts about nature and the world in general. Emerson noticed in Thoreau a deep vocation and discipline; meanwhile, Thoreau saw in Emerson a teacher, a guide, a father, and a friend. Thoreau was a splendid poet who was able to produce his transcendentalist ideas in each one of his works, in order to create conscience among the individual, nature, and humanity.

Although many people thought that he was a hermit because he lived alone during two years at Walden Pond, this writer had many friends with whom he shared his ideas and thoughts. He also served as an influence for Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Great poets like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson among others, were some of the many friends with whom he felt affinity because they shared the same



thoughts or simply because they were friends. It is for this reason that we have included a brief review of those who were of more relevance and helped to develop his ideologies.

Due to the importance that each one of the works of Thoreau has, we have dedicated two chapters to Thoreau's works' summaries, like Walden, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Life without Principle, and Civil Disobedience. It is with the purpose of understanding in a better way what he wanted to transmit through his works.

It has been necessary to investigate and analyze the impact that Thoreau provoked on society. For this reason we have investigated his influences from the nineteenth century to the presents. Thus, we can realize that Thoreau was not a poet who died together with his epoch, but he recovers his life in each book that is read by any individual.



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Through the decades Thoreau has become an icon for many people and movements. Although at the beginning his works did not produce any effect on readers, nowadays these situations have changed because everybody knows or wants to know who Henry David Thoreau was.

Finally, through this work, we hope that the readers of this thesis can recognize Thoreau as a thinker, as a citizen, as an artist, and as an individual. We also want to create conscience between man and money. We do not have to give emphasis to wealth instead of real values. The objective of life is to love nature and live in a harmonious relationship with it. People should act according to their principles and live by themselves. We are the owners of our lives. We should establish our own rules. We do not have to be slaves of time. Enjoy life without wasting time. We trust that this interesting thesis achieves all the objectives that we have proposed at the beginning.

Enjoy it!

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CHAPTER Nº 1

THOREAU AS A PERSON

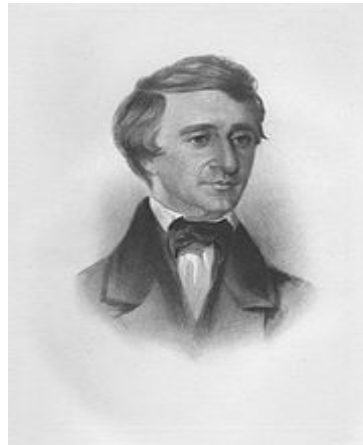


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1.1. BRIEF BIOGRAPHY



Henry David Thoreau

One of the most famous American authors because of his relation with nature and his beliefs about the surrounding world is Henry David Thoreau. His ideas and principles, which are related to Transcendentalism, are well known today to thousands of people in the world. His works were essays, poems, journals, and publications that, although in his time they did not produce excellent results in people, afterwards served to change people's minds and had a huge impact on later generations.



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Concord, Massachusetts

On July 12, 1817, in Concord, Massachusetts, was born a child named Henry David Thoreau. He was the son of John Thoreau, an unsuccessful storekeeper and later a pencil manufacturer. John was pleasant and quiet, a passive man who had little to do with his son Henry, and his mother, Cynthia Dunbar, a dynamic and reform-minded woman who had the power in her family. She always supported Henry's ideas and beliefs. She was a mother who encouraged her children to share their own deep interest in nature and stirred in them ambitions to learn new things every day. The Thoreau family had three other children, in addition to Henry: Helen, five years older than

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Henry; John, two years older; and Sophia, two years younger. Henry David’s paternal grandfather was French and had been born in Jersey, his maternal grandfather, Asa Dunbar, was known for leading Harvard’s 1766 student “Butter Rebellion”, which was the first recorded student protest in the United States.

Henry was named after the death of his paternal uncle, David Thoreau, who died six weeks after Henry was born. So his legal name was not Henry David Thoreau but David Henry Thoreau. It was not until after Thoreau had finished his studies at Harvard that he changed his name from David Henry to Henry David Thoreau, although he never bothered to request the state legislature to have his name legally and officially changed.

In 1821 the family moved to Boston, where they lived until 1823. Thoreau’s parents decided to send him to



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kindergarten at the Grammar School, where he was judged to be slow, passive, and not a brilliant student. However, his mother made the decision that he would go to college. In 1828, when he was 11, he was enrolled in Concord Academy, a college preparatory school. He studied there for five years.



Harvard University

When he was sixteen, Thoreau entered Harvard University; he studied there from 1833 to 1837. His schooling was paid for with the money his father made in

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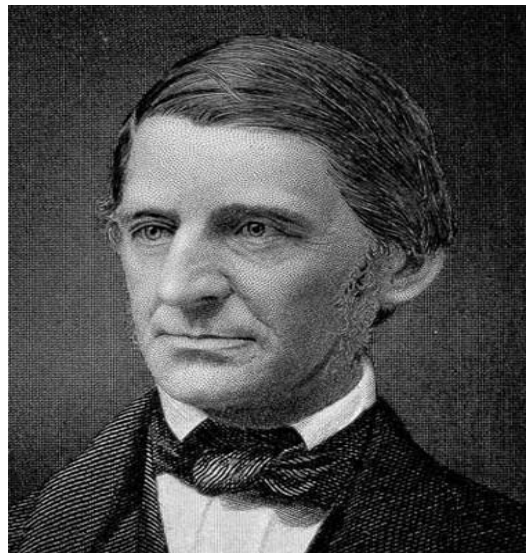
his job as a pencil manufacturer, combined with support from his older siblings' salaries. They were both schoolteachers. While at college, Thoreau studied Latin and Greek grammar and composition and took classes in a variety of subjects, including Mathematics, English, History, Philosophy, and four different modern languages. He also made great use of the Harvard library, drawing his knowledge from real resources. Although Harvard was his second home, Thoreau did not share the majority of its ideas and rules, which did not have any relation with Thoreau's personality. Once in Harvard, Thoreau had the possibility to find a few friends, and attend a few clubs.

During a time of absence from Harvard, in 1835, Thoreau taught school in Canton, Massachusetts. After graduating in 1837, Thoreau accepted a job as a school teacher and tutor on the faculty of Concord Academy. There he was introduced to Bronson Alcott's progressive



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principles of education, where physical punishments were eliminated and pupils were encouraged to participate in discussions, debates, and forums. Unfortunately, he remained in this position only two weeks because he refused to continue the traditions of daily canings and beating of six students who protested against corporal punishment. In the same year, Thoreau began keeping the journal which he would write for the rest of his life. He also became friends with Concord residents Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Ellery Channing, and became a follower of Transcendentalism.



Ralph Waldo Emerson

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After working at Concord Thoreau decided to work in his father’s pencil factory. During that year of work, Thoreau continued his friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who sensed in Thoreau a deep vocation and a true disciple, that is, one with very much of Emersonian self-reliance. Thoreau saw in Emerson a teacher, a guide, a father, and a friend.

Thoreau and Emerson were two authors who were related to the Philosophy of Transcendentalism. Fundamentally, it combined romanticism with reform. It celebrated the individual rather than the masses, emotion rather than reason. It argued that there were two ways of knowing; through the senses and through intuition. In the same way, it conceded that matter and spirit both existed. It believed, however, that the reality of spirit transcended the reality of matter.



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In 1838, Emerson, as a friend of Thoreau, provided a letter of reference for his young friend, when he decided to travel to Maine in search of a teaching position at a private school. Unfortunately, he could not find a job there. Thoreau returned to Concord and opened a school with his brother John in June, 1838. Concord Academy was different from other schools in its principles, ideas, and rules, and in its lack of corporal punishment. Henry and John introduced several progressive concepts, including nature walks and visits to local shops and businesses. The school was successful in attracting students, but it lasted only three years. John became sick with lockjaw after cutting his finger while shaving. He died in his brother's arms on January 11, 1842. After that, Henry decided not to continue the school alone. This death produced a deep personal impact on him.



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During the summer vacation of 1839, Thoreau and his brother John had taken a canoe trip on the Concord and Merrimack rivers. They lived an incredible and fascinating experience. The result was that he decided not to pursue a schoolteacher career, but to be a poet of nature.

In 1840, Thoreau fell in love with an attractive young woman named Ellen Seawall, whose younger brother Edward was a student at his school. Even though she wanted to marry, her father disapproved of the relationship because of Thoreau's Transcendentalism. He sent her to New York, to end the romance. There she met and married Joseph Osgood. Later on, when Thoreau went to live in Emerson's home, he had a romance with Mary Russell, a young woman who stayed with Emerson during the summers of 1840 and 1841. He wrote her a love poem in 1841, but never proposed, and she married Marston Watson, Thoreau's friend from Harvard.



On April 18, 1841, Thoreau moved into the house of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was an essayist and transcendental philosopher. There, from 1841 to 1844, he worked as children’s tutor, editorial assistant, and handyman. He also had access to Emerson’s library and opinions. This library included works on German, English, French, Indian, and Chinese philosophy, as well as Classical and English Literature. For a brief period of time, in 1843, he went to the home of William Emerson (Emerson’s son) on Staten Island, to work as his tutor. Emerson always urged Thoreau to write essays and poems for a newspaper known as *The Dial*. Thoreau’s first published essay was Aulus Persius Flaccus, a very difficult work to follow. It consisted of revised passages from his journal, which he had begun keeping at Emerson’s suggestion. Through Emerson’s relation and the articles in *The Dial*, Thoreau could meet other transcendentalists,



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such as Bronson Alcott, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and George Ripley.



Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond

On July 4, 1845, Independence Day and the day before the anniversary of his brother's birth, Thoreau moved into the cabin he had been building during the spring for months before at Walden Pond, just south of Concord village. The land had been purchased by Emerson some time before. Thoreau lived there through the cultivation of beans, potatoes, and turnips. He stayed there alone for two

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years, two months, and two days. Although many people believe Thoreau was a lonely man without any contact with society while he lived at Walden Pond, he had frequent dinners with his family and friends, and also some curious neighbors and friends visited him.

Some thought Henry went to live at Walden Pond because he was a hermit or a recluse, or because he hated the society to which he belonged; but this was not the case. Henry had a deep, special, and sincere reason to go to Walden Pond to honor his brother. It was his brother's death which inspired him to decide to go to that place. Henry's main idea was to work on a book called “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers”, which was a tribute to his brother John. This book was the result of the canoe trip he had taken with his brother in 1839. This work combined poetry, historical background, and philosophical reflections with the narrative of the trip.

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In 1846 Thoreau began to write about his experiences living simply and idyllically in the work Walden, or “A Life in the Woods.” This work shows Thoreau’s response to the thousands of questions he received as a result of living in his small cabin in the woods at Walden Pond. Walden described a two-year period in Thoreau’s life from July 1845 to September 1847. A lot of Walden’s material was taken from his journals; other famous sections involved Thoreau’s visits with a Canadian woodcutter and with an Irish family, a trip to Concord, and a description of his bean field. Without a doubt Walden is the most complete work written by Thoreau. It shows his relationship with the surrounding world.

In July, 1846, Thoreau went into town to have a pair of shoes repaired; he was arrested for non-payment of the poll tax to the town for several years because he opposed the



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use of town revenues to finance the U.S. war with Mexico and enforcement of slavery laws. Thoreau spent a night in jail. He was released the next day, after one of his relatives, probably an aunt, paid his debt. In 1848, Thoreau gave a speech to the Concord Lyceum that would be adapted to be the essay “Resistance to Civil Government,” published in 1849. In this essay Thoreau discussed passive resistance as a method of protest.

On September 6, 1847, Thoreau left Walden Pond. He became more involved with the family trade of making pencils. From 1847 to 1854, Thoreau continually redrafted and revised Walden. In 1849, he saw one of his major works in print, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. From 1854 to 1861, he was dedicated to correcting and revising his writings; also, in 1854, he gave a speech on “Slavery in Massachusetts.”



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Here we present a list of some of his works:

- ❖ Aulus Persius Flaccus (1840)
- ❖ The Service(1840)
- ❖ A Walk to Wachusett (1842)
- ❖ Paradise (to be) Regained (1843)
- ❖ The Landlord (1843)
- ❖ Sir Walter Raleigh (1844)
- ❖ Herald of Freedom (1844)
- ❖ Wendell Phillips Before the Concord Lyceum (1845)
- ❖ Reform and the Reformers (1846-1848)
- ❖ Thomas Carlyle and His Works (1847)
- ❖ A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers (1849)
- ❖ Resistance to Civil Government, or Civil Disobedience
(1849)
- ❖ An Excursion to Canada (1853)
- ❖ Slavery in Massachusetts (1854)
- ❖ Walden (1854)
- ❖ A Plea for Captain John Brown (1859)

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- ❖ Remarks After the Hanging of John Brown (1859)
- ❖ The Last Days of John Brown (1860)
- ❖ Walking (1861)
- ❖ Autumnal Tints (1862)
- ❖ Wild Apples: The History of the Apple Tree (1862)
- ❖ Excursions (1863)
- ❖ Life Without Principle (1863)
- ❖ Night and Moonlight (1863)
- ❖ The Highland Light (1864)
- ❖ The Maine Woods (1864)
- ❖ Cape Cod (1865)
- ❖ Letters to Various Persons (1865) A Yankee in Canada, with Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers (1866)
- ❖ Early Spring in Massachusetts (1881)
- ❖ Summer (1884)
- ❖ Winter (1888)
- ❖ Autumn (1892)
- ❖ Micellanies (1894)



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- ❖ Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau (1894)
- ❖ Poems of Nature (1895)
- ❖ The First and Last Journeys of Thoreau (1905)
- ❖ Journal of Henry David Thoreau (1906)

Although Thoreau never earned a living by his writings, his works fill 20 volumes. His letters were edited by his friend Emerson and published in 1865. Many scholars consider Henry David Thoreau to be the father of the American conservation and preservation movements.



Thoreau's tomb

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Finally, Henry David Thoreau died on May 6, 1862, after suffering from tuberculosis, a disease which had plagued him most of his adult life.

As a conclusion of Thoreau’s biography it is possible to say that he was a man who had a true relation with nature. Thoreau was a splendid writer who used his lifetime writing the best essays, poems, journals, and publications. He never found an obstacle to expressing his ideas and thoughts. He was an enterprising man who took advantage of every event in his life. He used literature as a powerful weapon to transmit his ideas and beliefs to future generations. His relation with nature was his invaluable treasure. He saw in nature a different world, where everybody lived in a harmonious relation. His works have been a vital resource of information for generations; they have served for the most important purpose, that is, to change old ideas about different themes such as slavery,



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the connection between man and nature, the government and the laws, etc. Henry David Thoreau has been, without a doubt, one of the most important authors of American Literature.

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1.2. HIS ACQUAINTANCES, FRIENDS, AND INFLUENCES



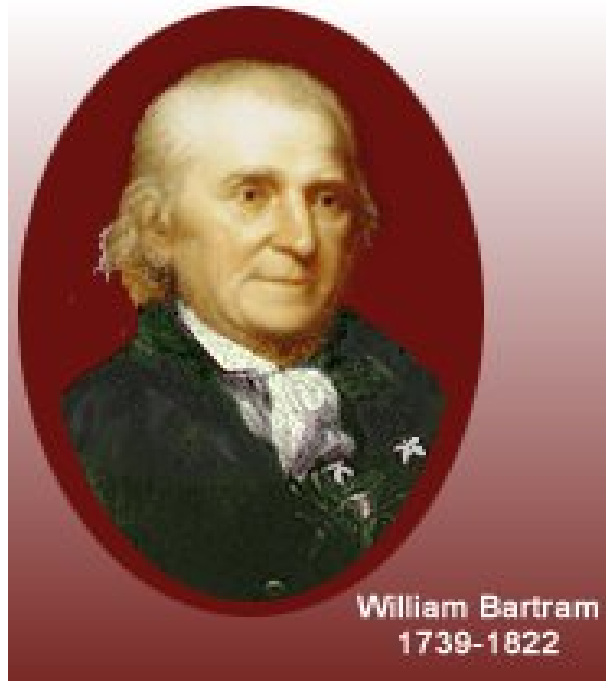
Thoreau's Recognition

Henry David Thoreau was an excellent writer, philosopher, and thinker, and for this reason he felt a lot of influences from many people, and he also influenced many people, thanks to his writings and thoughts. His life was not so easy. He was a man who liked the outdoors. He liked nature more than the city.



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He had some influences from many people who were already writers, philosophers, or people related to these subjects. Among them we have Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. He also admired William Bartram and Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*. Thoreau was one of the first American supporters of Darwin's theory of evolution.



William Bartram

William Bartram was born on April 7, 1739, in Kingsessing, which now is called Philadelphia,

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Pennsylvania. William Bartram is one of the few Americans who is considered to be a part of The Enlightenment. He was a man who liked to walk in the woods. He included many observations in his personal journals and diaries, and they inspired many authors, including Henry David Thoreau, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. The term “naturalist” was first applied to him.



Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born on October 21, 1772, in Devonshire. He was the youngest of ten children,

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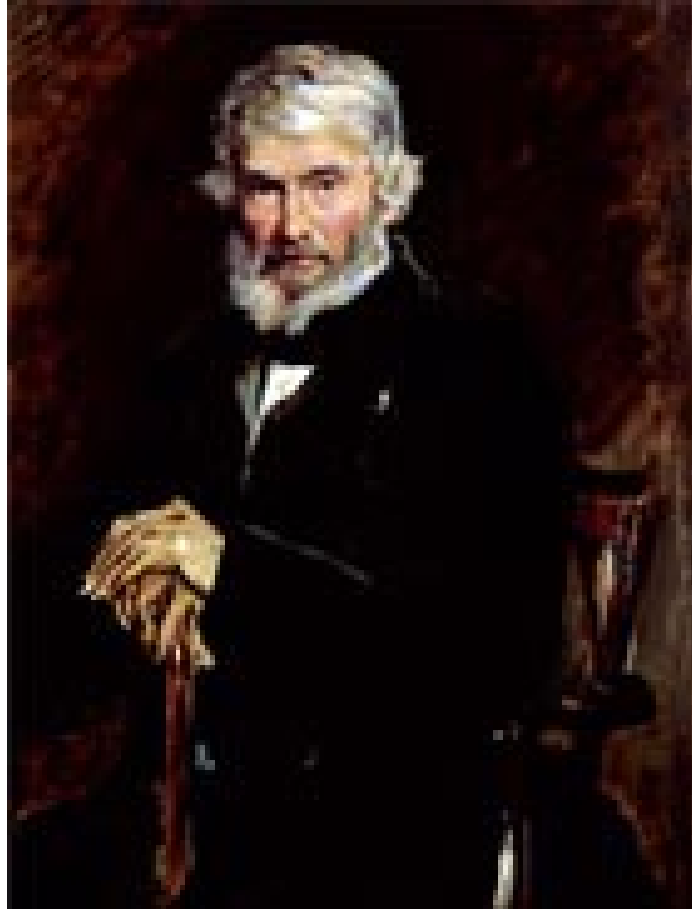


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and he was adored by his parents. He was an English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher. He joined in the reformist movement stimulated by the French Revolution. In 1797 he started a close friendship with Dorothy and William Wordsworth. It was one of the most successful relationships in English literature. From it resulted Lyrical Ballads, which started the English Romantic Movement. These poems set a new style because they used everyday language and fresh ways of looking at nature. Disappointed with political developments in France, Coleridge visited Germany together with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, and they became interested in the works of Immanuel Kant. Coleridge had become addicted to opium, because he suffered from neuralgic and rheumatic pains. He was considered the greatest of Shakespearean critics.



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Thomas Carlyle

Thomas Carlyle was born on December 4, 1795, in Ecclefechan. He was a British historian and essayist who was a leading figure in the Victorian era. Thomas Carlyle was raised in Ecclefechan, Dumfries, and Galloway. While staying in London in 1831, Carlyle became familiar with JS. Mill, who later introduced him to Emerson. Carlyle’s wife,

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Jane, called their meeting with Emerson, "The visit of an angel." Emerson said about his friend, "He talks like a very unhappy man, profoundly solitary, displeased and hindered by all men and things about him." Carlyle insisted on the importance of the individual, and raised serious questions about democracy, mass persuasion, and politics.



Ralph Waldo Emerson



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A decisive turning point in Thoreau's life came when he met Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was an American essayist, philosopher, poet, and leader of the Transcendentalism movement. In his hometown, Concord, Emerson founded a literary circle called New England Transcendentalism, a gathering of extraordinary thinkers, in which participated, among others, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson formulated and expressed the philosophy of Transcendentalism. It was based on a group of new ideas about literature, religion, culture, and philosophy. Henry David Thoreau and Emerson are invariably paired as the two leading Transcendentalists. Like Thoreau, Emerson was motivated by the places he visited, and he used this advantage for his writings. Emerson, together with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry David Thoreau, often went for a walk in Concord. Emerson encouraged Thoreau's talent and early career. Thoreau absorbed many of Emerson's ideas, and he could actually



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put them into practice. Thoreau was a member of the Emerson household from 1841 to 1843, earning his living as a handyman. Emerson was the owner of the land on which Thoreau built his cabin and lived in it for two years. After that, he went to live at Emerson's house, so they maintained a very close relationship, but this was destroyed after Emerson gave Thoreau the advice to publish his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. This book had few readers, and Thoreau was in debt. Then they reconciled at last. According to Emerson, Thoreau had no friends, only a few acquaintances. Thoreau liked to be alone. He enjoyed watching nature's sights. During his life Thoreau supported himself by doing odd jobs, such as gardening, carpentry, and land surveying.



Nathaniel Hawthorne

In 1842 Nathaniel Hawthorne became friends with the Transcendentalists in Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Hawthorne also drew on the Puritan legacy. He was an American novelist and short story writer. His real name was Nathaniel Hathorne, but he changed his

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name to “Hawthorne,” adding a “w” to his last name to dissociate himself from his relatives. He also had to do with Transcendentalism. He joined a Transcendentalist Utopian community before marrying. When Hawthorne and his family moved to a small farmhouse in Massachusetts, he became friends with Herman Melville, who had read Hawthorne’s short story collection *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Melville was composing *Moby Dick* at that time, and he said that these stories revealed a dark side to Hawthorne, so he decided to dedicate *Moby Dick* to Hawthorne. When Hawthorne returned to Concord, he had as neighbors Emerson and Henry Thoreau. His works often had moral messages and psychological complexity. He wrote: "I have not lived, but only dreamed about living." Hawthorne’s works belong to romanticism, warning tales that suggest that guilt, sin, and evil are the most natural qualities of humanity. Then his later writings would reflect his negative view of the Transcendentalism movement.



William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth, who also influenced Thoreau, focused on nature, children, and the poor and common people, and used ordinary words to express his personal feelings. His definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," was shared by a number of his followers. He was a British poet. The wonderful landscape affected Wordsworth's imagination and gave him

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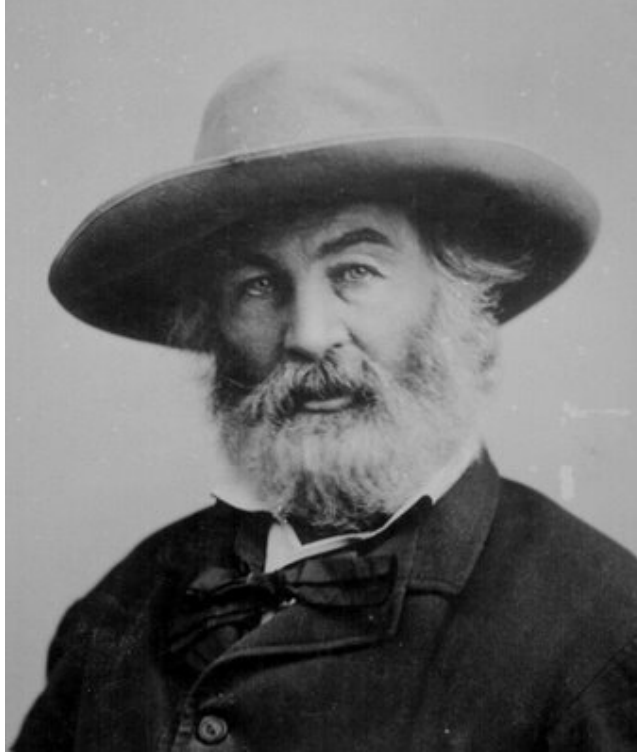
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a love of nature. Wordsworth had an inspiration, his sister Dorothy. They were more than siblings - good friends. In 1795 he met Coleridge. Wordsworth composed his first masterwork, Lyrical Ballads, encouraged by Coleridge and stimulated by his close contact with nature. This long work described the poet's love of nature.

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Walt Whitman

Thoreau met Walt Whitman in 1856 in New York. He was an American poet, journalist and essayist. Whitman had a special love of nature. He was also inspired by writers such as Goethe, Hegel, Carlyle, and Emerson. He wanted to write a new kind of poetry. Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of his early admirers and wrote, in 1855: "I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy." The Civil War had a great impact and effect on the writer. It led

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him to write Memoranda after the War (1875.) He wrote a famous poem about Lincoln's death called 'O Captain! My Captain!' Whitman was forced to give up his work because of a paralytic attack in 1873. The fresh use of language by Whitman helped to liberate American poetry. He said that a poet's style should be simple and natural, without traditional meter or rhyme. In his poems he used free verse, and it had a deep influence on poetry. Walt Whitman also traveled in New Hampshire, Maine, Canada, and Minnesota.



John Brown

John Brown was another person who influenced Thoreau. He was familiar with modern philosophy, ranging from Descartes, Locke, and the Cambridge Platonists through Emerson, Coleridge, and the German Idealists, all of whom are influential on Thoreau's philosophy. While Brown was visiting many places, he met Thoreau and

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Emerson in Boston. On May 9, he delivered a lecture and in attendance were Bronson Alcott, Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. John Brown has been called the most controversial of all nineteenth-century Americans. When John was hanged after his attempt to start a slave rebellion in 1859, church bells rang, guns were fired, large memorial meetings took place, and famous writers such as Emerson and Thoreau joined for praising Brown.

Thoreau was friends with many influential thinkers and writers of his time, including Bronson Alcott, father of Louisa May Alcott, Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller, and Nathaniel Hawthorne and his son Julian Hawthorne.



Margaret Fuller

Margaret Fuller, who was an influential thinker and writer, was born on May 23, 1810, in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts. She was a journalist, critic, and women's rights activist associated with the American Transcendental Movement. She was also related to Thoreau because she became the first editor of the transcendental publication,

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“The Dial” in 1840. Margaret had earned a reputation as the best-read person in New England, and became the first woman allowed to use the library at Harvard College. One of her most important beliefs was to provide education to women. She had great confidence in all women. Margaret Fuller advised women to be careful with marriage and not to become dependent on their husbands. In the Transcendental Club, she rebelled against the past and believed in the possibility of change. However, her rebellion was not based on religion. She was an inspiration for the poet Walt Whitman. Thoreau thought that her books’ strengths came in part from Fuller’s conventional ability.



William Ellery Channing

William Ellery Channing was another poet who was related to the Transcendental Movement. He was born in Newport, Rhode Island, on April 7, 1780. He rejected the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity and divine election. He preferred a gentle relationship with God. He lived through

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the increasing tension between liberals and conservatives, but he took a moderate position, rejecting the extremes of both groups. As for slavery, he was never a devoted abolitionist; he was even declared a romantic racist in Black Abolitionism. He was never part of the abolitionist movements. He often chose to remain separate from organizations and movements.



Amos Bronson Alcott

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Amos Bronson Alcott, an American teacher, writer and philosopher, was born on November 29, 1799, in Wolcott, Connecticut. He was an abolitionist, and pioneered the strategy of tax resistance to slavery, which Henry David Thoreau made famous in Civil Disobedience. Alcott and Thoreau debated publicly the use of force and passive resistance to slavery. Along with Thoreau, Bronson was among the financial and moral supporters of John Brown and occasionally helped fugitive slaves escape via the Underground Railroad. Alcott was opposed to corporal punishment as a means of disciplining his students. He said that any student's fail was the teacher's responsibility. His teachings influenced the growing mid-19th century New Thought Movement. Many of Alcott's educational principles are still used in classrooms today, including "teach by encouragement," art education, music education, acting exercises, learning through experience, risk-taking in the



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classroom, tolerance in schools, physical education-recess, and early childhood education.

Thoreau was not only influenced by people, he was also influenced by places to which he traveled, or where he lived. These places inspired him to write many essays; for example, his essay "Walking" (1861) was followed by “Cape Cod” in 1865, based on a series of excursions he made to the Atlantic sea-side to study its people and the Cape's flora and fauna. He traveled to Quebec once, Cape Cod four times, and Maine three times; these landscapes inspired his "excursion" books, A Yankee in Canada, Cape Cod, and The Maine Woods, in which travel itineraries frame his thoughts about geography, history, and philosophy.

Thoreau’s writings had far-reaching influences on many public figures. Political leaders and reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, President John F. Kennedy, civil rights



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activist Martin Luther King, Jr., Supreme Court Justice

William O. Douglas, and, Russian author Leo Tolstoy all spoke of being strongly affected by Thoreau’s work, particularly Civil Disobedience. So did many artists and authors, including Edward Abbey, Willa Cather, Marcel Proust, William Butler Yeats, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, E.B. White, and Frank Lloyd Wright, and naturalists like John Burroughs, John Muir, E.O. Wilson, Edwin Way Telae, Joseph Wood Krutch, B. F. Skinner, and David Brower. Anarchist and feminist Emma Goldman also appreciated Thoreau and referred to him as “the greatest American anarchist.”

Mahatma Gandhi first read Walden in 1906 while working as a civil rights activist in Johannesburg, South Africa. He told American reporter Webb Miller, “Thoreau’s ideas influenced me greatly.” He adopted some of them and



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recommended the study of Thoreau to all of his friends who were helping him in the cause of Indian Independence.

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted in his autobiography that his first encounter with the idea of non-violent resistance was by reading "On Civil Disobedience" in 1944, while attending Morehouse College. Thoreau also inspired children's book author and illustrator DB. Johnson to create a series of picture books based on Thoreau.

Henry David Thoreau liked to relate to people who shared his ideas and opinions. As we can notice, all of the people who influenced Thoreau were related with nature and with politics, and shared the same or almost the same beliefs and opinions. Thoreau was an extraordinary writer and thinker. Many of his ideas helped and influenced people to do and think new things, and these people became famous not only thanks to Thoreau's ideas and



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feelings, but because they also influenced people to do things based on Thoreau’s way of thinking.

Although Thoreau’s writing had not too much value in his time, we can say that he sowed great ideas, values, and thoughts among American people and people of the entire world.

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1.3. HOW HIS PHILOSOPHY WAS INCORPORATED IN ACTION

“Things do not change; we change.”

Thoreau (Journal, 1906)

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined.”

Thoreau (Walden, 1854)

Henry David Thoreau was one of the great U. S. writers of the 19th century and the greatest of all U.S. nature writers. He is best known as the man who leaves society and civilization to live alone in direct contact with nature, at Walden Pond. He was an exacting practitioner of the art of writing, and a disciplined craftsman who worked hard to revise and refine his material. Thoreau intended his writing to be an expression of life according to high ideals, beliefs, dreams, and aspirations guided by morality and integrity, spent in pursuit of spiritual development, of the universal



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truth that lay behind the particular and the personal. He strove to transmit his ideas and the true meaning of the word “Nature” in all that he wrote.

Each of Thoreau’s works reflected a self-proclaimed, deep idea of self-discovery and self-knowing. He was someone who organized his life to have a harmonious contact with nature. He knew how to penetrate into the heart of Nature, and the most useful thing he learned was how to live without luxuries and commodities so far from a society where most people lived by what they imagined to be true or what others said was true. He wanted constant, intense contact with reality. Thoreau was also one of the first American supporters of Darwin’s theory of Evolution. In fact, most of his ideas and beliefs had a close relation with that theory.



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Thoreau put into his writings all his power physical, intellectual, and spiritual. He was a versatile writer, capable of expressing stark reality in strong language. His works are characterized both by directness of style and by the suggestion of a real and deep life. Moreover, all of his works have something special; not one of them is boring. On the contrary, all of them catch the attention of the reader. He used effectively a variety of techniques, like paradox, exaggeration, and irony.

Writing like Thoreau is a difficult task because his philosophy is not common and his mind has little relation with ours. Besides, he was able to use his personal experience, wide and deep reading, imagination, originality, a strong vocabulary, a fascinating facility for manipulating words, and an aptitude for the figurative (simile, metaphor, allegory). Phrases like "A man is rich in proportion to the



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number of things which he can afford to let alone,”¹ “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,”² and “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth”³ reflect his philosophy, his thoughts made Thoreau become not only a poet but an interesting and wise man who achieved a huge impact on the people within the society.

Without a doubt, Thoreau and his way of writing had a close relationship with his ideas and principles, in other words, with his “philosophy”. When we write this word we refer to the sum of beliefs that governed Thoreau’s life and mind. Obviously, talking about philosophy is little complicated, since it deals with doctrines and thoughts that must be analyzed carefully.

Thoreau was a philosopher of nature and its relation to the human condition. In his early years, he accepted the

¹ Willey, Basil. Walden. New York, chapter 2, p. 97

² Op.cit., chapter 1, p. 22

³ Op. cit., chapter 18, p. 351

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ideas of Transcendentalism, which began as a radical movement supported by Unitarians opposed to the rationalists. His close friends Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Bronson Alcott were leaders in the movement. Among their core beliefs was an ideal spirituality that “transcends the physical and empirical and is only realized through the individual’s intuition, rather than through the doctrines of established religions.”⁴

His philosophy can be represented by two epochal events: His two years of experimental life in nature at Walden Pond, and a night in jail for refusing to pay his taxes. His literary masterpiece, Walden, shows his unique perspective on nature, man, perception, and culture; the latter experience gave birth to “Civil Disobedience,” his work on political philosophy. At first glance, “Walden” and “Civil Disobedience” seem as if they were written by two different people: one who wants to escape human society, including

⁴ http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Henry_David_Thoreau “Transcendentalism,” p. 2



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its political strife, and one who thinks deeply about political issues and takes strong political stands. But these two are the same man. Thoreau was a friend, and in some sense a disciple, of Emerson, who said that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."⁵ Thoreau certainly took these words to heart. Even more than most writers in the nonviolent tradition, he made no effort at systematic philosophy. He did not try to fit his thoughts into a single intellectual framework that stayed the same over the years. He wrote whatever he was inspired to write at the moment. Therefore, his ideas were always changing. So it is inappropriate to classify him into any category of traditional schools of thought. He did not hold common views, such as Christianity and a modern dualistic framework of thought, with other transcendentalists. Although Thoreau

⁵ <http://quotesnack.com/ralph-waldo-emerson/a-foolish-consistency-is-the-hobgoblin-of-little-minds-ralph-waldo-emerson/>



acknowledged himself as a member of this group, his thought was unique.

In addition to the literature of the Classics and Romanticism, Thoreau was familiar with a wide range of philosophical works, ranging from Greek and Roman antiquity, including Plato and Platonism, to the Modern philosophies of Descartes, Locke, Kant, and Cambridge Platonism, to mysticism and to contemporaries such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. His interests went far beyond the intellectual traditions of the West. He was one of the few philosophers who recognized the rich wisdom of ancient Indian and Chinese thought.

Thoreau was also a unique writer because he did not present his thoughts in a clear conceptual form. He did not present his thought by developing arguments against the existing philosophical traditions. Instead, he developed his



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thought through direct encounters with nature, and embedded his insights within literary prose. His theory of knowledge, perspective of nature and human life, the meaning of work, and the relationship between culture and nature were later critiqued by phenomenology, pragmatism, and environmental philosophy in the twentieth century. From a contemporary perspective, his philosophy can be seen as a challenge to modernity and its presuppositions, including the myth of progress; domination of mass consumption cultures; life within nature, which was for him the imminent place of deity. His experiences with nature were at the same time spiritual experiences.

Thoreau understood nature as a direct manifestation of deity and spirituality. He tried to listen to the language all things and all events speak and to see God in nature. He rejected the modern framework of subject-object in perception, which distorts and limits the diverse richness of



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human experience. Perception for him was a holistic experience that captures what the living earth discloses. Smells, tastes, textures, beauty, liveliness, and all imaginable senses are involved in his idea of "perception." Through his observation of the intricate details of life in nature, Thoreau came to understand the rich and delicate interdependent existence of beings.

One important thing is that perception for Thoreau was not a mechanical interaction between cognitive subject and an object of cognition, as modern epistemology supposed. Perception was more like a realization, discovered by immersing oneself in nature. When Thoreau tried to enrich his experience, he realized that experience was highly subjective and colored by perspective. Nature exhibited its beauty to the extent to which he was attuned to it. Sensitivity to beauty was for Thoreau a moral test. The spiritual, the divine, the moral, and the beautiful all merged



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in his experience with nature. Nature was for him truly a living cathedral where human spirituality was cultivated without separating the aesthetic and the sensual.

For Thoreau, the human mind is the access to infinite reality. He urged everyone to make their mind a temple, consecrated to the service of the gods. Mind is the way to the absolute. This led Thoreau to a principle that was absolutely crucial for him: since every person's mind is different, every person has his own unique route to the absolute. Everyone has his own unique way to fit into the divine plan. So he urged everyone to dig always deeper toward the truth. Thoreau made this notion the center of his philosophy. If each person's way to truth is different, then each person's path in life must be unique. The goal of life is to discover and fulfill one's own destiny, not to accept it. The only way to discover the truth of reality is to follow one's own conscience.

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The great evil of human life is conformity to the beliefs, values, and behaviors of others. Thoreau added economic to political analysis. He lived at a time when industrialization and the new market economy were changing every aspect of life. His main complaint was that the dominance of marketplace thinking reduced all individual freedom to the economic terms of free enterprise, the freedom to produce, sell, and buy goods. Therefore people no longer understood the real meaning of human freedom. People were fascinated by the rapid advances in technology and the freedom it seemed to open up. But their lives were being narrowed to fit the confines of what technology allowed and demanded.

Finally, Thoreau has become the prophet of wilderness for modern environmentalists, who have adopted as a motto his assertion that *in wildness is the preservation of the*



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World. His transcendental philosophy of simplicity and “small is beautiful” teaches us to reject conformity, and to be a special and unique man, to see nature as the center of life, and, above all, to achieve a harmonious contact with our spirit.

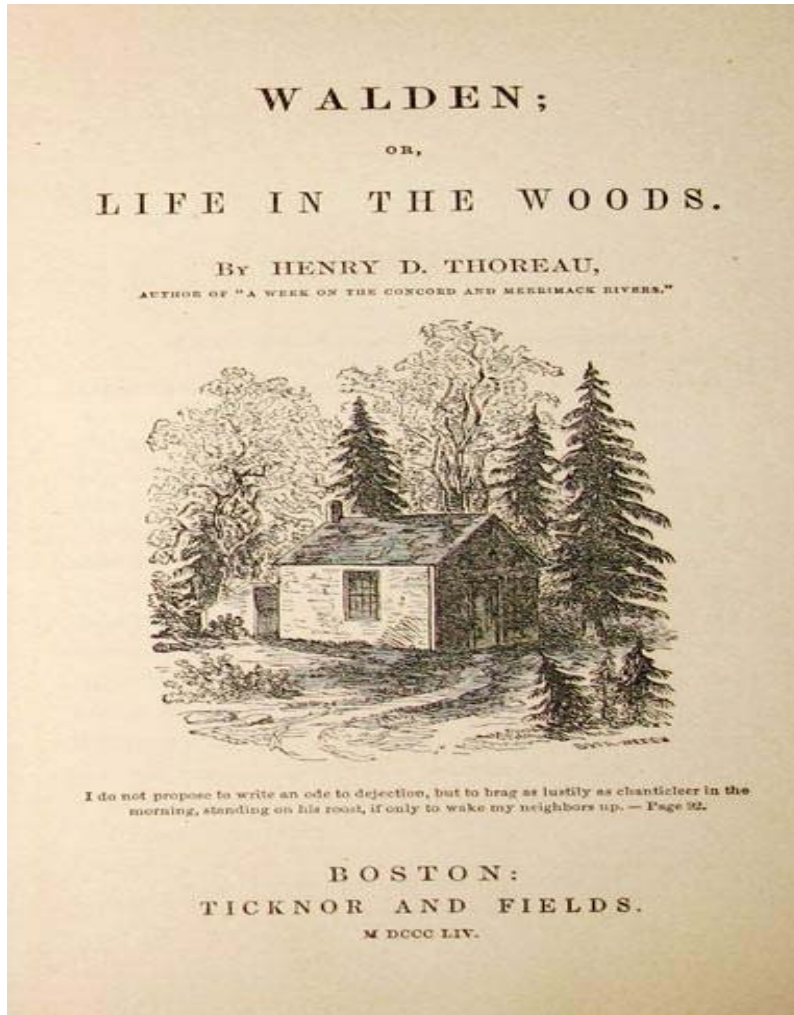
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CHAPTER Nº 2

THOREAU AS AN ARTIST





2.1. WALDEN

2.1.1 INTRODUCTION



Walden begins with the narrator, who informs his audience that this book was written to answer the questions that arose when he lived during two years at Walden Pond. Thoreau wanted to explain how he enjoyed his rich life there, and at the same time, he presented us the example of his own life. While living at the pond, Thoreau had the opportunity to view society from outside, and he realized that in contrast to his happiness,

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most men lived in desperate ways. Thoreau liked to live his life simply and close to nature. From the pond, Thoreau could see other men wasting their lives by chasing after wealth and social status. Then Thoreau concluded that a modern man was obsessed with material gain and had no time to be anything but a machine. Henry Thoreau felt sad because he said that even farming had lost its noble character and had become simply another weak and dehumanizing way to accumulate wealth and property.

“We need the tonic of wildness,”⁶ said Thoreau. “We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some life pasturing freely where we never wander.”⁷ He wanted to avoid almost all ordinary human contacts and seek the Holy Land in the woods of Concord, Massachusetts.

Walden records his central experiment in living: his two years’ solitary existence in a cabin made by himself on the

⁶ Willey, Basil. *Op. cit.* introduction, p. 9

⁷ *Ibid*



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shore of Walden Pond. The book remains one of the classics of American literature. It is not a revolutionary book. Thoreau’s ideas and values can be and generally are respected, even revered, and then ignored. This is because the human race, while doing evil, has always honored good.

Thoreau was an American of only the second generation; he was not deeply rooted in the New England past. The Americanism of Thoreau was of a different kind: Thoreau was a child of light and a son of the morning. Thoreau was fortunate in living in a country where space was practically infinite, and at a time when there was still a possibility of escape from artificial things.

What Thoreau rejected was the debased “Christianity” of his time. For him, Christianity meant precisely those precepts which “Christian” Mammonism has agreed to forget. Thoreau wanted to prove that, “a man is rich in



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proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone,” and at Walden he proved to his own satisfaction that he could support himself with a minimum of expenses. He had seen all his fellow-creatures spending their lives in laborious efforts to support life, exalting the money-getting activities into virtues and duties, and forgetting to live the lives they work hard to maintain. Henry Thoreau had no sophisticated ambitions at all; he never contemplated marriage, and he did not care for the commonest luxuries. The only commodity he cared to earn was leisure to be busy in his own way.

Thoreau’s way of life was neither Christian nor economic. Emerson described his life as one long mission for edelweiss (a small plant with white woolly leaves), a symbol of a snowy and inviolate purity. Nature, in the mid-nineteenth century, was both a refuge and a strength for such as he; it was the appointed alternative and antidote to



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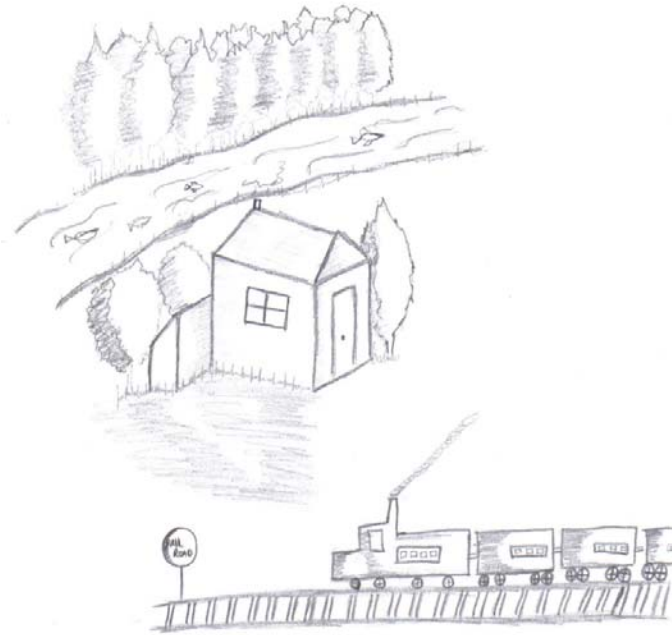
a petrified “churchianity.” Thoreau said that he loved the wild not less than the good... He liked sometimes to take rank hold on life and spend his day more as the animals do.

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2.1.1. ECONOMY



This is the first chapter of *Walden*; here Thoreau began by telling his readers that he was writing to answer why he had chosen to live alone for two years and two months in a cabin that he had built near Walden Pond. He also explained that his book was written in the first person because he was able to tell his own experiences, since for him it was difficult to explain others' ones.

He wanted to inform about his peaceful and happy life in contact with nature, and at the same time he hoped to

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explain what he could observe around him. While he was living at Walden, he had a quiet and passive life. He had the opportunity to see the society from outside and realized that his situation was different than that of most of the people, who spent all their time and energy working to acquire luxuries. They did not pay attention to human happiness. Thoreau thought that it was better to have time to walk in nature, think about beautiful things, and breathe pure air, instead of working long hours to pay for big houses, luxurious cars, or properties. He could notice that men were enslaved by their “needs”; men did not work by passion; they worked because they needed huge amounts of money to pay for their costly desires.

According to Thoreau, men should try to achieve a change in their lives; they should look for a new road in order to achieve their goals. The best way to acquire things is by changing the old and obsolete ideas about life. An

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intelligent man was he who had the capacity to walk on the unknown road without worrying about danger. Taking risks at all moments is positive because it helps us to face any circumstance, so mankind should think and choose the best road in life.

Moreover, Thoreau suggested that men should focus only on their basic needs. The most important thing for Thoreau was to have enough food, clothing, shelter, and fuel to exist. A happy man did not have a lot of things; he had peace and health in his body. For him luxuries were unnecessary in life because they were obstacles to grow as humans. When people had too many things around them, they could not leave behind their terrible materialism; in short, for Thoreau life did not require wealth but commodities for soul and body.



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Everybody had the right to have a worthy life, with enough possibilities to live it out, but the problem was that everybody wanted more and more. People did not know the meaning of “enough”; for this reason they wanted to accumulate huge amounts of things, and they became ambitious.

For Thoreau, sometimes society did not permit men to live according to their own principles and ideas. It gave a style of life where men had to work so hard, like machines, in order to get an artificial happiness. On the other hand, nature allowed men to live in a free way, according to their ideas and beliefs; for this reason Thoreau wanted to share his life with the woods, because in that place he felt free, without the necessity to follow any style of life, since he was the owner of his life.



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Thoreau was a man who loved nature. He felt comfortable when he was in contact with it. For him it was better to live with animals and plants than within a society, which required too many efforts to accomplish a position and feel a serviceable person. Nature was a place where you could find yourself and analyze your soul. For Thoreau, nature was like his best friend because it helped him to grow up as a human, with a great heart and a powerful brain. In contrast, society tried to create humans with big hands and foolish brains in order to work and get a lot of money. In that society men are called machines.

In the middle of this chapter, Thoreau gave a description of his cabin. He told about the different activities that he used to do and what he could observe in nature. About his home, he said that it was small, built by himself, and located a mile off from civilization; behind it there was a river where he used to catch fish, and nearby there was a



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railway where people used to travel. In that place there were some hills and a lot of trees. He used to spend his time watching nature; sometimes he forgot the hours or the days of the week. The best activities for him were reading books and admiring nature. Through his observations he could realize that around him there was a different and new world, where everybody worked to live. In this world there was no ambition, egoism, power, or excess of luxury. This world was perfect because all men worked enough, but not too much. In this place all were equal and nobody had a different status.

Finally, Thoreau advised his readers that they must respect and love their life, since it was planned by each individual. Thoreau thought each person made a map of his life, although sometimes men drew an incomplete or complicated map. Most of the time people forgot that money was necessary but not indispensable. The best things did



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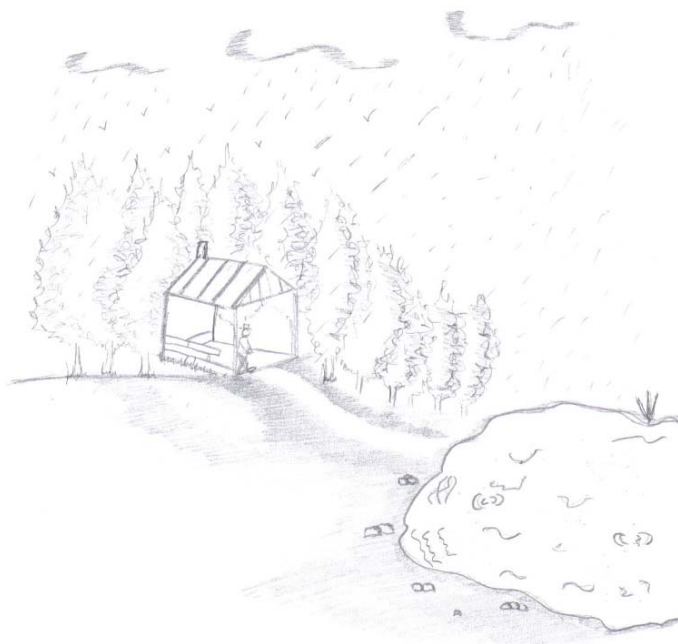
not have monetary value; they could be achieved with intelligence and sobriety. Each individual was able to discover the meaning of life by himself.

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2.1.2. WHERE I LIVED, AND WHAT I LIVED FOR



In this chapter Thoreau talked about the places where he lived, and he said, “Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the landscape radiated from me accordingly.”⁸ He discovered that a site for a house must not be soon improved. “A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone,”⁹ he said. He never got his fingers burned by his possessions. He felt that he came to his actual possessions when he began to

⁸ *Op. cit.* chapter 2, p. 97

⁹ *Op. cit.* chapter 2, p. 100



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categorize his seeds, and collected materials with which he made a wheelbarrow. All that he could say about farming was that he had had his seeds ready. Many think that seeds improve with age. He had no doubt that time discriminates between the good and the bad. He would say to his fellows, once and for all, as long as possible live free and uncommitted.

When he first built his abode in the woods, which was on Independence Day, his house was not finished for winter, but was only a defense against the rain, the walls being of rough boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The only house he had been the owner of before, except a boat, was a tent, which he used occasionally when he made excursions in the summer; but the boat, after passing from hand to hand, has gone down the stream of time. With this more substantial shelter about him, he had made some progress toward settling in the world. He did not need to go outdoors to take the air. The Harivansa says,

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“An abode without birds is like meat without seasoning.”¹⁰

“Such was not my abode, for I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them”¹¹ said Thoreau. He was not only nearer to some of those which commonly frequented the garden, but to those wilder ones of the forest.

In that place there was a lake, which was of most value as a neighbor in the intervals of a gentle rain-storm in August. “There are none happy in the world but beings who enjoy freely a vast horizon,”¹² Damodara, when his herds required new and larger pastures. Both time and place were changed, and Thoreau dwelt nearer to those parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most attracted him. Where he lived was as far off as many a region viewed by astronomers. He discovered that his house actually had its site in such a quiet, but forever new

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, chapter 2, p. 103

¹² *Op. cit.*, chapter 2, p. 104

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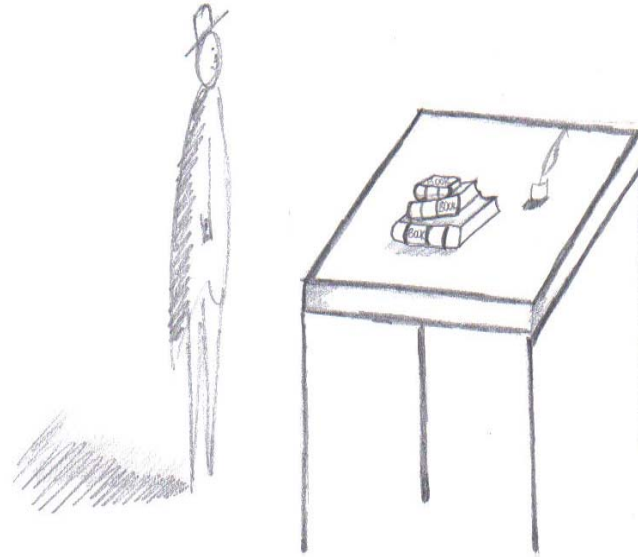
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and unprofaned, part of the universe. He got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which he did. The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. The man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way. The Vedas say, “All intelligences awake with the morning.”¹³ Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions of men, date from such an hour. He said that morning is when he is awake and there is a dawn in him. Then millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual effort. To be awake is to be alive.

¹³ Op. cit., chapter 4, p. 129



2.1.3. READING



In this chapter Thoreau wrote about the importance that man must give to reading; for him great books were treasures that men should not forget because they were important and rewarding and had passed from generation to generation. As Thoreau spent some part of his time reading, he could realize the value of literature in spiritual growth.

According to Thoreau there were different kinds of readings; some of them were easy to understand, others

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were more or less complicated, and there were many which were impossible to analyze because of their old and incomprehensible language. Thoreau thought it was important to have an idea about the classical languages in order to recognize great works. Only the famous poets could read and understand their own works; for this reason the majority of these books had been read superficially, without a deep analysis.

Thoreau concludes the chapter by inviting society to a new and renewed world, dedicated not only to trade or agriculture, but to a deep and interesting human culture. Society should be a group of people who, by means of, reading can discover the real significance of life and become noble humans.



2.1.4. SOUNDS



After telling us about the importance of reading books, Thoreau introduced a paradox in this chapter because he also wanted to mention the importance of hearing nature.

We are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor. Much is published, but little printed. Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity. He did not read books the first summer; he weeded beans. He often did better than this. Sometimes, on a summer morning, having taken

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his accustomed bath, he sat in his sunny doorway from sunrise till noon. For the most part, he minded not how the hours went. The day advanced as if to light some work of him; it was morning, and look, now it is evening, and nothing memorable is accomplished. Instead of singing like the birds, he silently smiled at his incessant good fortune. His days were not days of the week, bearing the stamp of any heathen deity. A man must find his occasions in himself, it is true. The natural day is very calm, and will hardly reprove his indolence. “I had this advantage, at least, in my mode of life, over those who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society, and the theatre, that my life itself had become my amusement and never ceased to be novel,”¹⁴ said Thoreau. “If we were always, indeed, getting our living, and regulating our lives according to the last and best mode we had learned, we should never be troubled with boredom.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Op. cit. chapter 4, p. 137



“I confess that practically speaking, when I have learned a man’s real disposition, I have no hopes of changing it for the better or worse in this state of existence.”¹⁶ He said that the echo is, to some extent, an original sound, and there is the magic and charm of it. In the evening, the distant lowing of some cow on the horizon beyond the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first he would mistake it for the voices of certain medieval singers by whom he was sometimes serenaded. He was also serenaded by a hooting owl. He rejoiced that there were owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for me. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized.

¹⁶ Op. cit. chapter 5, p. 153



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Late in the evening he heard the distant rumbling of wagons over bridges, the baying of dogs, and sometimes the lowing of some disconsolate cow in a distant barn. He was not sure that he had ever heard the sound of cock-crowing from his clearing. If certain kinds of birds could be naturalized without being domesticated, it would soon become the most famous sound in our woods, surpassing the ringing of the goose and the hooting of the owl; and then imagine the cackling of the hens to fill the pauses when their lords' rested. All climates agree with Chanticleer. He is more indigenous even than the natives. His health is ever good, his lungs are sound, and his spirits never flag. Even the sailor of the Atlantic and Pacific is awakened by his voice. Thoreau kept neither dog, cat, cow, pig, nor hens; so that you might have said there was a deficiency of domestic sounds.



2.1.5. SOLITUDE



Without a doubt solitude was one of the main characteristics in Thoreau's life; for this reason it was chosen as the title for this chapter. When he was living at Walden Pond he could experience a relaxed and comfortable environment, enriched by the sounds of the animals in the woods and the wind in the trees.

In one part, he described the feelings and emotions that nature had produced in him. He felt good when he



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listened to the sounds of the frogs, the rustling leaves, and the cool and pure breeze.

As Thoreau’s cabin was located about a mile off from the town, he rarely saw other humans, but when that happened a lot of thoughts came to his mind, and he remembered the pleasures that good friendship offered him.

Thoreau realized that nature showed the most tender sweet society to men. Although he was living alone in his cabin, he never felt more alone than the sun in the sky or the grass on the ground. He discovered that he was not alone; he was accompanied by nature. When he thought he needed the company of other men, he deduced that people were connected not by physical distance but by the strong and powerful connection of their spirits.



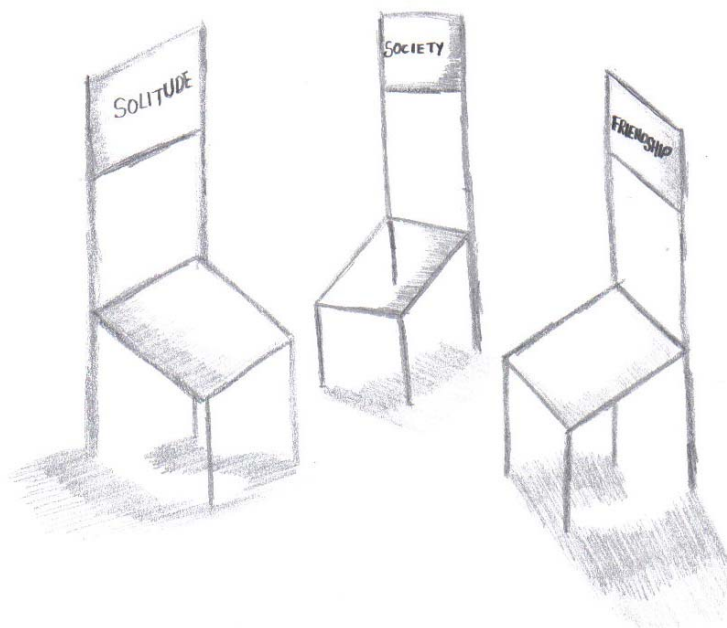
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Thoreau used some comparisons to explain why he was not alone. He said that he was not more alone than the loon on the pond that laughed so loudly, or than Walden Pond itself. The sun was alone, except in thick weather when there sometimes appeared to be two, but the one was a mock sun. God was alone, the devil was not; the devil was among a great deal of company.

Finally, Thoreau explained that solitude was a wonderful state in his life, because it gave him the opportunity to have contact with his interior, and he could achieve a better style of life. Even though Thoreau lived far from the company of men, he lived happily, without complaint. Nature was everything for him, with only the company of solitude. He thought that a person could be alone even if he was among people, or even if he was occupied.



2.1.6. VISITORS



Thoreau said that he loved society as much as most. He was naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if his business called him thither. Thoreau had three chairs in his house; the first one for solitude, the second one for friendship, and the third one for society. The last chair was used for visitors who came in large and unexpected numbers. It is surprising how many great men and women a small house will contain. Thoreau said that some public and private houses have innumerable apartments, and they appeared to him

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extravagantly large for their inhabitants. Huge houses are so vast, although in some cases the families which live there are small in number, and they do not need a lot of space. Sometimes they have these big houses just for appearance. In some situations these houses have a lot of rooms which most of the time are not occupied.

But Thoreau experienced one inconvenience of having a small house. When he began to utter big thoughts in big words with a guest, he experienced the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from his visitor. Thoreau said that individuals, like nations, must have suitable broad and natural boundaries between them. If we are purely loquacious and loud talkers, then we can afford to stand very near together and feel each other's breath; but if we speak reservedly and thoughtfully, we want to be farther apart, so that all animal heat and wetness may have a chance to evaporate. Thoreau's best room, which was



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always ready for company and on whose carpet the sun rarely fell, was the pine wood behind his house. In summer days, when distinguished guests came to his house, he took them to that place. When only one guest came he shared his scarce meal, and it was no interruption to conversation. But if twenty came and sat in his house there was nothing to say about dinner. He could entertain thus a thousand as well as twenty.

When Winslow went with a companion on a visit of ceremony to Massasoit on foot through the woods, and arrived tired and hungry at his cottage, they were well received by the king, but nothing was said about eating that day. The next day, at one o'clock Massasoit brought two fish. They boiled them, and then they shared that food between them. The Indians had nothing to eat themselves, and they were wiser than to think that apologies could supply the place of food to their guests. Thoreau had more



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visitors while he lived in the woods than at any other period of his life; he meant that he had some.

One of Thoreau's favorite visitors was a Canadian woodchopper and post-maker, who could hole fifty posts in a day. Henry David Thoreau delighted in the company of the woodchopper because of his simple and honest personality. Henry said, "A more simple and natural man it would be hard to find."¹⁷ Vice and disease had hardly any existence for him. He was a young man only twenty-eight years old, and he had left Canada and his father's house to work in the States and earn money to buy a farm in his native country. Then Thoreau continued with a long description of the woodchopper; and according to that Thoreau thought that the woodchopper led a perfect life because he rose early, he was free from anxiety, and he was liberated from economic labor because he lived on the

¹⁷ Op. cit. chapter 6, p. 163



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level of mere subsistence, close to nature. Thoreau said that the woodchopper was such a natural person that birds perched on his shoulders as he ate his lunch. Thoreau also said that he was a skillful chopper who interested him because he was so quiet, solitary, and happy. When Thoreau sometimes saw him at his work in the woods, the woodchopper greeted him with a laugh of inexpressible satisfaction. For Henry Thoreau, the woodchopper had an exuberance of animal spirits, and in him the animal man, chiefly, was developed. Once Thoreau asked him if he was not sometimes tired at night, after working all day; and he answered, “Gorrapit, I never was tired in my life.”¹⁸ He did enjoy his job. Thoreau was ready to declare him the ideal man, but then he noted a substantial defect in the woodchopper; he was pleased in nature, but pleased mainly in the sense that a well-fed ox is. The intellectual and what is called “spiritual” man in him were slumbering as

¹⁸ Op. cit. chapter 6, p. 165



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in an infant. Thoreau sometimes saw in the woodchopper a man whom he had not seen before, and he did not know whether he was as wise as Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him of a fine poetic consciousness or of stupidity.

Thoreau also tells us that on many occasions some travelers came out of their way to see him and the inside of his house, and, as an excuse for calling, they asked for a glass of water. He told them that he drank at the pond, and Thoreau pointed in that direction, offering to lend them a dipper. Thoreau was not exempted from annual visitations, which occurred about the first of April. There were some curious specimens among the visitors. The people who came to see him were half-witted men from the poor house and elsewhere. He tried to make them exercise all the wit they had, and make their confession to him. Thoreau said that with respect to wit, he learned that there was not much



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difference between the half and the whole. One day, an inoffensive poor person visited Thoreau and expressed a wish to live as he did. That poor man told Thoreau that he was deficient of intellect. He said that he never had much mind. He was not like other children. He was weak in the head. His conclusion was that it could be the Lord's will.

Henry David Thoreau could notice some of the peculiarities of his visitors. Girls, boys, and young women generally seemed to be glad in the woods. They looked in the pond and at the flowers, and improved their time. Then Thoreau mentioned that men of business, even farmers, thought only of solitude and employment. He said that their time was all taken up because they spent their time getting a living or keeping it. Thoreau concluded by saying, “If a man is alive, there is always danger that he may die, though the danger must be allowed to be less in proportion as he is



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dead-and-alive to begin with.”¹⁹ Finally, he said that he did not fear the hen-barriers because he kept no chickens; but he feared the men-barriers, rather.

2.1.7. THE BEAN FIELD



This is the seventh chapter of Walden; here Thoreau described his bean field and the experience he could acquire through it. At Walden Pond Thoreau dedicated part of his time to his bean field, which had seven square miles of bean plants. There were a lot of rows of beans growing in

¹⁹ Op. cit. chapter 6, p. 171



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his field. Thoreau’s main labor during the summer was to tend his crop. His auxiliaries were the dews and rains which watered the dry soil. His enemies were worms, cool days, and, most of all, woodchucks.

When Thoreau was four years old, he remembered he was brought from Boston to Concord, his native town, through those woods; and from that field, to the pond. This was one of the oldest scenes stamped in his memory. Thoreau could realize that the landscapes were almost the same many years after, with trees older than him; although it was changing for the future generations.

Thoreau’s daily work was to remove the weeds from his field, put fresh soil around the bean stems, and help plants which he had sown, making the yellow soil express itself in summer through bean leaves and blossoms rather than wormwood, pepper, and millet grass; to make the



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earth produce beans instead of weeds. He became much more intimate with his beans than a common farmer because he had little help from horses or cattle, hired men or boys, or from implements of husbandry.

Travelers who looked at Thoreau’s crops used to say “beans so late,” “peas so late”²⁰ his bean field was the point of attention for everybody. In this part Thoreau made a comparison between his cultivated field and the different kinds of civilizations that existed. For him a civilization with values was similar to a field with good crops.

Thoreau woke up at 5 o’clock to tend his beans; he spent his time on that labor until noon, and during the rest of the day he took care of other affairs. He wanted to achieve a close relationship between his beans and himself. He spent each morning trying to finish off his enemies, the

²⁰ Op. cit. chapter 7, p. 176



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woodchucks and the weeds, which did not permit the growth of his beans.

For Thoreau the earth was like a camp of power that attracted the salt and the virtue; that powerful place could offer the most important gift, “life.” According to Thoreau men should work to achieve good results; the earth could produce many things if man worked hard on it.

In the middle of this chapter Thoreau presented a list that included his outgoes and income. Through this list he could ascertain how much money he had spent and how much money he had earned with his crop. This list was very useful to him, because it helped him to discover that his income was not lower than his outgo.

Thoreau kept an eye out for woodchucks, since they would usually nibble the earliest tender leaves almost clean,



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when they passed by. He learned that seeds would grow in whatever soil. He said that if we used the correct soil to plant seeds, we would have excellent results.

According to Thoreau each generation was very sure to plant corn and beans each new year, precisely as the Indians did centuries ago and taught the first settlers to do it, as if there were a fate in it. Once he saw an old man making holes with a hoe for the seventieth time, at least, not for himself to lie down in, but in order to plant a lot of beans.

Most of the time people forget the benefits that the sun gives to our cultivated fields, prairies, and forests. Nature absorbs the sun's rays and forms a glorious and fascinating picture, where man spends his life every day. In this context all the earth is cultivated like a beautiful garden. So we should receive the benefit and heat of light with a corresponding trust and gratefulness.



The true farmer would cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifested no concern about whether the woods would bear chestnuts this year or not, and finish the labor of every day.

As a conclusion, through the bean field Thoreau could have a close and prolonged contact with nature. Moreover, he learned that the most important thing of all was to enjoy work without worrying about money or power; for this reason he criticized those farmers who used the soil only for financial gain, instead of considering the possibility to try new things and achieve a real contact with nature.



2.1.8. THE VILLAGE



Thoreau begins this chapter by telling us that after hoeing, reading, or writing, he usually bathed in the pond, and washed the dust of labor from his person, or smoothed out the last wrinkle, and for the afternoon was absolutely free. Every day or two Thoreau walked to the village to hear some of the gossip which was going on there; it could be mouth to mouth, or from newspaper to newspaper. On the other horizon of Thoreau's house, there was a village of busy men, who ran over to each others' houses to gossip. He went there frequently to observe their habits. The village



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was like a great news room for him; and on one side, they kept nuts and raisins, or salt and meal and other groceries. These are the mills, in which all gossip is first rudely digested before it is emptied into finer and more delicate hoppers within doors. While Henry was observing their habits, he could notice that the vitals of the village were the grocery, the bar-room, the post office, and the bank; and as a necessary part of the machinery, they kept a bell, a big gun, and a fire engine, at convenient places; and the houses were so arranged in lines fronting one another, that every traveler had to suffer criticism or attack from all sides, and every man, woman, and child might have a lick at him. The people who were located nearest to the head of the line paid the higher prices for their places; and the inhabitants on the outskirts paid a very slight ground or window tax.



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Sometimes, Thoreau escaped suddenly, and nobody could tell his location. He was accustomed to make an irruption into some houses, where he was well entertained, and after learning the most important parts and very last sifted news, he was allowed to leave through the rear avenues, and so escaped to the woods again. It was very pleasant for him, when he had to stay late in town. It is darker in the woods, even on common nights. He frequently had to look up at the opening between the trees above the path in order to learn his route. Sometimes, when his feet had felt the path which his eyes could not see, he had not been able to recall a single step of his walk, and he had thought that his body would find its way home if its master should abandon it, as the hand finds its way to the mouth without assistance.

There were several times when a visitor wanted to stay into the evening, and it proved a dark night. Thoreau was



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obliged to conduct him to the back of the house, and then point out to him the direction he was to follow, and he had to be guided rather by his feet than his eyes. An example was when Henry Thoreau had to direct two young men who had been fishing in the pond. It was a very dark night. They lived about a mile off through the woods. Thoreau said, “It is a surprising and memorable, as well as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time.”²¹

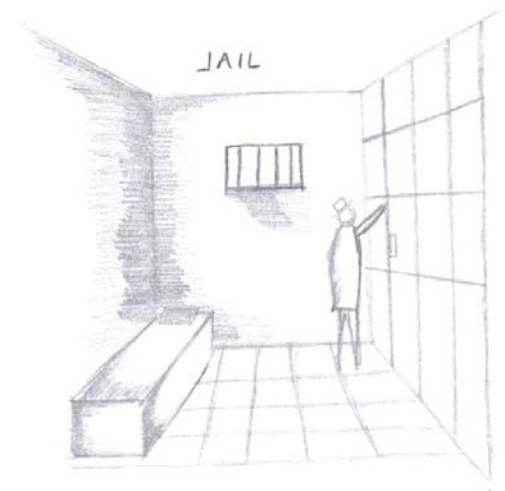
One afternoon, near the end of the first summer, when Thoreau went to the village, he was put into jail because he refused to pay taxes, or recognize the authority. He was going to the woods for other purposes. He was angry about that. He said that he preferred that society should run against him, and not that he run against society. However, he was released the next day and returned to the woods to

²¹ *Op. cit.*, chapter 8, p. 189



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get his dinner. He said, “I was never molested by any person but those who represented the State.”²²



He never locked the doors of his house, night or day, even when he was absent several days, not even when he spent two weeks in the woods of Maine; and yet his house was more respected than if it had been surrounded by a row of soldiers. He never suffered when many people of every class came to the pond, and he never missed anything but one small book, a volume of Homer. Thoreau

²² Op. cit. chapter 8, p. 190-191



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said, “I am convinced, that if all men were to live as simply as I did, thieving and robbery would be unknown.”²³

Thoreau ends this chapter with an important paragraph which goes like this:

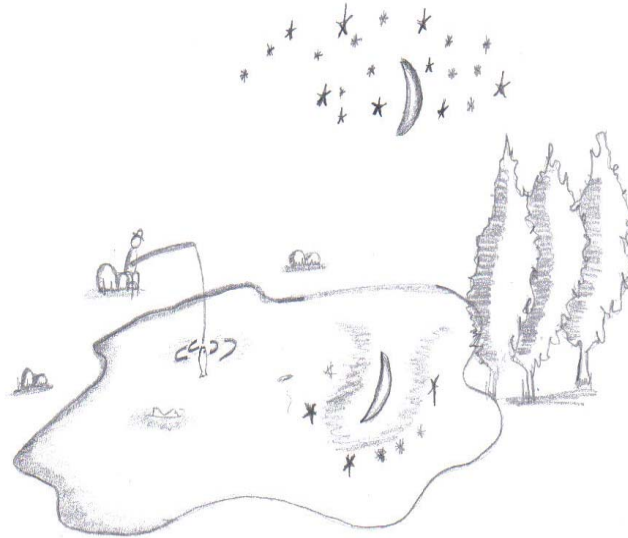
“You who govern public affairs, what need have you to employ punishments? Love virtue, and the people will be virtuous. The virtues of a superior man are like the wind; the virtues of a common man are like the grass; the grass, when the wind passes over it, bends.”²⁴

²³ Op. cit. chapter 8, p. 191

²⁴ Ibid



2.1.9. THE PONDS



When Thoreau was tired of people, he spent most of his time rambling westward to unfrequented parts of the country. He climbed Fair Haven Hill and enjoyed the ambrosial flavors of ripe huckleberries and blueberries. The only way to taste huckleberries was by picking and eating them; unfortunately, those that were sold in Boston had lost their true taste.

Sometimes, after his hoeing was done for the day, Thoreau went to the pond to fish. Usually, he met an



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important companion, who had been fishing in the pond since morning and he also enjoyed it.

There was one older man, an excellent fisher and skilled in all kinds of woodcraft, who was pleased to look upon his home. Thoreau was also pleased when that man sat in his doorway to arrange his lines. Once in a while they sat together on the pond, the older man at the opposite end of the boat, but they did not talk, since the man had lost his hearing. Often the man hummed a psalm, which pleased Thoreau more than a conversation.

On warm evenings, Thoreau used to sit in his boat and play the flute, while the perch swam nearby and the moon shone overhead. In the past, he had gone to the pond adventurously on dark summer days with a companion, and made a fire close to the water's bank, to attract fish. They caught pouts with a bunch of worms braced on a thread.



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Sometimes, after staying in the village, Thoreau returned to the woods and, with a view to the next day's dinner, spent the hours until midnight fishing from a boat by moonlight, and listening to owls and foxes. He heard the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. Those experiences were very memorable and valuable to him.

The landscape of Walden was humble but beautiful. The pond was so unusual for its depth and purity, as to merit a particular description. The water of that pond was clear and deep green. The pond was half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contained about sixty-one and a half acres. The water was so clear that people could see to the bottom at twenty five or thirty feet and watch schools of perch and shiners. The surrounding hills were forty to eighty feet high in the southeast and one hundred and fifty feet high in the east.



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All water in Concord had two colors at least; one when viewed at a distance, which depended more on the light and reflected the sky; and another, more proper, close at hand. The color of the water in the ponds changed in relation to the weather. So in the summer they appeared blue at a little distance, and at a great distance all appeared similar; and in stormy weather they were sometimes dark slate-color. Walden was blue at one time and green at another; it combined the sky and earth, though the green could be a combination of the blue sky and yellow sand. In the spring, when the ice had begun to melt, the water was even bluer than the sky.

The water in Concord River looked black or dark brown, like that of most of the ponds. It gave a swimmer and yellowish tint, but the water of Walden was so pure that it gave the swimmer's body an alabaster glow.



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The shore of the pond was surrounded by rounded white stones except for a couple of beaches. There was no mud or weeds, except where nearby meadow streams flowed. There was sand on the bottom and a little sediment of leaves that blew into the lake. Thoreau was acquainted with most of the ponds within a dozen miles, but no pond was as pure and beautiful as Walden, which he supposed was already in existence when Adam and Eve were banished from Eden.

The height of the pond had changed through time; when Thoreau wrote in the summer of 1852 it was five feet higher than when he lived there, and the same height that it was thirty years before. Thoreau realized that when the water was high, many shrubs and trees which had grown around the edges were killed, clearing the shore, which was the property not of the trees but of the pond.



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Next to Thoreau’s house, on the side of the pond, a row of pitch pines, fifteen feet high, had been cut and toppled. Their size indicated how many years had elapsed since the pond last rose to that height.

The pond was called Walden because the townsmen had heard the name from a tradition. The oldest people told Thoreau that they heard it in their youth, that many years ago the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill where the lake is now, during which they used much profanity. While the Indians were engaged the hill shook, it suddenly sank. Only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and after her the pond was named. There was another story that Thoreau had heard about an ancient traveler who came with his diving rod and dug a well that became the pond.



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The pond was Thoreau's well. Walden had the best and coldest water in town. There was also spring water that tasted delicious even when left for a long time. The temperature of the pond was 65° or 70° most of the time, and in the summer Walden never became warm.

Although Walden was not a great place for fishing, Thoreau remembered the different kinds of fish and animals that lived there, like shiners, eels, trout, at least three different kinds of pickerel, frogs, tortoises, mussels, muskrats, ducks, geese, and white-bellied swallows. According to Thoreau the fish from Walden were cleaner, handsomer, and firmer-fleshed than those in the rivers and most other ponds, because of the water. Walden had round piles of stones sunk in the pond, but Thoreau could not guess their origin.



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In September or October, Walden was a perfect mirror, set round with stones, not as large as a lake. It was a mirror without any impurity. The water was pure and clear, and the surface was completely calm. By November, the surface reflected somber colors because of the water with some schools of perch swimming.

One day Thoreau met an old man, who had used to come to that pond sixty years before when it was dark with surrounding forests. He told him that in those days he saw it all alive with ducks and other water-fowl, and that there were many eagles on it. He came to the pond to fish, and used a long canoe, which he found on the shore. He did not know whose it was, so he thought that maybe it belonged to the pond.

The old man told Thoreau he saw an iron chest at the bottom of the lake. Sometimes, it came floating up to the



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shore, but when people went toward it, it went back into deep water and disappeared.

According to Thoreau the water in Walden was purer than any man he had known. Although trees had been cut down and the railroad ran nearby, the water was the same as he had seen when he was young.

Near Walden there were other ponds, and one of them was Flint's or Sandy Pond. It was located about a mile off east of Walden. It was much longer than Walden, since it contained one hundred and ninety-seven acres. Sandy Pond was more fertile in fish than Walden, but it was not remarkably pure.

Another pond located near Walden was Goose Pond. It was on the way to Sandy Pond. It was an expansion of Concord River and contained some seventy acres. Its

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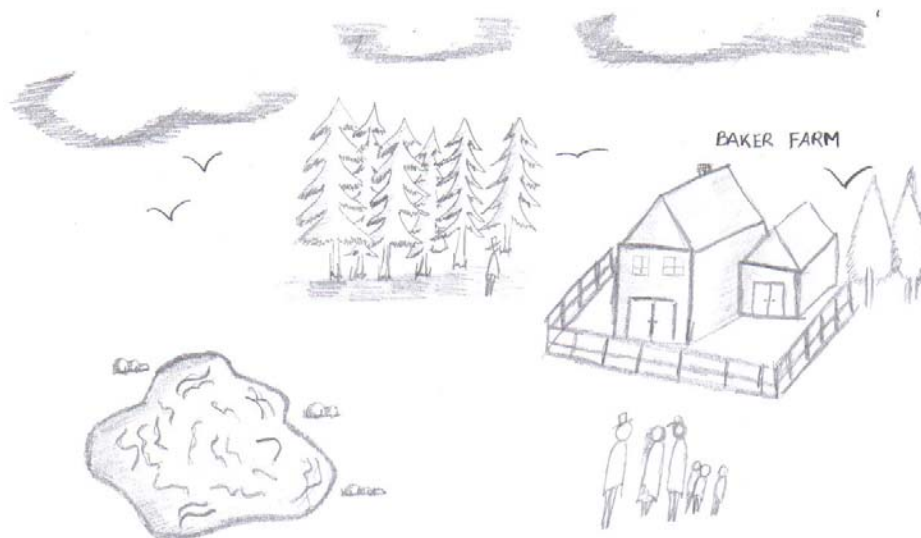


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location was a mile off southwest. White Pond was about forty acres and was a mile and a half beyond Fair Haven Pond. All these ponds, along with Concord River, were Thoreau's privileges. However, White Pond and Walden had the purest water on the earth. Their surface was so clear that people could see the bottom without any difficulty.



2.1.10. BAKER FARM



He begins this chapter with a long description of what he called holy places to worship. He mentioned them using a lot of complex vocabulary and some adjectives which are used just for this kind of places. He used to visit them in winter and in summer. He said that sometimes he walked to the group of pines, standing like temples, or like fleets at sea. Thoreau said that instead of visiting some scholar, he paid many visits to particular trees, which were rare in his neighborhood. They were standing far away in the middle of a field.



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He enjoyed his moments in a lake of rainbow light, in which, for a while, he lived like a dolphin. As he walked on the walkway, he used to wonder at the halo of light around his shadow, and would fancy himself one of the elect. Someone told Thoreau that some people have no halo because they are such distinguished people.

One afternoon he went fishing at Fair Heaven, through the woods. The way led him to Pleasant Meadow, a part of Baker Farm, which a poet had been singing about. Henry thought of living there before he went to Walden. He did some activities there. He hooked apples, jumped over the brook, and scared the musquash and the trout. For Thoreau, it was one of those afternoons which seem indefinitely long, in which many events may happen. Later, he took a shower and stood half an hour under a pine. Then he found himself in the shadow of a cloud, and the thunder began to roar so that he could do no more than



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listen to it. He thought that this was a signal that the gods must be proud of him because he was a poor unarmed fisherman, and he did good labor.

After a while he met an Irishmen, John Field, his wife, and several children. Then they sat together under a roof which was showered and thundered on by the rain. They spoke for a while, and Thoreau was analyzing him. He drew the conclusion that John Field was an honest, hard-working, but inefficient man. His wife had cooked many dinners in the recesses of the stove. They were accompanied by the chickens, which also took refuge there from the rain. They were like members of the family, too humanized to roast well. They looked in Thoreau's eye and pecked at his shoe significantly while his host told him his story. John Field said how hard he worked “bogging” for a farmer, turning up a meadow with a spade, having a salary of ten dollars and the use of the land for one year. His son also worked at his father's side.



After that, Thoreau tried to help him with his experience, telling him that he was one of his nearest neighbors and that he too, who looked like a loafer, was getting his living like John Field. Thoreau explained to John Field that he lived in a stretchable, light, and clean house, which cost more than the annual rent, and if John chose, he might in a month or two build himself a palace of his own. Henry also told him that he did not use tea, coffee, butter, milk, or fresh meat, and for this reason he did not have to work to get them. Then, as he did not work hard, he did not have to eat hard. Thoreau said that the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life, and where the state does not attempt to force you to sustain slavery and war and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such



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things. “A man will not need to study history to find out what is the best for his own culture,”²⁵ said Henry Thoreau.

Thoreau told him that, as he worked so hard at bogging, he required good and appropriate clothes which were too expensive and worn out. “Look at me,” said Henry; “I wore light shoes and thin clothing, which were cheap, and in an hour or two I could, if I wished, catch as many fish as I should want for two days, or earn enough money to support me a week.”²⁶ Then John sighed, and his wife stared at him, and both appeared to be wondering if they had capital enough to begin such a new life.

The woods promised a fair evening, so Thoreau took his leave. While he was leaving the Irishman’s roof after the rain, he knew what his Good Genius seemed to say, “Go fish and hunt far and wide, day by day, farther and

²⁵ Op. cit. chapter 10, p. 226

²⁶ Ibid



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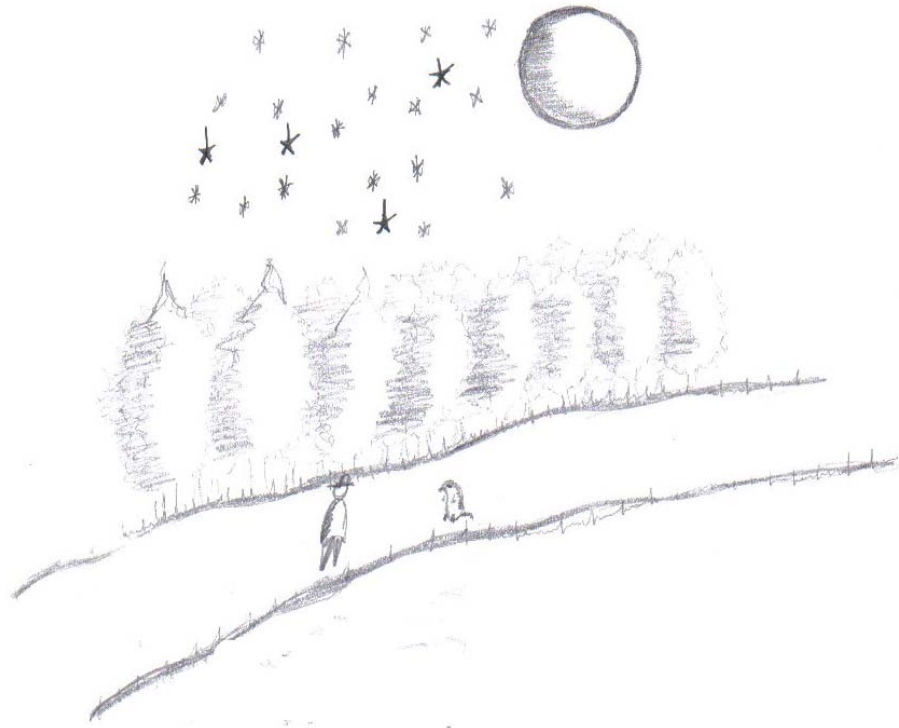
wider, and rest thee by many brooks and hearth-sides without misgiving. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Rise free from care before the dawn, and seek adventures. Let the noon find thee by other lakes, and the night overtake thee everywhere at home. There are no larger fields than these, no worthier games than may here be played...”²⁷ These were some of the things that Thoreau understood after comprehending God. Thoreau said that we should come from far, from adventures, and risks, and discoveries every day, with new experience and character.

Before Thoreau had reached the pond some fresh impulse had brought out John Field. Poor man, it was his luck; when they changed seats in the boat, luck changed seats too. Poor John Field! Thoreau trusted he would not read this book, unless he would improve by it.

²⁷ Op. cit. chapter 10, p. 227



2.1.11. HIGHER LAWS



One night Thoreau was coming home after fishing. Suddenly he saw a woodchuck cross his path. He felt “a strange thrill of savage delight”²⁸ and was “strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw.”²⁹ He had felt such strange urge previously. He had been overwhelmed by a strange and primitive sense, a feeling of wildness.

²⁸ Op. cit. chapter 11, p. 229

²⁹ Ibid



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Once or twice, when Thoreau lived at the pond, he realized that he was ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound with a strange abandonment, looking for some kind of deer which he could devour. Thoreau tried to explain those urges to his readers by saying that he was not literally hungry, but had a strong desire to achieve an experience of wilderness and a feeling of animal existence in nature.

Almost immediately, he told his readers about another urge that he often felt. He found in himself an instinct toward spiritual and primitive life. Thus, there were two instincts that dominated Thoreau’s personality, and he explained that both of them were very important in his life.

Thoreau was studying ornithology, since he was interested in new or rare birds. Thus, he used to hunt birds in the woods, but he sold his gun because he was thinking that there was a finer way of studying birds. Obviously, it



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required much closer attention to the habits of the birds, but at the same time it omitted the use of a gun. He told his friends to encourage their sons to be hunters, mighty hunters, so they would not find game large enough for them.

The men and their sons spent half a day at Walden fishing, but they were disappointed if they did not go home with a string of fish. The legislature ignored that practice, and therefore all men passed through the hunter stage of development. Thoreau had lost self-respect when fishing because fish made an unclean diet. Moreover, there was repugnance toward animal food, not from the effect of experience, but from instinct.

According to Thoreau the instinct of carnivorous men was acquired in a miserable way through the slaughter of animals. Thoreau was convinced that it was the destiny of



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the human race to stop eating animals, just as the savage tribes gave up cannibalism when they became civilized.

The greatest gains and values were farthest from being appreciated. They were the highest reality. The true harvest of Thoreau’s daily life was somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It was a little star-dust caught, part of the rainbow which he had clutched.

Thoreau could eat a fried rat if it was necessary. He drank only water because he desired to be always sober. He avoided wine, coffee, and tea. For Thoreau people ate and drank in relation to their labors. Thus, coarse labors led people to eat coarsely. He became a thinker, and this chapter represented his opinions rather than his practices.

Everything in life had a moral aspect, and goodness was the only investment that never failed. People knew



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there was a kind of animal in their inside, which was almost impossible to escape.

One day Thoreau picked up the jaws of a pig and saw in its tusks a vigorous animal, different from spiritual vigor. The spirit could control the body and turn everything into purity and devotion. The loss of the animal inside brought the person closer to the divine. People called themselves Christian when they were not purer than the heathen, even when they could learn to be purer through heathen religion.

Finally, Thoreau said “Every man is the builder of a temple called his body; we are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones.”³⁰ He tried to encourage his readers to take risks in life. He wanted people to realize that they were the only owners of their destiny.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, chapter 11, p. 240



2.1.12. BRUTE NEIGHBORS



Thoreau begins this chapter with an imaginary dialogue between a Hermit (Thoreau) and a poet (Ellery Channing) about the basis of his visits. The dialogue begins with how the Hermit is interrupted by the poet.

Hermit: I wonder what the world is doing now. I have not heard any news for some time. How do you like the world today?

Poet: You have to appreciate nature because there is nothing like this in any part of the world.

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MAYRA LAZO T.



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Hermit: I think I am near the end of it.

Hermit (to himself): Where was I? Shall I go to heaven fishing? I was as near being resolved into the essence of things as ever I was in my life. I fear my thoughts will not come back to me. If it would do any good, I would whistle for them. My thoughts have left no track, and I cannot find the path again.

Poet: How now, Hermit, is it too soon?

Hermit: Shall we to the Concord? There's good sport there if the water be not too high.

This chapter continues with a lengthy description of some animals which he could observe while he was living by the pond. Thoreau then asked, “Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world? Why has man just these species of animals for his neighbors, as if nothing but a mouse could have filled this fissure?”³¹ The mice which

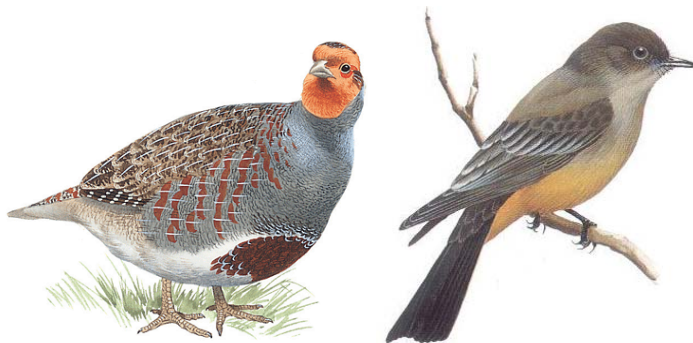
³¹ Op. cit. chapter 12, p. 244



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appeared in Thoreau’s house were not the common ones.

The mice come out regularly at lunch time and picked up the small fragments of bread at his feet. They soon became familiar, and would run over his shoes and up his clothes. The mice were then his friends.



phoebe

partridge

Then a phoebe built her nest in his shack, and a robin in a pine which grew against the house. In June a partridge, a shy bird, led her babies past his windows, and then she called to them like a hen. They were not inexperienced, like the young of most birds, but more



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perfectly developed and precious even than chickens. They were very intelligent. They suggested a wisdom clarified by experience.



raccoon

It is unbelievable how many creatures live wild, secret, and free in the woods, and still sustain themselves, stalked by hunters only. In this case, Thoreau mentioned the otter, and he said, “How retired the otter manages to live here!”³² Every human being should get a glimpse of him. Then he also talks about a raccoon which he saw in the woods behind where his house was built. Thoreau had a place where he rested after planting, ate his lunch, and read a

³² *Op. cit.*, chapter 12, p. 246



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little. It was a swamp under Brister’s Hill, located half a mile from his field. It was full of pines. In that place, the woodcock led her babies to search for worms. These kinds of birds tried to attract Thoreau’s’ attention by circling round and round him, nearer and nearer, pretending to have broken wings and legs. There were also turtle doves, which sat over the spring and fluttered from branch to branch of the soft white pines over his head. A red squirrel was particularly familiar and curious. Thoreau said, “You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods so that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns.”³³

³³ Op. cit. chapter 12, p. 248



red ant

black ant

One day, Thoreau observed two species of large ants, the one red and the other black. The black ones were much larger, nearly half an inch long. He was surprised to find that the chips were covered with such soldiers. It was a war between two races of ants, the red always competing against the black, and frequently two red ones to one black. The ground was covered with the dead and dying, both red and black. Thoreau said that it was the only battle that he had ever witnessed, the red republicans on the one hand,

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MAYRA LAZO T.



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and the black imperialists on the other. It was evident that their motto was “Conquer or die.” He described this combat in a long account, and he noticed when a single red ant which had not yet taken part in the battle came. He had lost none of his limbs. He stood on his guard, looking at the fighters; then, watching his opportunity, he jumped upon a black warrior. Then the two ants united for life. Thoreau was excited at seeing the combat, even as if they were men. He had no doubt that it was a principle they fought for, as much as our ancestors, and not to avoid paying taxes on their tea, and the results of this battle would be important and memorable. Then Thoreau took the chip on which the two particular ants were, and carried it home and put it in his window, to see the issue. For a long time he was observing the ants fight through a microscope. He never learned which part was victorious.



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Then he was surprised to see a cat walking along the shore of the pond. The surprise was mutual. Once, when he was looking for berries, he met a cat with young kittens in the woods. They were little wild ones, and they all, like their mother, had their backs up and were fiercely spitting at him. Thoreau then tells us that a few years before he lived in the woods there was what was called a “winged cat” in one of Mrs. Gillian Baker’s farmhouses in Lincoln, near the pond. Then Thoreau went to visit Gillian, and he gave him a pair of her wings, which he had kept. Some thought it was a flying squirrel or some other wild animal. Thoreau said that this would have been the right kind of cat for him to keep.



loon



The last description that Thoreau made of the animals he could see around the pond was of the loons, which appeared in the fall. They came to change their feathers and to bathe in the pond, making the woods ring with their wild laughter. The sportsmen were on the alert with rifles and conical balls because they wanted to shoot them. When Thoreau went to get a bucket of water early in the morning, he frequently saw this bird sailing out of his cove within a few rods. If Thoreau wanted to overtake them in a boat, in order to see how they maneuvered, they would dive and be completely lost, so that he did not discover them again. Many loons have been caught in the New York lakes eighty feet beneath the surface, with hooks set for trout. It was surprising to see how serenely they sailed off with relaxed breast when they came to the surface, doing all the work with their webbed feet beneath. Their usual note was the demoniac laughter. Thoreau then concluded that they



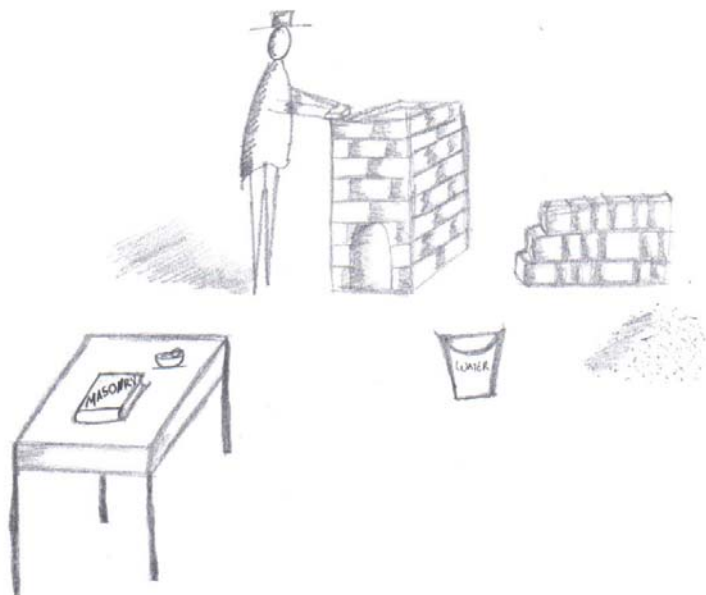
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laughed because they were making fun of his efforts, confident of their own resources.

For hours, on fall days, he watched the ducks hiding in the middle of the pond, far from the sportsman; a trick which they would have less need to practice in Louisiana swamps. When they had to rise, they would sometimes circle round and round and over the pond at a considerable altitude, from which they could easily see the ponds and the river; but what, besides safety, they got by sailing in the middle of Walden Pond he did not know, unless they liked its water for the same reason that he did.



2.1.13. HOUSE WARMING



After writing about the beauty of the pond, the experience with his bean-field, and the comfort of his cabin, Thoreau began the story of the winters he had spent at Walden Pond.

October arrived, and Thoreau began to prepare himself for the winter months. He gathered grapes in the river meadows. There he saw the cranberries that would be cultivated and sent as jams to Boston and New York. He



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also used to collect wild apples and chestnuts, which he found in the chestnut woods in Lincoln.

Behind Thoreau’s home there was a large tree, which he climbed and shook. The nuts that fell down were a good substitute for bread. He also discovered the ground-nut, which seemed like a potato, and many years ago it had been eaten by the Indians. Thoreau thought that if nature was to reign again in New England, corn would be extinct, and the ground-nut would thrive.

By September 1st, he had seen two or three small maples across the pond turn red. He admired the change of their color reflected in the water pond from week to week. In October, thousands of wasps settled on the windows and walls of Thoreau’s home. They never bothered him, although they were frightening visitors. In November,



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sometimes he went to the northeast side of Walden to be warmed by the sun during the day.

When Thoreau wanted to build his chimney, he “studied masonry”. He cleaned his second-hand bricks, mixed his own mortar with white sand from the beach, and little by little he built his chimney, even using the bricks as a pillow at night. That job was a source of great enjoyment. His chimney, the most vital part of his house, an independent structure that could survive even fire, was finished at the end of the summer.

By November, the pond had begun to freeze. Thoreau’s cabin was small, but it seemed larger for being a single and remote apartment. The weather outside was terrible; however, Thoreau felt that all the attractions of his home were concentrated in one room; he enjoyed it. He was prepared for that cool season, since he had stored in



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his cabin potatoes, two quarts of peas, a little rice, and a jug of molasses.

Sometimes, he dreamed of an enormous one-room house, with unplastered beams where all things and inhabitants were visible to any who entered. A place where people could see the fire that cooked the dinner and the oven that baked the bread would be better than anything.

When the freezing weather had begun, Thoreau plastered the walls. He brought whiter sand from the opposite beach in a boat. He learned to admire the economy and convenience of plastering and created a wonderful finish. Meanwhile, a small cap of ice had formed over the pond. Thoreau liked to lie stretched out over the clear ice and look down through the still water of the pond straight to the bottom. On mornings, it was possible to watch a large number of bubbles pressed against the lower



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surface of the ice. After a few warm days, the ice became discolored and the bubbles shifted. Thoreau cut out a block of ice to study and found what the ice had formed around the bubbles. He realized that the bubbles beneath the ice had melted and rotted.

Once Thoreau finished plastering, the winter began and the wind started howling. Geese came every night in the dark with a clangor and a whistling of wings. During this time Thoreau collected dead woods, of which the forest was full, and firewood for his fire. He also found a wooden raft, made by some Irish railroad workers and sunk in the earth for several years. Thoreau became very sad when any part of the forest had been burned or cut down, and thought about the Romans, who made an offering when cutting trees in a sacred grove.



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According to Thoreau wood seemed to have more permanent and universal value than gold. The cost of wood for fuel in New York or Philadelphia was the same as the best wood in Paris. He looked at his woodpile with affection. He spent wood when it was necessary. He used dried leaves from the forest saved in his cabin to make fire with.

AUTORAS:

**ROCÍO CUENCA O.
MAYRA LAZO T.**



2.1.14. FORMER INHABITANTS; AND WINTER

VISITORS



Henry David Thoreau begins this chapter by telling us how he survived some snow storms, and spent cheerful winter evenings by his fireside. In the winter, for long periods he did not see anybody but those who came occasionally to cut wood. The deep snow made visits from friends less frequent and, in this solitary situation, he had to exercise his ingenuity to keep his mind active. The habitat, however, encouraged him to make a path through the deepest snow in the woods, for when he had once gone through the wind blew the oak leaves into his tracks, where

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MAYRA LAZO T.



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they lodged, and by absorbing the rays of the sun melted the snow, and so not only made a dry bed for his feet, but in the night their dark line was his guide. For human society he was obliged to conjure up the former occupants of those woods.

To keep his mind busy, in this chapter he described the former inhabitants of the Walden area. Most of these people were old liberated slaves. Thoreau described the stories of three former slaves: Cato Ingraham, whose Walden land was eventually taken away by a younger white speculator. He lived to the East of Thoreau's bean-field. He was a slave of Ingraham, Esquire, and a gentleman of Concord village, who built a house for his slave and gave him permission to live in Walden Woods. Some people said that Cato was a Guinea Negro. Zilpha, an elderly colored woman, who spun linen and made the woods ring with her songs, lived by the corner of Thoreau's field. In the war of



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1812, her house was set on fire by English soldiers when she was away, and her cat, dog, and hens were all burned up together. After that, she led a hard and sometimes inhuman life. Finally, Brister Freeman, whose wife, Fenda, "pleasantly" told fortunes. He was a handy Negro who lived on Brister's Hill. He was a slave of Squire Cummings. There, Brister planted, grew, and tended apple trees.

On the old road in the woods were marks of the ruined farm of the Stratton family. Then, nearer to town, there was the Breeds' location, on the other side of the way, just on the edge of the wood. It was a ground famous for the stories of a demon not distinctly named in old mythology. But history must not yet tell the tragedies performed here. Here the most unclear and doubtful tradition says that once a tavern stood; a well as well, which tempered the traveler's beverage and refreshed his steed. Here, then, men saluted



one another, and heard and told the news, and went their ways again.

Breed’s cabin was set on fire by mischievous boys, one Election night. He lived on the edge of the village then. Thoreau had just laid down his head when the bells rang out – fire! The people thought it was far south, over the woods. One person cried it was Baker’s barn; another affirmed it was the Codman place. Then some fresh sparks went up above the wood, and all the people shouted “Concord to the rescue!” At that moment, they did not realize that they were there until at a turn in the road they heard popping noises and actually felt the heat of the fire. At first, they thought to throw frog-pond water on it; but then they concluded to let it burn. They finally retreated without doing anything.



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The following night, he walked across the fields about the same hour, and he heard a low moaning. He approached in the dark, and discovered the only survivor of the family that he knew. Then he was calmed by the sympathy which Thoreau's presence implied, and he showed Thoreau where the well was covered up; which, thank Heaven, could never be burned.

Farther in the woods, Wyman the potter squatted and furnished his fellow townsmen with earthenware, and left descendants to succeed him. One day in midsummer, when Henry was digging, a man who was carrying a load of pottery to market stopped his horse at Thoreau's field, asking for Wyman the younger. He had bought a potter's wheel a long time ago, and he wanted to know what had happened to Wyman.



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Hugh Quoil, an Irishman, was the last inhabitant in those woods before Henry Thoreau. He had lived on Wyman's property. He was called Col. Quoil. A rumor said that he had been a soldier at Waterloo. All the information that Thoreau knew about Quoil was tragic. He was a well-educated man. He gave the best speeches you could ever attend to. Quoil died in the road of Brister's Hill shortly after Thoreau came to the woods, so he could not remember him as his neighbor. Thoreau visited Quoil's house before it was demolished. There were his old clothes upon his bed, and his broken pipe, which was the symbol of his death. At the back of the house there was a garden which had never been taken care of. There was also the skin of a woodchuck, a trophy of his last Waterloo battle. Now only a hollow in the earth marks the site of that house. Thoreau said that he was not aware that any man ever built on the spot which Quoil occupied.



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In winter, Thoreau rarely had a visitor. He lived as comfortably as a meadow mouse, or as cattle, which are said to survive for a long period of time even without food. Since there were few visitors, Thoreau spent much time walking across the winter landscape, observing the snow-covered trees and an occasional animal. One afternoon, he watched an owl with stripes. It was sitting on one of the dead limbs of a white pine. The owl seemed as inactive as the rest of nature, and it could hear Henry when he moved the snow with his feet, but he could not see him. Thoreau felt a slumberous influence after watching the owl half an hour. Then the owl flew and found a new perch, where it could wait out for the daylight.

As he walked, Thoreau met with a very cold wind, and when the frost had smitten him on one cheek, he turned the other to it. When he returned to town new drifts would have formed. He wanted to find, even in midwinter, some warm



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swamp where some birds awaited the return of spring. On a Sunday afternoon, if he had the chance to be at home, he could hear the crunching of the snow made by the step of a farmer, who was looking for his house from far through the woods, to have a social encounter. He visited him, and they recalled rude and simple times. A poet also visited Henry Thoreau, and together they made that small house ring with their talk. A philosopher also stopped by his cabin.

Thoreau said that a farmer, a hunter, a soldier, a reporter, even a philosopher, may be intimidated; but nothing can deter a poet, for he is actuated by pure love. But during Thoreau's last winter at the pond, there was another welcome visitor, who saw the lighted lamp in his house through the trees. He shared with Thoreau some long winter evenings. They talked and put the world behind them. To whichever side they turned, it seemed that the heavens and the earth had met together, since the visitor improved the beauty of the landscape. There they worked,



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revising mythology and building castles in the air. Thoreau became inspired by his conversation with the philosopher, and felt a delicate spiritual awareness.

Henry David Thoreau said that he sometimes expected a visitor who never came. He also quoted what the Vishnu Purana says, “The house-holder is to remain at eventide in his courtyard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or longer if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest.”³⁴ Thoreau often performed this duty of hospitality. He waited long enough to milk two cows, but he did not see any man approaching from the town.

³⁴ Op. cit. chapter 14, p. 290



2.1.15. WINTER ANIMALS



Thoreau's house was always visited by some winter bird or animal. He seldom opened his door on a winter evening without hearing some sound near or far from his house.

One night, at the beginning of winter, about nine o'clock, he was startled by the loud honking of geese. Thoreau heard the sound of goose wings like a tempest in the woods, as the geese flew over his house. They passed over the pond toward Fair Haven and deterred from settling

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in their sight. Suddenly, an unmistakable owl near Thoreau, with the most tremendous voice that he had ever heard from any inhabitant of the woods, responded at regular intervals to the geese, as if determined to expose and disgrace those intruders from Hudson’s Bay, trying with its voice to confuse the geese.

Sometimes, he heard foxes barking like dogs, and he supposed that the animals were becoming civilized. The red squirrel woke him at dawn running over his house. He threw out ears of unripe sweet corn on the snow-crust by his door, and was amused by watching the motions of the various animals. In the twilight and the night the rabbits often came and made a hearty meal. Every day the red squirrels came and went and offered Thoreau much entertainment with their unusual movements. The squirrels also became familiar and ran over Thoreau’s feet.



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At length, the jays arrived. They were thieves who stole the kernels from the squirrels, and they worked hard to get their meal. The jays used to sit on a pitch pine and attempt to swallow in their haste a kernel which was too big for their throats and choked them; and after that labor they disgorged it, and spent an hour in the endeavor to crack it by repeated blows with their bills. Thoreau had little respect for them, but the squirrels, though at first shy, went to work as if they were taking what was their own.

Chickadees also came in flocks, picked up kernels, and pecked at them until they were small enough to swallow. They flew to the nearest twig, placing there the crumbs in their claws.

When the ground was not yet quite covered, and again near the end of winter, when the snow was melted on the south hillside about Thoreau’s wood pile, the partridge flew

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out of the woods at morning and evening to feed. They ate the buds of the wild apple trees.

One day, a man lost his dog in the woods. The man started to look for his dog. He was walking in the woods when he found Thoreau's hut. Then the man told Thoreau that he had been hunting a fox with his dog, but that now he could not hunt the fox because his dog was lost.

An old hunter, who used to come to bathe in Walden once every year when the water was warmest, told Thoreau that some years ago he had taken his gun one afternoon and had gone out for a walk in Walden Wood. He was walking on the road when he heard the cry of hounds approaching. They were following a fox that had leaped the other wall, out of the road, and the hunter's swift bullet had not touched him. Behind the fox came an old hound and her three pups in full pursuit, hunting on their own account. In

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this difficult job they disappeared into the woods. Late in the afternoon, Thoreau was resting in the thick woods south of Walden; he heard the voice of the hounds still following the fox. Suddenly, the fox appeared in the forest. The fox sat erect, listening and watching the hunter. Soon the hunter took out his gun and shot the fox. The fox fell to the ground, making a demoniacal cry. After that the old hound ran directly to the rock, but spying the dead fox the old hound ceased her hounding, and walked round and round the fox in silence. One by one her pups arrived and, like their mother, were sobered into silence by the mystery. After the hunter came forward and stood in their midst, immediately the mystery was solved. The hounds waited in silence while the hunter skinned the fox. That evening, a man from Weston came to the Concord hunter's cottage to inquire for his hounds, and told how for a week they had been hunting on their own account in Weston woods. The Concord hunter told him what he knew and offered him the skin, but the

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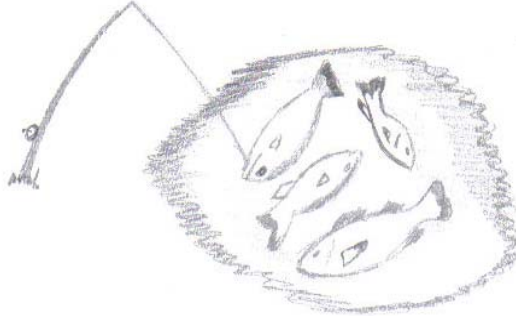
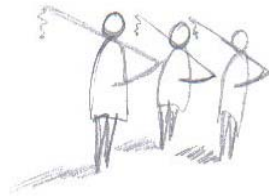
other declined it and departed. Unfortunately, he did not find his hounds that night, but the next day he learned that they had crossed the river and had stayed the night at a farmhouse before leaving in the morning.

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2.1.16. THE POND IN WINTER



Thoreau begins this chapter by telling us that after a winter night he awoke with the impression that a question had been put to him, and he was trying to answer it in vain. The next morning, when he woke up, the question was still unanswered. Then Thoreau said that there was a dawning nature, in which all creatures live, looking in at his broad windows with a serene and satisfied face, and no questions on her lips. He also said that nature makes no questions and answers, but mortals do.

He followed what he understood from nature, “Forward!” and he began his morning work more vigorously.



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First, he took an axe and pail and went on his search for water. Every winter, the liquid and trembling surface of the pond became solid to the depth of a foot. Like the marmots in the surrounding hills, the pond closed its eyelids and became dormant for three months or more. Thoreau first cut his way thorough a foot of snow, then a foot of ice, and then he knelt to drink water, and he saw some fish. Thoreau said, “Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.”³⁵

Early in the morning, men came with fishing-reels and a slender lunch to take pickerel and perch. However, wild men, who had other beliefs, sat and ate their lunch on the dry oak leaves on the shore. They never consulted books, and they knew more things.

³⁵ Op. cit. chapter 16, p. 303



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When he walked around the pond in foggy weather, he was sometimes amused by the primitive mode which some ruder fisherman had adopted. He had placed alder branches over the narrow holes in the ice, and having fastened the end of the line to a stick to prevent its being pulled through, had passed the slack line over a small branch of the alder, and tied a dry oak leaf to it, so when it was being pulled down, it would show he had a bite.

Thoreau was impressed and awe-stricken by the rare beauty of the pickerel. He said that they were so foreign to the streets, even to the woods. They possessed a quite dazzling and transcendent beauty. They were not green like the pines, nor gray like the stones, nor blue like the sky. They had rarer colors, like flowers and precious stones, as if they were the pearls or crystals of the Walden water. He said that these fish were themselves small Waldens in the



animal kingdom, Waldenses. He never wanted to see that kind of fish in any market.

As David Thoreau was desirous to recover the long-lost bottom of Walden Pond, he contemplated it carefully, before the ice broke up. There were many stories told about the bottom. It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it. Many people believed that Walden reached quite through to the other side of the globe. So Thoreau said that he could assure his readers that Walden had a reasonably firm bottom at a not unreasonable, though unusual, depth. The greatest depth was exactly one hundred and two feet. “This is a remarkable depth for so small an area,”³⁶ said Thoreau. “I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol.”³⁷

³⁶ *Op. cit.* chapter 16, p. 307

³⁷ *Ibid*



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A factory-owner could not believe that Thoreau had found a depth. “But the deepest ponds are not so deep in proportion to their area as most suppose, and, if drained, would not leave very remarkable valleys,”³⁸ said Thoreau. Probably, the depth of the ocean will be found to be very inconsiderable compared with its extent. When Thoreau sounded through the ice, he could determine the shape of the bottom with greater accuracy, and he was surprised at its general regularity. The regularity of the bottom and its conformity to the shores were so perfect.

When Thoreau had mapped the pond, he observed a remarkable coincidence. It was that the number indicating the greatest depth was apparently in the center of the map, so Thoreau placed a rule on the map lengthwise, and then breadthwise, and he found that the line of the greatest length intersected the line of greatest breadth exactly at the point of greatest depth, in spite of the fact that the middle

³⁸ Ibid



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was so nearly level. Then he said to himself, “Who knows but this hint could conduct to the deepest part of the ocean as well as of a pond or puddle?”³⁹

One important thing that Henry Thoreau said was, “If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation.”⁴⁰ What Thoreau observed of the pond was no less true in ethics. It was the law of average.

As for the inlet or outlet of Walden, he had not discovered any but rain and snow and evaporation, for where the water flowed into the pond it would probably be

³⁹ Op. cit. chapter 16, p. 309-310

⁴⁰ Ibid



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coldest in summer and warmest in winter. When Thoreau began to cut holes for measuring there were three or four inches of water on the ice under a deep snow which had sunk it thus far; but the water began to run into these holes, and continued to run for two days in deep streams, which contributed essentially to dry the surface of the pond.

In the winter, there came a hundred men who arrived at the pond one morning with many farming tools. Thoreau did not know if they had come to sow a crop of winter rye or some other kind of grain. They said that a gentleman farmer wanted to double his money. They went to work at once, as if they were going to make a farm, a model farm. Thoreau was very curious about what was happening, so he was looking to see what kind of seed they dropped into the furrows; but what these people were actually doing was digging out some molds of the virgin sand and hauling it away on sleds.



Thoreau noticed that a portion of Walden which in the state of water was green would often, when frozen, appear from the same point of view blue. Perhaps the blue color of water and ice is due to the light and air they contain, and the most transparent is the bluest. Ice is an interesting subject for contemplation. Thoreau asked himself a great question, “Why is it that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but if frozen remains sweet forever? It is commonly said that this is the difference between the affections and the intellect.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Op. cit. chapter 16, p. 317



2.1.17. SPRING



After some months of cold winter, spring had come, so Thoreau in this chapter tried to explain the different changes and transformations that he could observe around him. He described the pond's thaw and the birth of a new landscape which was beautiful. For Thoreau this chapter was a kind of creation story because all nature began to show signs of new life. Obviously, one stage had finished, and another very different one was beginning.



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Spring came about the first of April, with little variation of temperature. It began to melt on the north side and in the shallower parts of the pond. During spring time the wind blew and agitated the water of the pond. A thermometer thrust into the middle of Walden stood at 32 °, and in the middle of Flint's Pond, the same day, at 31 and a half at a dozen rods from the shore in shallow water, and under ice a foot thick, at 36°. That difference of three and a half degrees showed why the ice there broke up so much sooner than in Walden. At this time the ice in the shallowest part was several inches thinner than in the middle. However, in midwinter the middle had been the warmest and the ice thinnest there. People who waded about the shores of the pond in a summer night knew how much warmer the water was close to the shore.

In spring, the sun reflected from the bottom of the shallow water, which had been the first to freeze in the fall,



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warming the ice from both sides and creating a honeycomb effect, in which air bubbles helped to melt the ice. The sun in spring not only exerted an influence through the increased temperature of the air and earth, but its heat passed through ice a foot or more thick. Where there was a rock or a long rising near the surface, the ice over it was much thinner, and it was frequently quite dissolved by that reflected heat.

The phenomena of the year took place every day in the pond on a small scale. Every morning the shallow water was being warmed more rapidly than the deep. Every night it was being cooled more rapidly, until the next morning. The night was the winter, the morning and evening were the spring and fall, and the noon was the summer. Over that time lapse the cracking and booming of the ice indicated the changes of temperature.



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One pleasant day after a cold night on Flint’s Pond,

Thoreau realized with surprise that when he struck the ice with the head of his axe, it resounded like a gong for many rods around. The pond began to boom about an hour after sunrise, when it felt the influence of the sun’s rays slanting upon it from over the hills. It stretched itself and yawned like a waking man, with a gradually increasing tumult, which was kept up three or four hours. However, in the middle of the day, being full of cracks, and the air being less elastic, it had lost its resonance.

One attraction in coming to live to the woods, was that Thoreau had the opportunity to see the spring come, when the ice in the pond began to be honeycombed. Fogs, rains, and warmer suns were gradually melting the snow. Thoreau was on the alert for the first signs of spring to hear the chance note of some arriving bird or the striped squirrel’s



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chirp. On March 13th, when he had heard a bluebird, a song sparrow, and a red-wing, the ice was a foot thick.

One day, an old man who was a close observer of Nature told a little story to Thoreau. One spring day the man took his guns and his boat and went to catch ducks. He stayed on the pond where there was still ice, but it was melting. It was a warm day, and he was surprised to see a body of ice remaining. Not seeing the ducks, he hid his boat on the backside of an island in the pond; then he concealed himself in the bushes on the South side, to await them there. Then he heard a distant sound. It seemed to him like the sound of a vast body of owls coming in to settle there. Immediately he seized his gun and started up in haste. But, to his surprise, he found that the whole body of the ice had started to move while he was waiting and then had drifted in to the shore, and the sound he heard was produced by the edge of the ice grating on the shore.

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For Thoreau, every change he observed was very interesting: the ice melting, the green leaves in the trees, the songs of the birds, and the sun shining all the days. Every detail was wonderful. During spring the pond seemed to be quiet sometimes, but at other times the waves moved as the wind passed by in any direction.

According to Thoreau, Nature was the mother of humanity. The earth was not a mere fragment of dead history. Nature was a place that offered the best things for men. The different vegetation, animals, and seasons of nature could be enjoyed by men. Without a doubt, it offered a different style of life with complete freedom. In the mornings, Thoreau liked to watch the geese swimming in the middle of the pond. After they had rested there, they flew away to the north. The pond appeared to be an artificial one for his amusement.



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Finally, Thoreau was a man who enjoyed every day of his life at Walden, and who knew how to appreciate the gifts that nature offered. In this chapter he explained his experience of the birth of a new landscape which had interesting things.

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2.1.18. CONCLUSION



Thoreau begins this chapter by saying that to the sick the doctors recommended a change of air and scenery. He said that when we make a voyage, we have to be like curious passengers and not like stupid sailors, picking oakum. Thoreau also wanted to let his readers know that they should begin a new and finer life. Thoreau said that we live within four walls, and for that reason we can't realize



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what there is outside. Life can be wonderful if we know how to enjoy it. We do not have to travel around the world to be happy, to enjoy our lives, or to have an interesting life. Every person should be whatever he chooses to be. The rich life involves an inner voyage, by means of which we discover our divine potentialities, our unique possibilities for greatness as men. So he advised his readers thus:

“Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be
Expert in home-cosmography.”⁴²

Thoreau also advised us to be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within us, opening new channels, but not just any channel. He said that we have to open new channels, not of trade, but of thought. He said that a man does not have to show a certain attitude to

⁴² Op. cit. chapter 18, p. 341



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society, but to maintain within himself whatever attitude obeys the laws of his own being.

Thoreau left the woods for as good a reason as he went there, and perhaps it seemed to him that he had several more lives to live. He pointed out that it is remarkable how easily people fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for themselves. He also said that people are accustomed to follow traditions, and they conform to stated things. They do not want to change rules or explore new routes. The highways of the world are damaged and dirty, said Thoreau.

Thoreau learnt some things by his experiment. For example, he said that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with an unexpected success in common hours. In proportion as he simplified his life, the laws of the universe would appear less complex, and he



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would be able to discover that solitude would not be solitude, poverty would not be poverty, and weakness would not be weakness. He also said that if you have built castles in the air, your work has not necessarily been lost; but what you have to do is to start putting foundations under them.

Henry David Thoreau said that it is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you should speak so that they can understand you. So Thoreau said, “Neither men nor toadstools grow so.”⁴³ Then he mentioned nature and put it as an example, asking how nature can welcome hundreds of animals, plants, and even men. Nature does not need to understand them in order to receive them. Thoreau desired to speak somewhere without bounds, like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments. The commonest sense is the sense

⁴³ Op. cit. chapter 18, p. 345



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of men asleep, which they express by snoring. The purity
men love is like the mists which cover the earth, and not like
the azure heavens beyond.

Thoreau tells us to avoid the paralyzing influence of
the past and not to listen to those who are constantly
"dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns
generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the
ancients, or even the Elizabethan men."⁴⁴ Thoreau said
that a living dog is better than a dead lion. Let everyone
mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was
made. He also told us that we must say what we have to
say, not what we ought. Any truth is better than make-
believe. In the middle of this chapter, Henry David Thoreau
wrote expressions and thoughts which are wonderful truths.
He said that we have to meet and live our life. We do not
have to be faultfinders because they will find faults even in

⁴⁴ Op. cit. chapter 18, p. 346



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paradise. He also said that we have to love our life even if it is poor, because poverty is not a crime. We can cultivate poverty like a garden herb, or like sage. He said that we do not have to worry or trouble ourselves about getting new things; it does not matter if they are clothes or friends. An important and valuable thing that Thoreau said is that things do not change; we change. He said that we can sell our clothes but we have to keep our thoughts. In this way, God will see that we do not want society. Thoreau's objective was to give all of these messages to us in order to improve our lives. In this part of chapter eighteen, he wants to make us notice that we have to preserve our thoughts, and this will make us important people.

Thoreau then continued by saying that we do not have to seek anxiously to be developed or to be famous people. We do not have to look for influences to be played on. It is all dissipation. “Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly



lights,”⁴⁵ “HENRY DAVID THOREAU: HIS LIFE, TIMES, AND LITERATURE” it means that if we are humble people, we can reach heaven. We do not need wealth or a lot of money to reach the desired heaven. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessity of the soul. Money is not all over the world. If we do not know how to live our life, we won't be able to enjoy it.

Thoreau said that rather than love, than money, than fame, he wanted truth. Sometimes he sat at a table where there were rich food and wine in abundance, but sincerity and truth were not; and he went hungry from the inhospitable board.

He said that there is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet we tolerate incredible dullness. We think that we can change our clothes only. The life in us is like

⁴⁵ Op. cit. chapter 18, p. 349

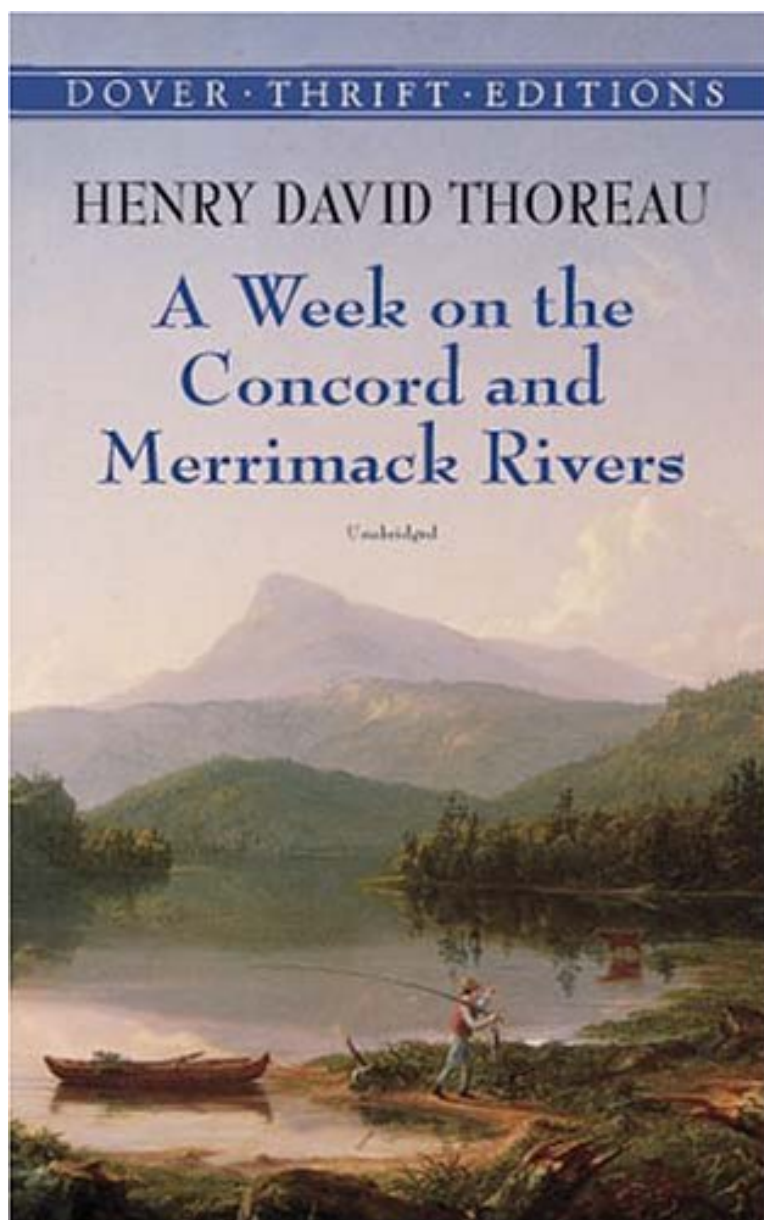


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the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man
has ever known it.

2.2. A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK

RIVERS



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2.2.1. INTRODUCTION

At the end of 1839, Thoreau made a seven-day rowboat excursion with his brother John. At the beginning Thoreau planned to make of his trip a kind of adventure, but later, because of the death of his brother, he changed his idea and made it a memorial. Unfortunately, he could not finish the book until his stay at Walden, where he started to write rapidly, and he could finish a year later the first of the only two volumes published during his lifetime.

A week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers was rejected by many publishers and finally printed at his own expense. In this work Thoreau did not achieved showing all his power as a writer; only a few years later could he find himself as a writer, in Walden.



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This book is a narrative about an excursion on the Merrimack Rivers, although sometimes it seems a mild parody. However, Thoreau interrupts this style frequently with his literary and philosophical ideas. James Russell Lowell was the one who described this book with the following sentence: “The style is compact, and the language has an antique purity like wine grown colorless with age.”⁴⁶

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers is a book that shows to the reader some fine and special passages. In this book Thoreau presents two of his major themes, “his mysticism and his sympathy with wildness,”⁴⁷ though his other major theme, that is, his criticism of contemporary society and of the lives of quiet desperation led by the mass of men, was hardly mention.

⁴⁶ Wood Krutch, Joseph. Walden and other writings by Henry David Thoreau. The USA and Canada, Bantam books, 1981, p. 25

⁴⁷ Op. cit. introduction.p. 26

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Finally, this book did not produce a huge impact on Thoreau’s society, since people preferred to read other kinds of writings. Thoreau printed one thousand copies of *A Week on the Concord*, but at the end of four years only 218 had been sold. On October 28, 1853 he wrote in his journal: “I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself.”⁴⁸ This phrase reflects that most of the time Thoreau wrote for himself because the rest of the people could not understand the real value of his writings.

⁴⁸ Ibid



2.2.2. THE CONCORD RIVER



After the introduction Thoreau wrote some pages about his feelings, emotions, and ideas about the excursion with his brother. In these pages Thoreau wrote every sensation and tried to catch the attention of the readers. Thoreau started to write his book with a poem of six stanzas which described what Thoreau could see at the beginning of the trip. The last stanza is one written by Emerson. Later, Thoreau wrote a sort of description about the Concord River. He told how the Concord received its name

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in 1635 because of the first plantation on its banks. He explained the location of the Concord River, which appeared in the south part of Hopkinton and Westborough and flowed between Hopkinton and Southborough through Framingham between Sudbury and Wayland, where sometimes it was called the Sudbury River.

Between Sudbury and Wayland the meadows acquired their greatest breath, and when they were covered with water there were many gulls and ducks. The Concord River was unique and wonderful, a place with secrets and treasures for Thoreau. Men could imagine a wonderful place, but they did not believe that place was the Concord River.

Thoreau described the Concord River as a natural and quiet place with a lot of flora and fauna. Here people could observe great hills, hundred brooks, farm-houses, barns,

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and haystacks, waves agitated by the wind, fresh air, gulls wheeling, muskrats, and thousand of cranberries around the shore; the weather was cold and wet but pleasant. Definitely, this river was unique. At the end of the description Thoreau told that he never voyaged in all his life. When Thoreau finished his description he talked about men whose names we do not know. They had guns, and they used to kill animals in the river. Thoreau thought that they could spend their time writing about those fascinating landscapes and avoid the destruction.

Thoreau wrote about the origin of the river and the meaning of its name. He could realize that the Concord River was remarkable for the gentleness of its current. Indians chose the most appropriate name, Musketaquid or Meadow River, because its streams were quiet in comparison with the other tributaries of the Merrimack. The Meadow River ran by green grass and prairies. It was an



incredible place but when the river overflowed animals and plants died.

Finally, Thoreau finished the introduction with a kind of praise for the Concord River. He gave thanks to the river because it was important for travelers. All rivers were considered the beauty of the world, places where animal and vegetable kingdoms attained their greatest perfection. Thoreau felt that a great trip was going to start and saw how everything in the river has a purpose and a certain connection.



2.2.3. SATURDAY



This was the first day that Thoreau described; he started his composition with a little poem. His trip began the last day of August, 1839. At the beginning, he wrote about the weather of that day. He mentioned that he was with his brother John. Thoreau's boat was painted green below with a blue border. It was fifteen feet long by three and half at the widest part, and it seemed a fisherman's dory.



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Thoreau took some important things in the boat for the trip, like potatoes and melons that he and his brother had cultivated; a few utensils, two sets of oars, many slender poles for poling in shallow places, a buffalo-skin to sleep in at night, and a tent of cotton cloth which served as their roof. Thoreau’s boat was not a perfect machine, but it fulfilled Thoreau’s requirements.

As soon as Thoreau and his brother started the trip they sailed close to “The North Bridge” where in 1775 had started the Revolution of the USA. In this part Thoreau wrote some poems about the Revolutionary War, the enemies, the ground of Concord, the courage of soldiers who fought to defend their honor. He also wrote about the Concord River, its clean water, the blue sky, and all the beautiful things that his eyes could observe.



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When the boat was floating on the water Thoreau watched all kinds of plants around the river's bank. Every flower had its own beauty and special characteristic. The flowers were blue, red, white, big and small; most of them were clean, although there were some weeds. Thoreau was amazed, since he never had watched a landscape so wonderful and harmonious as the Concord River, where his dreams could go on the streams.

According to Thoreau, the Concord River was fascinating. It was incredible how the land could change when it was seen on a boat. Everything seemed more colorful and beautiful. Soon Thoreau and his brother left their town, Concord, and new adventures and places have been discovered. Thoreau said that the river went straight until it arrived at Carlisle Bridge, which consisted of 20 wooden poles. It was a place where fishermen waited to catch some fish at any hour. Thoreau wrote a kind of



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reflection about men who were sitting on the bank. He thought that they spent their time fishing because of their necessity, since in their lifetime they did not learn anything new. They did not enjoy their lives because they were slaves of their jobs.

For Thoreau one of the species that were in all lakes, brooks, and rivers were fish. As a result of their easy reproduction they could live in any place that contained water. In the waters of that river there were a dozen distinct species. There was a kind of fish called Sun-Fish, which was the most common, it was a simple and inoffensive fish. Their nests were visible all along the shore because of the danger that they could be eaten by birds and other fish.

Another kind of fish that Thoreau could watch was one called *Perca flavescens*. It was a red fish with gold scales. It lived in clean water with sandy bottoms. They were small



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fish, not more than six or seven inches in length, although there were a few larger ones that lived in the deepest water.

Leuciscus Pulchellues or Red Chivin was a different kind of fish, which was white and red; it was a silvery soft-scaled fish. It loved to live in a swift stream with a sandy bottom. In the winter, minnows were used as bait to catch these fish. He who never had fished a red chivin was not yet a complete angler.

The Dace or *Leuciscus Argenteus* was a slight silvery minnow which lived in the middle of the stream, where the current was more rapid. The Shiner or *Leuciscus crysoleucas* was another kind of fish. It could be found in all places, deep and shallow, in clean and turbid water. It was not easy to catch because of its limber tail. The Pickerel of *Esox reticulate* was the swiftest, wariest, and most ravenous of fish. It was very common in the shadowy and weedy lagoons along the sides of the stream. They were so



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greedy and impetuous that they were caught by being entangled in the line at the moment it was cast.

The Hoed Pout or *Pimelodus ebulus*, sometimes called Ministers, was a kind of fish that was not easy to kill, since half an hour after their heads had been cut off they continued moving their mouths.

During his trip Thoreau also watched eels, the Common Eel or *Muraena Bostoiensis*, which was the only species of eel known in the stat, except for The Lamprey Eel or *Petromuzon Americanus*, which lived in the shallow parts of the river, where the current was rapid and the bottom pebbly.

After describing the different kinds of fish and eels, Thoreau told about his first night of the trip. Thoreau and his brother sopped the excursion about seven miles from



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BillERICA. They pitched their tent in a meadow near the river.

They found a lot of huckleberries hanging upon the bushes.

Thoreau and his brother used water from the river, bread, sugar, and cocoa to prepare their food. There was no

house in that place. The sound of the wind, some birds, and owls were the only melody that Thoreau could hear.

Finally, in the last paragraph of this chapter Thoreau explained how nature showed its state, and every sound meant something. Thoreau had heard a hound pursuing a fox. He and his brother watched a fire on the horizon. Definitely, the perspective of the world was different from that place. Thoreau closed the description of this day with a verse composed of two lines.



2.2.4. SUNDAY



This was the second day that Thoreau and his brother spent on the trip. In the morning of Sunday a thick fog had covered the river and all the towns. It was a quiet day where the sun began to reflect its sunbeams. Thoreau continued with his trip discovering and admiring the beauty of those places. There were some islands on the way, one called Fox Island, where Thoreau and his brother had camped the last night; another called Grape Island, which was an island



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with many trees and flowers, where the water was deep and clean. From Ball’s Hill to Billerica the river was as broad as in Concord; a deep, dark, and dead stream, flowing between hills and sometimes cliffs.

In that part Thoreau could not see either house or cultivated field, nor any sign of humans. On the river’s bank it was easy to see the dead limbs of the willow and the elegance of the water-willow, with its green leaves and its height. Without a doubt, for Thoreau this plant was the most attractive, since its position on the bank of the river was perfect. There was not another tree as wonderful as the willow.

The water was so calm and transparent that it was possible to see some fish swimming and the air was pure. When some birds were flying, it was easy to see their figures reflected in the water. The day was as passive as



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the night. The air reflected peace and freshness. The landscape was clothed in a mild and quiet blue light, the green woods covered the scenery, and everything seemed pure and special.

After this appreciation Thoreau wrote a poem about the relationship between beauty and nature. He also talked about two men who were on the river doing an experiment to find answers to some questions. The sun lodged on the old gray cliffs, the bulrushes and flags seemed to enjoy the delicious light and air, the frogs sat meditating near the bank, the fish swam, shoals of golden and silver minnows rose to the surface, and everybody began to be pleasant and happy in that environment.

The rowboat continued its way, and soon Thoreau could see behind the woods a town. It was Billerica. It was as old as Fernay or as Mantua. Its native name was



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Shawshine. This was an old town and its houses and farms did not show any activity. Maybe its origin was so old that only the rocks could tell when Billerica appeared on the earth.

On the other hand, the road ran to Carlisle, city of the woods. It was less civil but more natural. It was a small city; however, it was a place where great men could be born any day without distinction. It had a meeting-house, a tavern, a blacksmith's shop, and a good deal of wood to cut. It was not an old city. In the early epochs white men arrived and began to change the landscape. They cut trees and sowed new kinds of plants, like apples. Thus, native plants had to blossom near the new ones. Some animals like beavers, bears, and deer had to change their houses. The white man also scattered the seeds of the dandelion and the wild clover over the meadows, mingling English flowers with the wild native ones. Citizens had a quiet and very civil life.



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They were cultivators of earth, and lived under an organized political government.

According to Thoreau the relationship between men and nature was independent, since each person was free to establish a relationship according to his power and convenience. Philosophy and literature were sciences that helped to understand nature. So poets, through their poems and verses, tried to sing the beauty of nature. They showed that everything changed with time. Plants and birds, and other animals changed their forms and colors, for example.

Thoreau told about the stories, tales, and fables that appeared in human history. The main purpose of those tales was to amuse people, without worrying if they were real or imaginary. There were incredible fables, like Eгина Island, where after a terrible disease that killed the citizens, Jupiter transformed ants into men, or the story of Baco,

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where sailors became dolphins when they jumped into the water, thinking it was a meadow with flowers. Thoreau could realize that people almost never were worried if a tale was true or false. In the same way poets tried to write things, some of them real but others imaginary; the most important thing was that people could read poetry. Poets were the unique men that could write myths or true stories because of their great imagination.

A new road was appreciated by Thoreau and his brother. They were over the Billerica waterfalls, with 10 kilometers to arrive at Merrimack. They spent about an hour in that part. That channel was the oldest in that country and it was located near the modern railroads. The landscape was harmonious. There were many flowers and bushes. It was a pleasant route, without houses or travelers. There was a bridge in Chelmsford where some young men sat. When Thoreau and his brother were under the bridge, people who left church watched them and made pagan



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comparisons. The problem was they were sailing on Sunday. People worked six days, from Monday to Saturday, and Sunday everybody rested, since Sunday was God's day. Thoreau had calculated wrong, because he thought it was the first day, not the seventh.

Thoreau asked himself what God's day was. Maybe God could curse if people worked Sundays. Thoreau knew that there were different kinds of gods, but it was difficult to find one who governs the world. Every town had a god according to its necessities and circumstances. There were many religions, each one of them with a different god; however, the idea that Sunday was a special day was present in every belief.

Jehova and Christ were considered two different gods, each with his own independent rules to govern the world. As for this idea Thoreau had a conception, and he believed



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that it was not necessary to be a Christian to appreciate beauty and the meaning of life. The world was considered as a scene whose actors were each of us. For that reason it was important to enjoy each minute in life, instead of spending time on things without value.

On the theme of religion Thoreau could realize that people were limited to believe only some things through years without doubt. People could not reject beliefs that existed because they were not able to preach different things. They used to learn things without researching the real origin.

Thoreau had read a special book, “The New Testament.” It led Thoreau to dream and create a castle in the air. Thoreau’s favorite readings were the scriptures from India, China, and some written in Hebrew. He loved to read aloud to his friends. The New Testament was a lot of



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phrases that caught the attention of the readers; however, sometimes it became tedious and boring.

Thoreau considered that there was one thing that deformed the landscape-churches, because in most of them people lost their values and changed the real sense of life. The church was a kind of hospital for men, the center of concentration for poor and sick souls, where chatty people tried to forget their mistakes. Unfortunately, people thought that the most important thing was to go to the churches, pretending remorse for their sins. They did not help people when needed. They did not want to change their life style although they knew that it was wrong.

Thoreau believed Christianity was only a hope. Sometimes people had hope, but lost faith. The true faith was not in a prayer but in the inner part of men. Religion was considered a kind of umbilical cord between men and divinity. When men failed this cord could break.



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Nevertheless, the connection was the same for all men, although some people had broken the cord with their actions.

Thoreau's boat followed its route, and soon Thoreau and his brother were on the Merrimack between Chelmsford and Dracut. There were houses and men. They could hear some children in a cabin, in their catechism. Thoreau remembered that John Eliot was he who taught the Bible to the leaders of the tribes 200 years before; it was not an easy task, since in that place the only activity was fishing. They did not have any idea about religion.

The next stop was in the state of New Hampshire. It was a town with innumerable valleys and hills; its lakes and brooks reflected a special nature. The crystalline water went from one part to another without difficulty. The river in that part joined with the water of other small rivers, like the Mad,



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the Nashua, the Souhegan, the Suncook, and the Contoocook. There were some fishermen who threw their net for fish. So the river became commercial and important. This river was broad, with a good current where any kind of boat could start navigation, without worrying if it was small or big.

The Merrimack River had an active stream, different from the Concord River, whose stream was dying. Nevertheless in the Merrimack there was less life on its waters and banks. There were little fish, and its bottom there was dark sand. There were some kinds of fish, like shad, alewives, and salmon, that appeared in some stages of the year. In the same way an insect called shad appeared in May.

After that, Thoreau and his brother stopped their trip to rest, and picked some huckleberries. There they discovered



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the *Campanula Rotundifolia*, a new flower for them, which had been born in clean water.

As we know well, Thoreau was a poet, so he could not forget to write poetry in this part of the trip. He thought of poetry as a natural fruit. For Thoreau poetry helped people to establish a relation between phenomena that existed in society and to describe the most common sensations with absolute truth. Poetry was necessary because it helped to breathe. Each person was able to discover what he or she hoped to see through poetry. It was unique and special. Through poetry people could consider any topic, like war, god's power, or simple ideas. Each poetry book had its importance, but for Thoreau the most important and brilliant was *The Iliad*, written by Homer. According to Thoreau to write poetry was not difficult, since each man had a life and new experiences each day. Thus, everybody could use that fact to write verses or poems.

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In Thoreau’s perspective, poetry was as important as books, because they let us express ideas and minds and discover new worlds. For Thoreau a book was considered a world with letters, where the author’s inspiration was reflected. A book was the resource of pure science and knowledge. It was the shield to protect people from being ignorant. There were different kinds of books, but the reader was the only one who could choose the best, according to his necessities. When people read books they could change their ideas, since good books could wash their brains. The mind was considered like a current in a river, which could change as a result of the excess of water.

Reading was important because it served to propel minds. An excellent book had two qualities: Simplicity and Beauty. A good book always had a space in time because everybody wanted to read it. Some authors thought that a book was the best if it contained ideas of other writers. It



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was not true; a book was good when it contained important and real facts, things that happened in real situations.

The following stop was Rabbit Island, where the sun was shining and the river was straight. Thoreau and his brother passed by Wicasuck Island, which was located between Chelmsford and Tyngsborough. It was one of the favorite places for Indians. The day was ending, and the sun was hiding its reflections.

Finally, Thoreau and John stopped the trip. They pitched their tent in Tyngsborough. They hung a lantern to watch at night. Their beds had been made, with some blankets. After dinner, Thoreau and his brother observed their location. Then they were listening to the wind. Later Thoreau's brother wrote about the experiences of this day, until they slept.



2.2.5. MONDAY



A new day was born. It was Monday. This was the third day of Thoreau's trip. The birds woke up, the river murmured, all men had rested and were ready and prepared for new adventures. Thoreau cooked the breakfast while his brother cleaned the clay off the boat. Soon, Thoreau and his brother were ready to continue their



trip. They rowed through Tyngsborough then they entered Dunstable, a new territory.

After that they felt tired, so they looked for a quiet place to stop the trip and rest. They ate some fruits like melons and blueberries. They admired the new landscape and the relationship that existed between plants and animals, each of them in their space.

While he was resting he thought that in the world there were many wise men, but few craftsmen and discoverers. Life was a mystery; for this reason everybody was accustomed to follow the same pattern as the rest of the society. Nobody tried to create his own style of life, according to his thoughts. For this reason the art of life was always the same.

One of the most important facts that men should change was the idea of Preservation. All men enjoyed



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luxuries that nature offered, but men did not realize that it needed protection. The question was how to preserve; although it sounded difficult, the answer was easy. Men had to plant trees and sow the same fruits that they ate before, and protect the environment. In this way nature could become more beautiful and indestructible.

According to Thoreau men had knowledge, but they lacked prudence. It was not easy to change the old ideas than ruled their brains; for this reason men did not establish a harmonious relationship with nature. They destroyed nature and did not re-build it. Thoreau tried to establish a comparison between State and Nature. State had rules and reforms that men must accomplish. Sometimes those reforms were elaborated by governments, and they did not pay attention to the people's necessities. Otherwise, nature was free and it did not require laws. Men's only duty was to protect it. Moreover, nature existed for men, to help them to live well. The State was created by a man who wanted



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power over others. Reforms did not let men change according to their beliefs and thoughts.

In one of his paragraphs Thoreau mentioned Chateaubriand. For him there were things to help men become powerful and stronger. They were religion and love of native land. Religion was important because men needed a special light to guide their lives. Love of native land because it was important to show respect and love for the earth where men lived. If a man had these two things he could achieve all his dreams. Humility was a requirement that men would have in order to live in peace with themselves.

Following the theme of preservation, Thoreau mentioned that it was indispensable to have an important thing called “consciousness.” It was necessary and vital that men had consciousness to think about their actions. The

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conscience was a weapon, not an obstacle. The consciousness was the leader of the conservative people because people who had conscience knew what provoked damage. Conservative people must fight to avoid destroying nature and earth. Preservation of nature was related to wisdom. A wise man tried to protect the environment every day. Wisdom and Humility were necessary for life; men required both of them to live in peace in the world.

Between reflections and thoughts Thoreau and John were in Nashua, between Hudson and Nottingham. The river was quiet and calm; the banks were covered with willows and other plants. Then they rowed close to a small desert between Tyngsborough and Hudson. It was interesting for Thoreau's eyes. This was a place for fishing. Many years ago, this place was a center where Indians made arrows to catch fish.



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Thoreau could realize that earth changed, although men did not understand the reason of those changes. New landscapes appeared, some of them more wonderful than others. Nature was an active world, where each element had life. Nature and earth were places that kept thousands of histories through years.

For Thoreau actions or situations that formed part of history could tell in the present not as something dark or tragic, but with emotion and emphasis full of light. Although sometimes history had sad situations, about wars for example, always there was a little happiness and light.

In the afternoon Thoreau and his brother were in the occidental part of the river. There were a few trees near the river's banks. Tilia Americana or Lime was a new kind of tree for Thoreau and his brother. This tree had broad leaves in little bunches. The branches of this tree were useful.



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Fishermen used them to make mats. Farmers made shoes because of their hardness; they were also used to make cradles and baskets. Moreover, this tree was used to prepare a medicine, and its wood was used to make charcoal. When Thoreau saw this tree he remembered that he was in a strange land. Besides, he could realize that nature was unique.

Soon, they were in a place called Salmon Brook, considered the best place by Indians. Close to a mile away there was located John Lowell's house, who was a potter in Oliver Cromwell army. He was the father of the capital, Lowell. According to history he fought in the Narragansett War in 1675. Salmon Brook was a solitary brook, while Nashua had become popular. In Nashua, there was a valley with big trees and green meadows. The blue clouds covered this part of the world and provoked in Thoreau a sensation of peace.

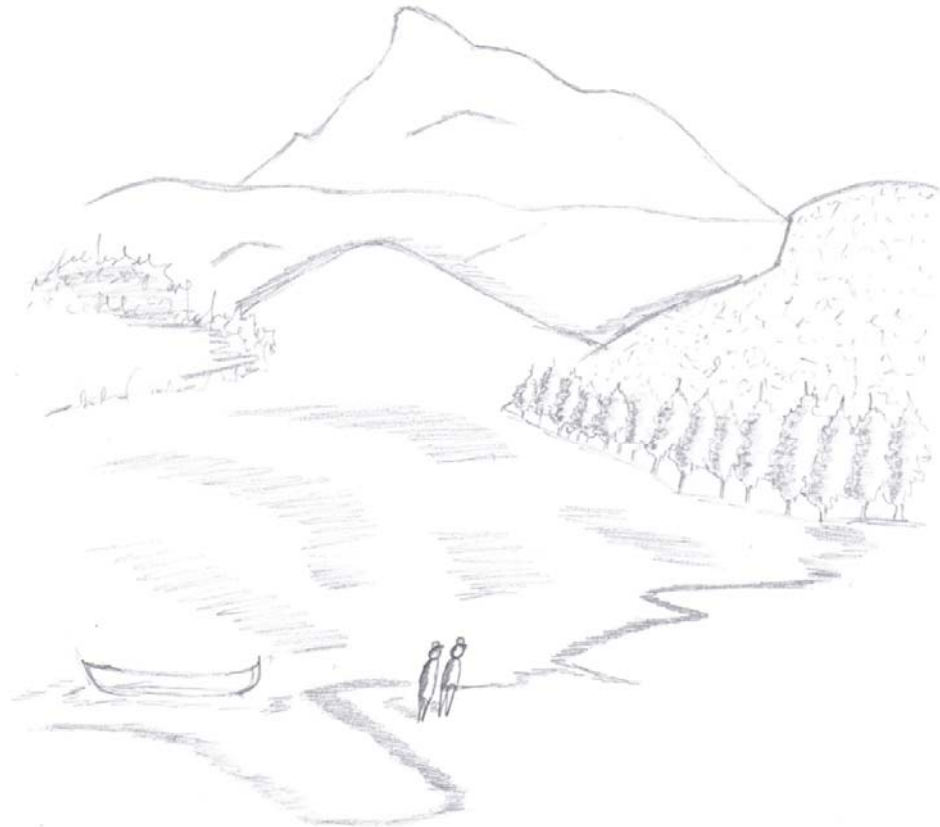


Thoreau was a man who knew many stories about each town or brook that he could observe. He knew the history of many soldiers and heroes from the past. Thus, Farwell, for example, was a captain who fought in many wars. He was a well-known man for his feats in wars against Indians.

Finally, the night was coming. Thoreau and John were looking for a place to rest. Soon they arrived at a new land called Penichook Brook. There they stopped their trip and awaited the next day, for new adventures.



2.2.6. TUESDAY



Long before daylight they traveled abroad in search of fuel, and made the slumbering and dreaming wood resound with their blows. Then they burned up a portion of the loitering night with their fire. They walked about the shore, waked all the muskrats, and scared up the bitterns and birds that were asleep on their roosts. They pulled up and upset their boat and washed it and rinsed out the clay. By

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three o'clock, they had completed their preparations, and they were ready to pursue their voyage. So shaking the clay from their feet, they pushed into the fog.

According to a historian of that State, Belknap, a whitish fog in the morning lying over the water was a sure indication of fair weather for that day; and when no fog was seen, rain was expected before night. They couldn't distinguish objects through that dense fog, so Thoreau said, “Let me tell this story more at length.”⁴⁹

He had come over the hills on foot and alone in serene summer days, plucking the raspberries by the wayside, and occasionally buying a loaf of bread at a farmer's house. He used to carry a backpack on his back, which held a few travelers' books and a change of clothing. He put a little rice, sugar, and a tin cup into his backpack at a village, and

⁴⁹ <http://www.thoreau-online-org/a-week-on-the-concord-and-merrimack-rivers-page-91.html>



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he began to ascend the mountain in the afternoon, whose height was three thousand six hundred feet above the level of the sea, and was seven or eight miles distant by the path. His route was located in a long and spacious valley called the Bellows, because the winds rushed up or down it with violence, in storms. There were a few farms scattered along at different elevations, and a stream ran down the middle of the valley on which, near the head, there was a mill. Thoreau said that it seemed a road for the pilgrim to enter upon who would climb to the gates of heaven. Then he crossed a hay-field.

The hills in the interior of that island were penetrated in various directions by similar sloping valleys on a humble scale. At the head of those valleys the Huguenots, who were the first settlers, placed their houses quite within the land, in rural and sheltered places, in leafy recesses. When walking in the interior there, in the midst of rural scenery, he



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had suddenly caught sight of a ship under full sail, over a field of corn, twenty or thirty miles at sea.

He at length reached the last house but one, where the path to the summit diverged to the right, while the summit itself rose directly in front, and he determined to follow up the valley to its head, and then he found his own route up the steep as the shorter and more adventurous way. Sometimes he had thoughts in which he wanted to return to that house the next day, and perhaps remain a week there, if he could have entertainment. That house was well kept and so nobly placed. The mistress was a frank and hospitable young woman. She was full of interest in that lower world from which he had come, talking all the time as familiarly as if she had known him for years. She reminded Thoreau of a cousin of his. As he passed the last house, a man called out to know what he had to sell, because he thought that Thoreau might be a peddler who was taking



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that unusual route over the ridge of the valley into South Adams. That man told him that it was still four or five miles to the summit by the path which he had left, but that nobody ever went that way, so there was no path, and he should find it as steep as the roof of a house.

Thoreau went along through his cow-yard, while the man, looking at the sun, shouted after him that he should not get to the top that night. He soon reached the head of the valley, but he could not see the top from that point, and he decided to ascend a low mountain on the opposite side, and take its bearing with his compass. He at once entered the woods and began to climb the steep side of the mountain in a diagonal direction, taking the bearing of a tree every dozen rods. The ascent was not difficult or unpleasant, and it occupied much less time than it would have taken to follow the path. So far as his experience went, he realized that travelers generally exaggerate the



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difficulties of the way. He said that like most evils, the difficulty is imaginary.

He made his way steadily upward in a straight line through a dense undergrowth of mountain laurel, and at length he reached the summit, just as the sun was setting. Several acres there had been cleared, and were covered with rocks and stumps, and there was a rude observatory in the middle which overlooked the woods. He was thirsty, and he set out directly to find water. Then he remembered that he had passed a wet place near the top, on his way up, and he returned there to find water. There, with sharp stones and his hands, he made a well about two feet deep, which was soon filled with pure cold water. Even the birds came and drank at it too. After that, he filled his dipper and on his way back to the observatory, he collected some dried ticks and made a fire on some flat stones. He soon cooked his



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supper of rice. He had already whittled a wooden spoon to eat it with.

During the evening he sat up and began to read the scraps of newspapers in which some party had wrapped their luncheon; the prices current in New York and Boston, the advertisements, and the singular editorials. It seemed to him that the advertisements, or what is called the business part of a paper, were greatly the best, the most useful, natural, and respectable. For Thoreau almost all the opinions and sentiments expressed were so little considered, so shallow and flimsy, that he thought the very texture of the paper must be weaker in that part and tear the more easily. The advertisements and the prices current were more closely allied to nature. The advertisements, as we have said, were serious, and not of the modern quack kind, suggested pleasing and poetic thoughts; for commerce was really as interesting as nature.



That night was cold. He collected quite a pile of wood and lay down on a board against the side of the building. He did not have any blanket to cover him, so he put his head near the fire. But as it grew colder towards midnight, he at length encased himself completely in boards, managing even to put a board on top of him, with a large stone on it, to keep it down, and so slept comfortably. His only companions were the mice, which came to pick up the crumbs that had been left in those scraps of paper. They nibbled what was for them; he nibbled what was for him. Once or twice in the night, when he looked up, he saw a white cloud drifting through the windows, and filling the whole upper story. The observatory was a building of considerable size, erected by the students of Williamstown College, whose buildings might be seen by daylight gleaming far down in the valley. Some students would



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remember, no doubt, not only that they went to the college, but that they went to the mountain.

He was up early and perched upon the top of this tower to see the daybreak. As the light increased he discovered around him an ocean of mist, which by chance reached up exactly to the base of the tower, and shut out every vestige of the earth. As the light in the east steadily increased, it revealed to him more clearly the new world into which he had risen in the night. All around beneath him, the mist was spread for a hundred miles on every side. There were immense snowy pastures and shady vales between the vaporous mountains. Far in the horizon he could see where some luxurious misty timber jutted into the prairie, and trace the windings of a water-course, some unimagined Amazon or Orinoco, by the misty trees on its brink.



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As he had climbed above storm and cloud, he might reach the region of eternal day, beyond the tapering shadow of the earth. When its own sun began to rise on that pure world, Henry David found himself a dweller in the dazzling halls of Aurora. The inhabitants of earth behold commonly but the dark and shadowy under-side of heaven's pavement.

In the earlier evening he had seen the summits of new and yet higher mountains. The Catskills, by which he might hope to climb to heaven again, and had set his compass for a fair lake in the southwest, which lay in his way, for which he steered, descending the mountain by his own route, and soon found himself in the region of cloud and drizzling rain, and the inhabitants affirmed that it had been a cloudy and drizzling day wholly.



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In their voyage, they passed a canal-boat before sunrise, groping its way to the seaboard, though they could not see it on account of the fog. One little rill of commerce already awake on that distant New Hampshire river. The fog enhanced the interest of their early voyage, and made the river seem indefinitely broad. Henry David Thoreau said that the most stupendous scenery ceases to be sublime when it becomes distinct, or in other words limited, and the imagination is no longer encouraged to exaggerate it. Nature is not made after such a fashion as we would have her. We spiritually exaggerate her wonders, as the scenery around our home.

They passed the mouth of Penichook Brook, a wild salmon-stream, in the fog, without seeing it. At length the sun's rays struggled through the mist and showed them the pines on shore dripping with dew, and springs trickling from the moist banks. They rowed for some hours between



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glistening banks before the sun had dried the grass and leaves. Its serenity at last seemed the more profound and secure for the denseness of the morning's fog. The river became swifter, and the scenery more pleasing than before. The banks were steep for the most part and trickling with water. Sometimes that purer and cooler water, bursting out from under a pine or a rock, was collected into a basin close to the edge of and level with the river, a fountain-head of the Merrimack.

Their path that morning lay between the territories of Merrimack, on the west, and Litchfield, once called Brenton's Farm, on the east, which townships were anciently the Indian Naticook. History says that Brenton was a fur-trader among the Indians, and those lands were granted to him in 1656. The latter township contained about five hundred inhabitants, of whom, however, Thoreau and his brother did not see anybody. What they did see was a



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few of their dwellings. When they were on the river, the country appeared much more wild and primitive than to the traveler on the neighboring roads. The river was by far the most attractive highway. As one ascended the Merrimack he rarely saw a village, but for the most part alternate wood and pasture lands, and sometimes a field of corn or potatoes, of rye or oats or English grass, with a few straggling apple-trees, and a farmer's house.

Sometimes the country appeared as if the Indian still inhabited it. Their slight fences straggling down to the water's edge, the barking of dogs and even the prattle of children were heard, and smoke was seen to go up from some hearthstone, and the banks were divided into patches of pasture. But when the river spread out broader, with an uninhabited islet, the rustling leaves with rippling waves, and few fences were seen, but high oak woods on one side, and large herds of cattle, and all tracks seemed to point to

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MAYRA LAZO T.



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one center behind some statelier grove, they imagined that the river flowed through an extensive mansion, and that the few inhabitants were retainers to a lord, and a feudal state of things prevailed.

When there was a suitable reach, they caught sight of the Goffstown Mountain. It was a calm and beautiful day and with optimistic spirits and vigorous impulses they tossed their boat rapidly along into the very middle of that forenoon. The fish-hawk sailed and screamed overhead. The chipping or striped squirrel sat upon the end of some Virginia fence or rider reaching over the stream, twirling a green nut with one paw. The larger red squirrel gave warning of their approach, and presently, when they have passed, he returns to his work of cutting off the pine-cones, and letting them fall to the ground.



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They passed Cromwell's Falls, the first they met with on that river, that forenoon, by means of locks, without using their wheels. Those falls were the Nesenkeag of the Indians. Great Nesenkeag Stream comes in on the right just above, and Little Nesenkeag some distance below, both in Litchfield. They read in the Gazetteer, under the head of Merrimack, that the first house in that town was erected on the margin of the river for a house of traffic with the Indians. For some time one Cromwell carried on a lucrative trade with them, weighing their furs with his foot, till, enraged at his supposed or real deception, they formed the resolution to murder him. This intention was communicated to Cromwell, so he buried his wealth and made his escape. Within a few hours after his flight, a party of the Penacook tribe arrived, but they did not find the object of their resentment, and they burnt his habitation. Upon the top of the high bank there, close to the river, was still to be seen his cellar, now overgrown with trees. The lock-man told



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them that his shovel and tongs had been ploughed up there, and also a stone with his name on it. On the opposite bank, where it jutted over the stream cape-wise, they picked up four arrow-heads and a small Indian tool made of stone. As soon as they had climbed it, they saw where plainly there had once stood a wigwam of the Indians with whom Cromwell traded, and who fished and hunted there before he came.

Gossips have not been silent respecting Cromwell's buried wealth. It is said that some years ago a farmer's plough slid over a flat stone which emitted a hollow sound, and a small hole six inches in diameter was discovered, stoned about, from which a sum of money was taken. The lock-man told Thoreau and his brother another similar story about a farmer in a neighboring town. He was a poor man, but suddenly he bought a good farm, and was well to do in the world. When he was questioned, he could not prove



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how he bought that farm. That caused his hired man to remember that one day, as they were ploughing together, the plough struck something, and his employer, going back to look, concluded not to go round again, saying that the sky looked rather lowering, and so put up his team. He concluded that the truth was that there was money buried everywhere, and you have only to go to work to find it.

There, there was another extensive desert by the side of the road in Litchfield, visible from the bank of the river. The sand was blown off in some places to the depth of ten or twelve feet, leaving small grotesque hillocks of that height, where there was a clump of bushes firmly rooted. In this part Thoreau wrote another story about sheep. Thirty or forty years ago, as they were told, it was a sheep-pasture, but the sheep, being worried by the fleas, began to paw the ground, till they broke the sod, and so the sand began to blow, till now it had extended over forty or fifty acres. The



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fleas bit the sheep, and the sheep bit the ground, and the sore had spread to this extent. There too they noticed where the Indians had gathered a heap of stones. They told them that arrow-heads, and also bullets of lead and iron, had been found there. They also noticed several other sandy tracts in their voyage. That sand seemed to them the connecting link between land and water. He said that it was a kind of water on which you could walk, and you could see the ripple-marks on its surface produced by the winds.

Plum Island, at the mouth of that river, was a similar desert of drifting sand, of various colors, and blown into graceful curves by the wind. It was a mere sand-bar exposed, stretching nine miles parallel to the coast. There were half a dozen houses on it, and it was almost without a tree, a sod, or any green thing with which a countryman is familiar. The thin vegetation stood half buried in sand, as in drifting snow. The only plant, the beach-plum, which gave



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the island its name, grew but a few feet high. Those plants were so abundant that parties of a hundred at once came from the main-land to the Merrimack, in September, pitched their tents, and gathered the plums, which were good to eat raw and to preserve. There were also graceful and delicate beach-peas, which grew abundantly in the middle of the sand, and several strange, moss-like and succulent plants.

Thoreau said that there is reason in the distinction of civil and uncivil. Manners are sometimes of a rind so rough that we doubt whether they cover any core or sap-wood at all. A true politeness does not result from any hasty and artificial polishing, it is true, but grows naturally in characters of the right grain and quality, through a long fronting of men and events, and rubbing on good and bad fortune.



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Early one summer morning Thoreau had left the shores of the Connecticut. The hills grew more and more frequent, and gradually swelled into mountains as he advanced, hemming in the course of the river, so that at last he could not see where it came from, and was at liberty to imagine the most wonderful meanderings and descents. At noon he slept on the grass in the shade of a maple. The hills approached nearer and nearer to the stream, until at last they closed behind him, and he found himself just before nightfall in a romantic and retired valley. David Thoreau thought that there could be no finer site for a cottage among mountains. Suddenly the road, which seemed aiming for the mountain-side, turned short to the left, and another valley opened. Thoreau said, “It was the most remarkable and pleasing scenery I had ever seen.”⁵⁰ He found there a few mild and hospitable inhabitants, who directed Thoreau four or five miles farther on his way to the

⁵⁰ Op. cit. Tuesday, p. 103



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dwelling of a man whose name was Rice. He occupied the last and highest of the valleys that lay in his path. He was a rude and uncivil man.

At length, Thoreau reached the dwelling of that man. When he observed that man, he realized that he was not as rude as had been anticipated. He kept many cattle and dogs to watch them, and he saw where he had made maple-sugar on the sides of the mountains, and above all distinguished the voices of children mingling with the murmur of the torrent before the door. As he passed his stable he met one whom he supposed to be a hired man. He was attending to his cattle, and he asked if they entertained travelers at that house. He answered that sometimes they did, and he immediately went to the farthest stall from him, and Thoreau perceived that it was Rice himself whom he had addressed.



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Then Thoreau bent his steps to the house. He passed from room to room without meeting any one. He came to what seemed the guests' apartment. It was neat and even had an air of refinement about it. He was glad to find a map against the wall which would direct him on his journey on the morrow. Then he heard a step in a distant apartment and he went to see if the landlord had come in; but it was only a child, one of those whose voices he had heard, probably Rice's son, and between him and Thoreau stood in the doorway a large watch-dog, which growled at him, and looked as if he would presently spring, but the boy did not speak to him; and when he asked for a glass of water, he briefly said, "It runs in the corner." So he took a mug from the counter and went out of doors, and searched round the corner of the house. Thoreau came back, therefore, and, setting down the mug, asked the child if the stream was good to drink. Then the boy went to the corner of the room, where a cool spring trickled through a pipe into



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the apartment, filled it, and drank, and gave it to him empty again, and, calling to the dog, rushed out of doors. In a short time some of the hired men made their appearance, and drank at the spring, and lazily washed themselves and combed their hair in silence, and some sat down as if weary, and fell asleep in their seats. But all the while he saw no women, though he sometimes heard a bustle in that part of the house from which the spring came.

At length, when it was dark Rice himself came in with an ox-whip in his hand, breathing hard, and he too soon settled down into his seat not far from Thoreau. As his day's work was done, he had no farther to travel, but only to digest his supper at his leisure. When Thoreau asked him if he could give him a bed, Rice said there was one ready. So far so good. And yet he continued to look at him as if he would fain have him say something further, like a traveler. Thoreau remarked that the place he inhabited was a wild



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and rugged country. Rice replied, "Not so very rough neither," and appealed to his men to bear witness to the breadth and smoothness of his fields. Then Thoreau asked if that place was the one he had heard of, calling it by a name he had seen on the map, or if it was a certain other; and he answered, that it was neither the one nor the other. He said that he had settled it and cultivated it, and made it what it was, and he could know nothing about that country.

Thoreau had come up there not for sympathy, kindness, or society, but for novelty and adventure, and to see what nature had produced there. He therefore did not repel Rice's rudeness, but quite innocently welcomed it all, and knew how to appreciate it, as if he were reading in an old drama a part well sustained. Thoreau said that Rice was indeed a coarse and sensual man, and, as he had said, uncivil, but he had his just quarrel with nature and mankind, Thoreau had no doubt, only he had no artificial covering to



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his ill-humors. At length Thoreau told him that he was a fortunate man, and he trusted that he was grateful for so much light. Then Thoreau had to pay him for his lodging. He expected to recommence his journey even as early as the sun rose in the country. He could take his breakfast with them before he started his voyage if he chose.

For many pleasant hours after the household was asleep he sat at the open window, for it was a sultry night, and heard the little river.

Before Thoreau had left the country of his host, while the first rays of the sun slanted over the mountains, as he stopped by the wayside to gather some raspberries, a very old man came along with a milking-pail in his hand, and turning aside began to pluck the berries near him. But when Thoreau asked for the way, he answered in a low, rough voice without looking up, and he proceeded to collect his cows in a neighboring pasture. When he had again



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returned near to the wayside, he suddenly stopped, and uncovering his head, prayed aloud in the cool morning air. When he had finished praying, Thoreau made bold to ask him if he had any cheese in his shelter which he would sell him, but he answered without looking up, and in the same low and repulsive voice as before, that he did not make any, and went to milking.

Returning with their voyage, they began to meet with boats more frequently, and hailed them from time to time with the freedom of sailors. The boatmen appeared to lead an easy and contented life, and they thought that they should prefer their employment themselves to many professions which are much more sought after. The boatmen suggested how few circumstances are necessary to the well-being and serenity of man, how indifferent all employments were, and that any may seem noble and poetic to the eyes of men, if pursued with sufficient



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buoyancy and freedom. They said that the man who picks peas steadily for a living is more than respectable; he is even envied by his shop-worn neighbors. Thoreau and his brother were as happy as the birds when their Good Genius permitted them to pursue any out-door work, without a sense of dissipation.

When we met them at noon as they were leisurely descending the stream, their busy commerce did not look like toil, but rather like some ancient Oriental game still played on a large scale, as the game of chess, for instance, handed down to this generation. The news spread like wildfire among them. Once in a year or two, one of those boats came up the Concord River, and was seen mysteriously through the meadows and past the village. It came and departed as silently as a cloud, without noise or dust, and was witnessed by few. One summer day this huge traveler might be seen moored at some meadow's



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wharf, and another summer day it was not there. Where precisely it came from, or who these men were who knew the rocks and soundings better than Thoreau and his brother who bathed there, they could never tell. They were a sort of fabulous river-men to them.

Thoreau had seen them in the summer when the stream ran low, that they might make a passage for their scow, while the grass in long windrows was carried down the stream, undried by the rarest hay-weather. They admired how their vessel would float, like a huge chip, sustaining so many casks of lime, thousands of bricks, such heaps of iron ore with wheelbarrows aboard, and that, when they stepped on it, it did not yield to the pressure of their feet. The men appeared to lead a kind of life on it, and it was whispered that they slept aboard. Some affirmed that it carried sail. They had been seen to sail across their Fair Haven bay by lucky fishers who were out, but unfortunately



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others were not there to see. Thoreau said, "Such is Commerce, which shakes the cocoa-nut and bread-fruit tree in the remotest isle, and sooner or later dawns on the duskiest and most simple-minded savage."⁵¹

The boatmen made two or three trips in a week, according to wind and weather, from Merrimack to Lowell and back, about twenty-five miles each way. They came singing in to shore late at night, moored their empty boat, got their supper and lodging in some house near at hand, and again early in the morning, they pushed away up stream, and, by a shout, or the fragment of a song, gave notice of their approach to the lock-man. Thoreau and his brother were frequently advised of their approach by some faint sound behind them, and looking round saw them a mile off, creeping stealthily up the side of the stream like alligators. Thoreau said that it was pleasant to hail those

⁵¹ Op. cit. p. 107



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sailors of the Merrimack from time to time, and learn the news which circulated with them.

When they climbed the bank, they commonly found an irregular copse-wood skirting the river. Sometimes they saw the river-road a quarter or half a mile distant, and the parti-colored Concord stage, with its cloud of dust, its van of earnest travelling faces, and its rear of dusty trunks, reminding them that the country had its places of rendezvous for restless Yankee men. There dwelt a quiet agricultural and pastoral people, with every house its well, as they sometimes proved. There they lived on, those New England people, farmer lives, father and grandfather and great-grandfather, on and on without noise, keeping up tradition, and expecting, besides fair weather and abundant harvests, they did not learn what. They were contented to live, since it was so contrived for them, where their lots had fallen. Those men had no need to travel to be as wise as



Solomon in all his glory. Thoreau said, “One half of the world knows how the other half lives.”⁵²

About noon they passed a small village in Merrimack at Thornton's Ferry, and tasted of the waters of Naticook Brook on the same side. The humble village of Litchfield, with its steepleless meeting-house, stood on the opposite or east bank, near where a dense grove of willows backed by maples skirted the shore. There also they noticed some shagbark-trees, which, as they did not grow in Concord, were as strange a sight to them as the palm would be, whose fruit only they had seen. Their course then curved gracefully to the north, leaving a low, flat shore on the Merrimack side, which forms a sort of harbor for canal-boats. They observed some fair elms and particularly large and handsome white-maples standing on that interval; and the opposite shore was covered with young elms and

⁵² Op. cit. p. 109



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maples six inches high, which had probably sprung from the seeds which had been washed across.

Some carpenters were at work there mending a scow on the green and sloping bank, and they realized that boat-building was as ancient and honorable an art as agriculture, and that there might be a naval as well as a pastoral life. They thought that it would be well for the traveler to build his boat on the bank of a stream, instead of finding a ferry or a bridge.

During the many hours which they spend in that waking sleep, the hand stood still on the face of the clock, and they grew like corn in the night. Thoreau said that men were as busy as the brooks or bees, and postponed everything to their business; as carpenters discuss politics between the strokes of the hammer while they are shingling a roof.

AUTORAS:

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In this part Thoreau told us another interesting story. One spring morning, on March 22, 1677, an incident occurred on the banks of the river, which was interesting to them as a slight memorial of an interview between two ancient tribes of men. A Mr. James Parker, at Mr. Hinchmanne's farm near Merrimack, wrote to the Honored Governor and Council at Boston, Haste, Post Haste something like this: Sagamore Wanalancet came this morning to inform me, and then went to Mr. Tyng's to inform him, that his son being on the other side of the Merrimack river over against Souhegan upon the 22 day of this instant, about ten o'clock in the morning, discovered 15 Indians on this side of the river, which he supposed to be Mohawks by their speech. He called to them; they answered, but he could not understand their speech; and having a canoe there in the river, he went to break his canoe that they might not have any use of it. In the mean time they shot about



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thirty guns at him, and he being much frightened fled, and came home forthwith to Nahamcock, where the wigwams now stand.

This is another story about the Penacook and Mohawk Indians. In the year 1670, a Mohawk warrior scalped a Naamkeak or a Wamesit Indian maiden near where Lowell now stands. She, however, recovered. Even as late as 1685, John Hogkins, a Penacook Indian, who described his grandfather as having lived at a place called Malamake river, wrote thus to the governor:

"May 15th, 1685.

"Honored governor my friend,

You my friend I desire your worship and your power, because I hope you can do som great matters to this one. I am poor and naked and I have no men at my place because I afraid allwayes Mohogs he will kill me every day and night. If your worship when please pray help me you no



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let Mohogs kill me at my place at Malamake river called Pannukkog and Natukkog, I will submit your worship and your power. And now I want powder and such alminishon shatt and guns, because I have forth at my hom and I plant theare.

This all Indian hand, but pray you do consider your humble servant,

^John Hogkins^.

Signed also by Simon Detogkom, King Hary, Sam Linis, Mr. Jorge Rodunnonukgus, John Owamosimmin, and nine other Indians, with their marks against their names.

One hundred and fifty-four years having elapsed since the date of that letter Thoreau and his brother, John, went unalarmed on their way without breaking their "canoe," reading the New England Gazetteer, and seeing no traces of Mohogs on the banks.



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During the heat of the day, they rested on a large island a mile above the mouth of the river. It was pastured by a herd of cattle. The island had steep banks, scattered elms and oaks, and a sufficient channel for canal-boats on each side. The woods on the neighboring shore were alive with pigeons. They could hear the slight, wiry, winnowing sound of their wings as they changed their roosts from time to time, and their gentle and tremulous cooing. They caught one of those handsome birds to be carried along for their supper. They depended mainly on the river and forest for their supply.

The carcasses of some poor squirrels, however, the same that frisked so merrily in the morning, which they had skinned and disemboweled for their dinner, they abandoned in disgust, with tardy humanity, as too wretched a resource for any but starving men. But with a sudden impulse they



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threw them away, washed their hands, and boiled some rice for their dinner again.

Then they found the pleasant harbor which they had sighed for, where the weary voyageur could read the journal of some other sailor, whose bark had ploughed, perchance, more famous and classic seas. At the tables of the gods, after feasting follow music and song; they would recline under those island trees.

Late in the afternoon, they raised their sail for the first time, and for a short hour the southwest wind was their ally. With one sail raised they swept slowly up the eastern side of the stream. Having passed Read's Ferry, and another island called McGaw's Island, they reached some rapids called Moore's Falls, and entered on that section of the river, nine miles in extent, converted, by law, into the Union Canal, comprehending in that space six distinct falls.



There they could see the pickerel lying low in the transparent water. They looked far into a new country, broad and serene, the cottages of settlers seen afar for the first time. It was strange to consider how the sun and the summer, the buds of spring and the seared leaves of autumn, were related to those cabins along the shore; how all the rays which paint the landscape radiate from them, and the flight of the crow and the gyrations of the hawk have reference to their roofs.

At length the never-sinking shore tempted them to disembark; and they decided to land on that remote coast, to survey it, without the knowledge of any human inhabitant, probably, to that day. But they still remembered the gnarled and hospitable oaks which grew even there for their entertainment, and they were no strangers to them, the lonely horse in the pasture, and the patient cows, and



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above all, the cool, free aspect of the wild apple-trees, generously proffering their fruit to them. After that, the waning day compelled them to embark once more, and redeem that wasted time with long and vigorous sweeps over the rippling stream.

That place was still wild and solitary, except that at intervals of a mile or two the roof of a cottage might be seen over the bank. That region was once famous for the manufacture of straw bonnets of the Leghorn kind.

Just before sundown they reached some more falls in the town of Bedford, where some stone-masons were employed repairing the locks in a solitary part of the river. They were interested in their adventure, especially one young man of their own age, who inquired at first if they were bound up to Skeag. When he had heard Thoreau's story, and examined their outfit, he asked them other



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questions. It was plain that the young man would like to go with them. When they were ready to go, he left his work and helped them through the locks with a sort of quiet enthusiasm, telling them that they were at Coos Falls.

At the end of this day, they wished to camp that night on a large rock in the middle of the stream, just above those falls, but the want of fuel, and the difficulty of fixing their tent firmly, prevented them. So they decided to make their bed on the main-land opposite Bedford, in a retired place because there was not any house in sight.



2.2.7. WEDNESDAY



Henry David Thoreau begins this day with a Cotton phrase, which goes “Man is man’s foe and destiny.”⁵³

Early that morning, the masons who worked at the locks came upon them as they were going to their work, and in that moment Henry and his brother found that they had pitched their tent directly in the path to their boat. That

⁵³ Op. cit. Wednesday, p. 121



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was the only time that they were observed on their camping-ground. Thus, they beheld the country privately and yet freely.

In that rocky coast, before sunrise, the smaller bittern, a bird of the oldest Thalesian school, which was the genius of the shore, was moping along its edge. It was looking for wrecks of snails and cockles. This kind of bird believes in the priority of water to the other elements. There is also something venerable in this melancholy and contemplative race of birds, which may have trodden the earth while it was yet in a slimy and imperfect state, and possibly their tracks are still visible on the stones.

Then, rowing between Manchester and Bedford, they passed a ferry and some falls called Goff's Falls, where there was a small village and a small handsome island in the middle of the stream. The bricks of which Lowell was



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made were boated from Bedford and Merrimack. People said that about twenty years before, one Moore, of Bedford, contracted to furnish eight million bricks to the founders of that city within two years, but he fulfilled his contract in one year, and since then bricks have been the principal export of these towns. The farmers found thus a market for their wood.

There were few incidents in their voyage that morning. The river was more rocky and the falls more frequent than before. It was a pleasant change. They did not use the wheels which they had provided. They rowed leisurely up the stream for several hours, until sunrise. For outward variety there was only the river and the receding shores; and for inward, such thoughts as the muses lent them.

The small houses which were scattered along the river were commonly out of sight to them, but sometimes, when



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they rowed near the shore, they heard the irritable note of a hen, or some slight domestic sound, which betrayed them. The lock-men's houses were particularly well placed, retired, and high, always at falls or rapids, and commanding the pleasantest reaches of the river, and there they wait for boats.

So, in the noon of those days, they occasionally climbed the banks and approached those houses to get a glass of water and make acquaintance with their inhabitants. One door was opened by some Yankee-Hindoo woman, whose small voice (but sincere hospitality) had traveled quite round to the opposite side, and feared only to impose its kindness.

Henry and his brother passed a large and densely wooded island that morning, between Short's and Griffith's Falls. They said that it was the fairest place they had met



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with, and if it had been evening they would have been glad to camp there. The boatmen told them that the current had recently made changes there. The inhabitant of an island can tell what currents formed the land which he cultivates; and his earth is still being created or destroyed.

Not long after that they saw the sparkling water emptying in on their left, and they heard the Amoskeag above. Large quantities of lumber were still annually floated down the Piscataquoag to the Merrimack, and there were many fine mill privileges on it. At the time of their voyage Manchester was a village of about two thousand inhabitants, where they landed for a moment to get some cool water, and where an inhabitant told them that he was accustomed to go across the river into Goffstown for his water. But now Manchester contains fourteen thousand inhabitants.



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From a hill on the road between Goffstown and Hooksett, four miles distant, Thoreau had seen a thunder-shower pass over, and the sun break out and shine on a city there, where he had landed nine years before in the fields. According to the Gazetteer, the descent of Amoskeag Falls, which are the most considerable in the Merrimack, is fifty-four feet in half a mile. Amoskeag, also called Namaskeak, is said to mean “great fishing-place.” It was near here that the Sachem Wannalancet resided. There is a tradition which says that the tribe, when at war with the Mohawks, concealed their provisions in the cavities of the rocks in the upper part of Amoskeag Falls. Perhaps the most remarkable curiosity of this kind in New England is the well-known Basin on the Pemigewasset, one of the head-waters of this river, twenty by thirty feet in extent and proportionably deep, with a smooth and rounded brim, and filled with a cold, pellucid, and greenish water. At Amoskeag the river is divided into many separate torrents and trickling



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rills by the rocks, and its volume is so much reduced by the drain of the canals that it does not fill its bed. There are many pot-holes there on a rocky island which the river washes over in high freshets.

Thoreau said that the monuments of heroes and the temples of the gods which may once have stood on the banks of this river are now, at any rate, returned to dust and primitive soil. Then Thoreau mentioned the Romans as an example and he said that their military monuments still remain in the hills and under the sod of the valleys of Europe. Then Thoreau also said that if one doubts whether Grecian valor and patriotism are a fiction of the poets, he may go to Athens and see still upon the walls of the temple of Minerva the circular marks made by the shields taken from the enemy in the Persian war, which were suspended there.



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In this part Thoreau wrote about some interesting people, and he mentioned that in those parts lived the famous Sachem Pasaconaway. He was reputed as a wise man in a powwow, and restrained his people from going to war with the English. People believed that he had supernatural powers. They believed that he could make water burn, rocks move, trees dance, and metamorphose himself into a flaming man; in winter he could raise a green leaf out of the ashes of a dry one, and produce a living snake from the skin of a dead one, and many similar miracles like these. He had a son named Wannalancet, who withdrew his followers to Penacook when Philip's war broke out.

Then Thoreau also talked about John Stark, who lived in Manchester. He was a hero of two wars and survivor of a third. He was taken prisoner by the Indians while hunting in the wilderness. He was the captain of rangers in the French



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war. He fought and won the battle of Bennington in 1777.

He died in 1822, at the age of 94. The graves of Pasaconaway and Wannalancet are marked by no monument on the bank of their native river. Thoreau said that every town which they passed had been the residence of some great man.

Thoreau and his brother, John, continued their voyage, and they went to Uncannunuc Mountain in Goffstown. Its name is said to mean “The Two Breasts.” The story says that about sixty years ago, a little south of Uncannunuc, an old woman who went out to gather pennyroyal, stumbled over the handle of a small brass kettle in the dead grass and bushes. Some people said that flints, charcoal, and some traces of a camp were also found. It is supposed to have belonged to some old French or Indian hunter, who was killed on one of his hunting or scouting excursions, and so never returned to look for his kettle. What Thoreau and



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his brother wanted was to hear of the pennyroyal. It is a pleasure to be reminded that wild nature produces anything ready for the use of man. There were a lot of opinions among men about pennyroyal, but everybody may be happy when what is their food is also their medicine. Everybody said that this herb was good. Thoreau was very glad to hear it. But, he asked himself, how should they know that it is good? That was the mystery for him.

After passing through the locks, they poled themselves through the canal there. There were many canal-boats bound up to Hooksett, and one man offered to take them in tow if they would wait. But then they realized that what the man meant was to take them on board. They knew that it was impossible because their boat was too heavy to be lifted. So they decided to continue their way up the stream and came to anchor under some alders on the opposite shore, where they could take their lunch. From the harbor of



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the canal, they could see everything that passed. After some time the boat which they had spoken to came along, and the steersman called out ironically to ask if this time they wanted him to take them in tow. They did not pay attention to him, and they continued eating until they finished their lunch. Their course that afternoon was between Manchester and Goffstown.

In this part Thoreau wrote about friendship. He said that the universe seems bankrupt as soon as we begin to discuss the character of individuals. How is it that we are forced to treat our old friends so ill when we obtain new ones? The housekeeper says, “I never had any new crockery in my life but I began to break the old.”⁵⁴ Thoreau said, “Friendship is evanescent in every man’s experience, and remembered like heat lightning in past summers.”⁵⁵ Something very interesting and important that Thoreau

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 133

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 135



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made reference to in this part was that there is on the earth no institution which friendship has established; it is not taught by any religion; no scripture contains its maxims. Friendship has no temple.

Thoreau cited something very interesting that Mencius says: “If one loses a fowl or a dog, he knows well how to seek them again; if one loses the sentiments of his heart, he does not know how to seek them again... The duties of practical philosophy consist only in seeking after those sentiments of the heart which we have lost; that is all.”⁵⁶ It tells us that we have to take care of our feelings as if they were our most valuable treasure. No word is oftener on the lips of men than friendship.

Thoreau said that men do not, after all, love their friends greatly, and he wrote some examples of this. He

⁵⁶ Op. cit. p. 137



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said that he did not often see the farmers made seers and wise to the verge of insanity by their friendship for one another. He did not observe them purified, refined, and elevated by the love of a man. If one reduces a little the price of his wood, or gives a neighbor his vote at town-meeting, or a barrel of apples, or lends him his wagon frequently, it is esteemed a rare instance of friendship. For this reason Thoreau said that there are only two or three couples in history. Thoreau said that to say that a man is your friend, means commonly no more than this, that he is not your enemy. Most people contemplate only the advantages of friendship, so the friend can assist in time of need. Thoreau said that we take advantage of friendship only when we need a favor from our friends. The dull man distinguishes only races or nations, or at most classes, but the wise man, individuals. There is a part in which Thoreau makes us think about the importance of friendship, and he said, “Think of the importance of friendship in the education



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of men.”⁵⁷ He said that friendship will make a man honest, a hero, and a saint. He also said that it is the state of the just dealing with the just, the magnanimous with the magnanimous, the sincere with the sincere, man with man. For Thoreau a friend is one who incessantly pays us the compliment of expecting from us all the virtues, and who can appreciate them in us. We are the product of what we make. For example, if we dealt only with the false and dishonest, we should at last forget how to speak truth. In our daily intercourse with men, our nobler faculties are dormant and suffered to rust.

There are a lot of books about the selection of friends for young people, and Thoreau said that it is because they really have nothing to say about friends. Thoreau believed that friendship takes place between those who have an affinity for one another, and it is a perfectly natural and

⁵⁷ Op. cit. p. 138



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inevitable result. Friends do not do what they think they must, but what they must. Thoreau suggested to us not to praise our friends, nor esteem them praiseworthy, nor let them think that they can please us by any behavior, or ever treat us well enough. Thoreau said that friendship is, at any rate, a relation of perfect equality, so the nobleman can never have a friend among his retainers, and the king among his subjects. There is something important that Confucius said: “Never contract friendship with a man who is not better than thyself.”⁵⁸

Friendship is never established as an understood relation. The language of friendship is not words, but meanings. It is an intelligence above language. Thoreau said that a name pronounced is the recognition of the individual to whom it belongs. He who can pronounce his name aright, he can call him, and is entitled to his love and

⁵⁸ Op. cit. p. 140



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service. The violence of love is as much to be dreaded as that of hate. A true friendship is as wise as it is tender.

Thoreau also related friendship with Christianity, and he said that friendship is not so kind as is imagined; it has not much human blood in it, but consists of a certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity. He said that nature puts some kind of blossom before every fruit, not simply a calyx behind it. When the friend comes out of his heathenism and superstition, and breaks his idols, being converted by the precepts of a newer testament, when he forgets his mythology, and treats his friend like a Christian, or as he can afford, then friendship ceases to be friendship, and becomes charity. Thoreau said that friendship does not stand for numbers; a friend does not count his friends on his fingers because they are not numerable.

AUTORAS:

ROCÍO CUENCA O.
MAYRA LAZO T.



Thoreau found that the only danger of friendship is that it will end, and he used a metaphor to compare friendship with a delicate plant. Then Thoreau told us about how sometimes he heard his friends complaining that he did not appreciate their greatness. He did not tell them whether he did or not. Thoreau's friends expected a vote of thanks for every fine thing which they did. “In human intercourse the tragedy begins, not when there is misunderstanding about words, but when silence is not understood,”⁵⁹ said Thoreau. What avails it that another loves you, if he does not understand you? Such love is a curse. What kind of friends are they who are presuming always that their silence is more expressive than yours? Few things are more difficult than to help a friend in matters which do not require the aid of friendship. True friendship can afford true knowledge, although it is impossible to say all that we think, even to our truest friend.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 143



Then Thoreau continued writing about love. He said that true love does not quarrel for slight reasons. We must accept or refuse one another as we are. He said that he could domesticate a hyena more easily than his friend. An Oriental philosopher said, “Although friendship between good men is interrupted, their principles remain unaltered. The stalk of the lotus may be broken, and the fibres remain connected.”⁶⁰ Thoreau said that ignorance and bungling with love are better than wisdom and skill without it. Our life without love is like coke and ashes. Thoreau’s friend is not of some other race or family of men, but flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. He is his real brother.

After his description of friendship, Thoreau continued telling us about his voyage. They rowed five or six miles above Amoskeag before sunset. They reached a pleasant

⁶⁰ Op. cit. p. 147



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part of the river. One of them wanted to look for a farmhouse, where they might replenish their stores, and then they explored the opposite shores to find an appropriate and suitable harbor for the night. The next day, a clever and well-disposed farmer entertained them by exhibiting his hop-fields and kiln and melon-patch. He told them that he sometimes sat on pleasant nights to defend his grounds against thieves. That farmer was a Methodist man, who had his house between the river and Uncannunuc Mountain. Thoreau and his brother suggested to him new varieties of melon-seeds and fruits of foreign flavors to be added to his stock. They had come up there among the hills to learn the impartial beneficence of nature. They were astonished to see how strawberries and melons grow as well in one man's garden as another's.

After that, they found a convenient harbor for their boat on the opposite or east shore, still in Hooksett, at the mouth



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of a small stream which emptied into the Merrimack. They brought with them some big melons. They set one of their largest melons in the water to cool it. When they were ready, they went to get it, but they realized that the melon had floated out on the stream, and was nowhere to be seen. So they took the boat and went in pursuit of their property. Fortunately, after long straining of the eye, it was discovered far down the river, in perfect condition.

While they were enjoying their supper, they admired how the clear light of the western sky fell on the eastern trees. They were grateful when they were reminded by interior evidence of the permanence of universal laws. Thoreau said that all the events which make the annals of the nations are but the shadows of our private experiences. For Thoreau, the history we read is only a fainter memory of events which have happened in our own experience. Tradition is a more interrupted and feebler memory.



In this part Thoreau chose another important theme to speak about. It was imagination. He said that this world is but canvas to our imaginations. The body is often warm, but the imagination is torpid; the body is fat, but the imagination lean and shrunk. He gave a definition of imagination, and he said, “Imagination is the air of the mind, in which it lives and breathes.”⁶¹ Our circumstances answer to our expectations and the demands of our natures. In this part Thoreau also told us that he was astonished at the singular endurance of our lives. He said, “I am never rich in money, and I am never meanly poor.”⁶²

Continuing with their voyage description, Thoreau and his brother lay awake a long while, listening to the murmurs of the stream. Here Thoreau told us about a dream that he had that night. He dreamed of an event which had occurred

⁶¹ Op. cit. p. 152

⁶² Ibid



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long before. It was a difference with a friend. In his dream he received that compensation which he had never obtained in his waking hours. He concluded this day by saying that dreams are excellent examples of our characters. In dreams we see ourselves naked and acting out our real characters, even more clearly than we see others awake. Our truest life is when we are in dreams awake.



2.2.8. THURSDAY



This day he begins by telling us that when they awoke that morning, they heard the sound of rain-drops on their cotton roof. When they first stepped abroad, a flock of sheep came rushing down to taste the herbage by the river-side; but when their leaders caught sight of their white tent through the mist the whole flock stood stock-still, endeavoring to solve the mystery in their sheepish brains.

AUTORAS:

ROCÍO CUENCA O.
MAYRA LAZO T.



The flock realized that there was no mischief to them and they spread themselves out over the field.

That was the limit of their voyage. Their boat was too heavy to be dragged around the long and numerous rapids which would occur. So they decided to continue up along the bank on foot. They climbed over the slippery logs in their path with as much pleasure as in brightest sunshine, scenting the fragrance of the pines and the wet clay under their feet. In their journey they saw a lot of beautiful things like waterfalls, wandering frogs, festoons of moss hanging from the spruce-trees, and thrushes flitting silent under the leaves.

Thoreau cited something that a man of genius said referring to nature, “Nothing that naturally happens to man can hurt him, earthquakes and thunder-storms not



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excepted.”⁶³ At that time this man lived a few miles farther
on their road. They improved any opportunity to inspect
some of nature’s works. Thoreau stood under a tree in the
woods half a day at a time, during a heavy rain in the
summer, and he employed himself happily and profitably
there prying with microscopic eye into the crevices of the
bark or the leaves or the fungi at his feet.

Actually, the drops came trickling down the stubble
while they lay drenched on a bed of withered wild oats. The
birds drew closer and were more familiar under the thick
foliage, seemingly composing new strains upon their roosts
against the sunshine. Thoreau said that Uncannunuc
Mountain is the best point from which to view the valley of
the Merrimack, so this hill affords the best view of the river
itself. From that part you can see up and down the
Merrimack several miles each way. He described these

⁶³ Op. cit. Thursday, p. 156



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mountains as the best of all. He said that the broad and straight river, full of light and life, with its sparkling and foaming falls, the islet which divides the stream, the village of Hooksett on the shore almost directly under your feet, so near that you can converse with its inhabitants or throw a stone into its yards, the woodland lake at its western base, and the mountains in the north and northeast, make a scene of rare beauty.

After that, Thoreau said that they were entertained in Concord, New Hampshire, which they persisted in calling New Concord, as they had been wont, to distinguish it from their native town, for which they had been told that it was named and in part originally settled. For Thoreau that would have been the proper place to conclude their voyage, uniting Concord with Concord by those meandering rivers, but their boat was moored some miles below its port.



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Then Thoreau wrote about some of the first settlers and explorers of those areas. According to the historian of Haverhill, in the year 1726 considerable progress was made in the settlement, and a road was cut through the wilderness from Haverhill to Penacook. Thoreau told us that in the fall of 1727, the first family, who were descendents of Captain Ebenezer Eastman, moved into the place. His team was driven by Jacob Shute, who is said to have been the first person who drove a team through the wilderness. Soon after, tradition said that one Ayer, 18, drove a team consisting of ten yoke of oxen to Penacook, swam the river, and ploughed a portion of the interval. He is supposed to have been the first person who ploughed land in that place. A Western orator said, “Men generally live over about the same surface; some live long and narrow, and others live broad and short, but it is all superficial living.”⁶⁴ Thoreau

⁶⁴ Op. cit. p. 158



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said that a worm is as good a traveler as a grasshopper or a cricket, and a much wiser settler.

They continued with their voyage. They no longer sailed or floated on the river, but trod the stubborn land like pilgrims. Thoreau said that the cheapest way to travel, and the way to travel the farthest in the shortest distance, is to go on foot; and he recommended some articles that we have to take with us. Those objects are: a dipper, a spoon and a fish-line, some Indian meal, some salt, and some sugar. Then he suggested some things that we can do when we come to a brook or a pond. We can catch fish and cook them; we can boil a hasty-pudding; or we can buy a loaf of bread at a farmer's house. But what Thoreau meant was to do one of these things, not all together. Thoreau said that he had traveled thus some hundreds of miles without taking any meal in a house, sleeping on the ground when convenient; and he found it cheaper, and in many



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respects more profitable, than staying at home. He never thought of travelling simply as a means of getting a livelihood. He had observed that the after-life of those who have travelled much is very pathetic. True and sincere travelling is no pastime.

Thoreau said that the best thing to carry with you on a journey is some hard and dry book in a dead language, which you have found impossible to read at home, but for which you have still a lingering regard. Henry David Thoreau wrote about the last service which he performed in the cause of literature, which was to read the works of Aulus Persius Flaccus. He also mentioned Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, and Wordsworth. He said that they are but the rustling of leaves and crackling of twigs in the forest, and there is not yet the sound of any bird.



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In this part David Thoreau wrote about satire. He said that as long as there is satire, the poet is, as it were, *particeps criminis*. Truth never turns to rebuke falsehood; her own straightforwardness is the severest correction. Horace would not have written satire so well if he had not been inspired by it. In his lyric poems, love always exceeds the hate, so that the severest satire still sings to itself, and the poet is satisfied, though the folly is not corrected. Thoreau also talked about Genius, and he said that a sort of necessary order in the development of Genius is, first, complaint; second, plaint; and third, love. He said, “But the divinest poem, or the life of a great man, is the severest satire. The greater the genius, the keener the edge of the satire.”⁶⁵

Henry said that to the virtuous man, the universe is the only *sanctum sanctorum*, and the *penetralia* of the temple

⁶⁵ Op. cit. p. 161



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are the broad noon of his existence. To the man who cherishes a secret in his breast, there is a still greater secret unexplored. Thoreau also said that our most indifferent acts may be matter for secrecy, but whatever we do with the utmost truthfulness and integrity, by virtue of its pureness, must be transparent as light. The bad sense is always a secondary one. Our vices always lie in the direction of our virtues, and in their best estate are but credible imitations of the latter. Falsehood never attains to the dignity of entire falseness, but is only an inferior sort of truth; if it were more thoroughly false, it would incur danger of becoming true. The life of a wise man is most of all extemporaneous, for he lives out of an eternity which includes all time.

Thoreau believed that the satires of Persius were the furthest possible from inspired; evidently a chosen, not imposed subject. He said that the artist and his work are not



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to be separated. The most stubborn foolish man cannot stand distant from his folly. Thoreau said that there is but one stage for the peasant and the actor. The buffoon cannot bribe you to laugh always at his grimaces; they shall sculpture themselves in Egyptian granite, to stand heavy as the pyramids on the ground of his character.

Now Thoreau continued describing his path. Suns rose, set, and found them still on the wet forest path which meanders up the Pemigewasset, where towns began to serve as gores, only to hold the earth together. A wild pigeon sat secure above their heads. Far up in the country, in Thornton, they met a soldier lad in the woods, going to muster in full regimentals, and holding the middle of the road; deep in the forest with military step and thoughts of war and glory. Thoreau said, “Poor man! He actually shivered like a reed in his thin military pants.”⁶⁶ It was too

⁶⁶ Op. cit. p. 163



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much for him to carry an extra armor then, who could not easily dispose of his natural arms, and for his legs, they were like heavy artillery in boggy places. Wandering by the side and over the brows of hoar hills and mountains, they at length crossed on prostrate trees over the Amonoosuck, and breathed the free air of inappropriated land.

Then Thoreau made a recount of his path. He said that in fair days, they had traced up the river to which their native stream was a tributary, until from Merrimack it became the Pemigewasset that leaped by their side, and they had passed its fountain-head, the wild Amonoosuck, whose puny channel was crossed at a stride, guiding them toward its distant source among the mountains, and at length, without its guidance, were enabled to reach the summit of Agiocochook.

A week afterward, when they returned to Hooksett, the melon man was already picking his hops with the help of



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many women and children. They decided to buy one watermelon, the largest of his patch, to carry it with them for counterbalance. Finding their boat safe in the harbor, under Uncannunuc Mountain, with a fair wind and the current in their favor, they started their return voyage at noon. At noon, the fresh, primitive, and savage nature could be seen, in which Scythians, Egyptians, and Indians dwell. Thoreau said that in the wildest nature, there was not only the material of the most cultivated life, and a sort of anticipation of the last result, but a greater refinement already than was ever attained by man. Thoreau also said that the wonders of nature existed ages before the studios were born or letters invented. Nature is prepared to welcome into her scenery the finest work of human art, for she is herself an art so cunning that the artist never appears in her work. Art is not tame, and nature is not wild, in the ordinary sense. A perfect work of man's art would also be wild or natural in a good sense.

AUTORAS:

ROCÍO CUENCA O.
MAYRA LAZO T.



Continuing with their return, they soon reached the Falls of Amoskeag and the mouth of Piscataquoag. Their boat was like that one which Chaucer described in his dreams. That afternoon, they sailed thinking of a saying of Pythagoras, “It is beautiful when prosperity is present with intellect, and when sailing as it were with a prosperous wind, actions are performed looking to virtue; just as a pilot looks to the motions of the stars.”⁶⁷ Then Thoreau said “All the world reposes in beauty to him who preserves equipoise in his life, and moves serenely on his path without secret violence.”⁶⁸

From a hill-top you may detect in it the wings of birds endlessly repeated. The trees made an admirable fence to the landscape, skirting the horizon on every side. Art can never match the luxury and superfluity of nature. Nature

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 165

⁶⁸ *Ibid*



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satisfies us still by the assurance of a certain generosity at the roots. Thoreau said that bareness does not suggest poverty and because of that, for the first time, he understood why men try to make single-spruce grow about their houses. Nature is a greater and more perfect art, the art of God. Thoreau said, “If I were awakened from a deep sleep, I should know which side of the meridian the sun might be on by the aspect of nature, and by the chirp of the crickets, and yet no painter can paint this difference.”⁶⁹

For Thoreau the forenoon is brighter than the afternoon, not only because of the greater transparency of its atmosphere, but because we naturally look most into the west, as forward into the day, and so in the forenoon see the sunny side of things, but in the afternoon the shadow of every tree.

⁶⁹ Op. cit. p. 166



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Here Thoreau told us a story about two white women and a boy. This story happened on the thirty-first day of March, one hundred and forty-two years before, when these people had left an island at the mouth of the Contoocook before daybreak. At the bottom of their canoe lay the still bloody scalps of ten of the aborigines. The two women were Hannah Dustan and her nurse, Mary Neff, both of Haverhill, and an English boy named Samuel Lennardson. They were escaping from captivity among the Indians. On the 15th of the March previous, Hannah Dustan had been compelled to rise from child-bed, and half dressed, with one foot bare, accompanied by her nurse, commence an uncertain march, in still inclement weather, through the snow and the wilderness. She had seen her seven older children flee with their father, but knew not of their fate. She had seen her infant's brains dashed out against an apple-tree. When she reached the wigwam of her captor, she had been told that she and her nurse were soon to be taken to a



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distant Indian settlement, and there made to run the gauntlet naked. The family of this Indian consisted of two men, three women, and seven children, beside an English boy, who was a prisoner among them. Having decided to plan their escape, she instructed the boy to ask one of the men how he should dispatch an enemy in the quickest manner, and take his scalp. “Strike ‘em there” said he, placing his finger on his temple, and he also showed him how to take off the scalp. On the morning of the 31st she arose before daybreak, and awoke her nurse and the boy, and taking the Indians’ tomahawks they killed them all in their sleep, excepting one favorite boy and one squaw who fled wounded with him to the woods. Then they collected all the provisions they could find, and in a canoe they commenced their trip to Haverhill. But after having proceeded a short distance, she thought that her story would not be believed if she should escape to tell it, so they returned to the wigwam and took off the scalps of the dead

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Indians, put them into a bag as proofs of what they had done, and then recommenced their voyage. This story was told by Thoreau because it happened in the same place and at the same time where Thoreau was at that moment.

Thoreau said that we can never safely exceed the actual facts in our narratives. To write a true work of fiction, even, is only to take leisure and liberty to describe some things more exactly as they are. A true account of the actual is the rarest poetry, for common sense always takes a hasty and superficial view. Though David Thoreau was not much acquainted with the works of Goethe, in his Italian travels Goethe jogged along at a snail's pace, but always mindful that the earth is beneath and the heavens are above him. It would thus be possible for inferior minds to produce invaluable books, if this very moderation were not the evidence of superiority; for the wise are not so much wiser than others as respecters of their own wisdom.



Some poor in spirit, record plaintively only what has happened to them; but others how they have happened to the universe, and the judgment which they have awarded to circumstances. Goethe's whole education and life were those of the artist. He lacked the unconsciousness of the poet. Wisdom applied to produce a constrained, partial, and merely well-bred man, the life of a city boy.

Thoreau said that the laws of nature break the rules of art. A man of genius may be an artist. The man of genius, referred to mankind, is an originator, an inspired or demonic man, who produces a perfect work in obedience to laws yet unexplored. The artist is he who detects and applies the law from observation of the works of genius, whether of man or nature. Meanwhile, the artisan is he who merely applies the rules which others have detected. Besides speaking of a man of genius, wisdom, nature, etc., Thoreau also spoke



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about poetry. He said that poetry is the mysticism of mankind. The expressions of the poet cannot be analyzed; his sentence is one word, whose syllables are words. Thoreau said, “But what matter if we do not hear the words always, if we hear the music.”⁷⁰ Much verse fails of being poetry because it was not written exactly at the right crisis. For him a poem is one undivided and unimpeded expression fallen ripe into literature, and it is undividedly and unimpededly received by those for whom it was matured. There is a sentence that Thoreau wrote that is true; he said, “If you can speak what you will never hear, if you can write what you will never read, you have done rare things.”⁷¹

He continued by talking about unconsciousness, and he said that unconsciousness is the consciousness of God. Deep are the foundations of sincerity. Even stone walls

⁷⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 171

⁷¹ *Ibid*



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have their foundation below the frost. Thoreau said that what is produced by a free stroke charms us, and he suggested to us to draw a blunt quill filled with ink over a sheet of paper, and if we fold the paper before the ink is dry, transversely to this line, a delicate shaded and regular figure will be produced, in some respects more pleasing than an elaborate drawing.

Returning to their voyage, they had already passed by broad daylight the scene of their encampment at Coos Falls, and finally they pitched their camp on the west bank, in the northern part of the Merrimack. When they looked out from under the tent, they saw the trees dimly through the mist, and a cool dew hung upon the grass. After having eating their supper, they soon grew weary of conversing and writing in their journals, and putting out the lantern, they fall asleep.



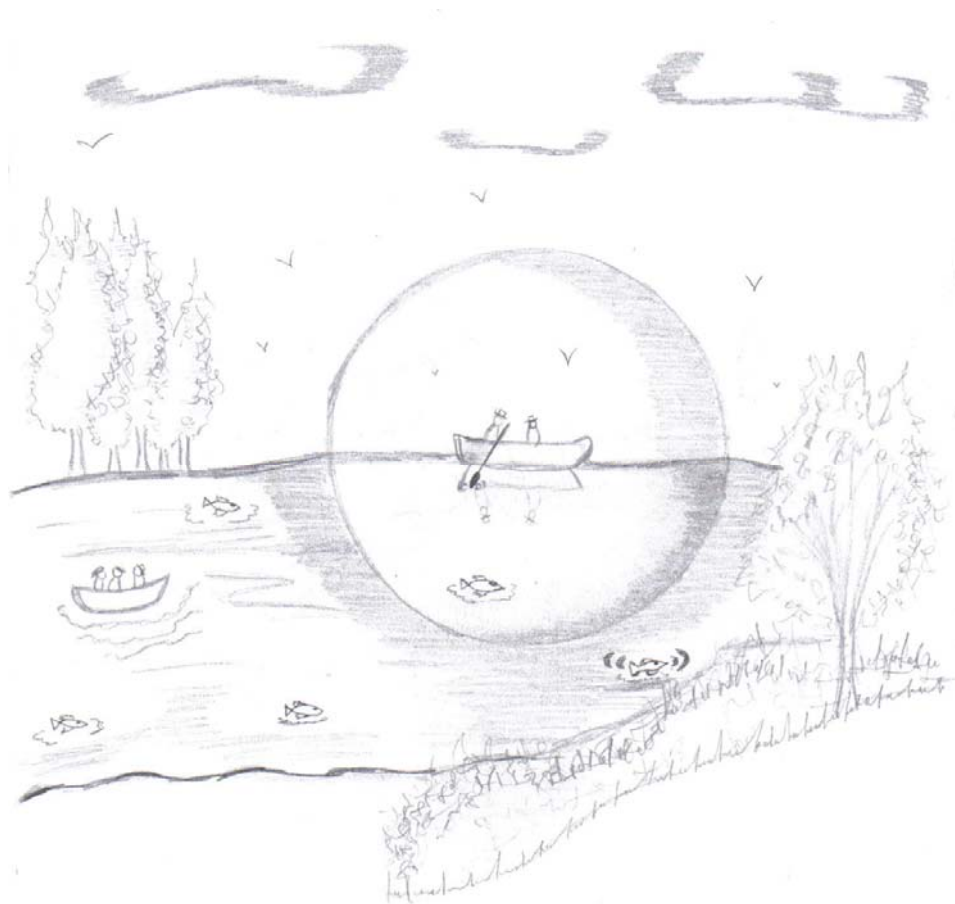
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Henry David Thoreau was sad because he said that many things had been omitted which should have been recorded in their journals. He also said that it was not easy to write in a journal what interested them at any time, because to write it was not what interests us.

He concluded this day by telling us about what they felt whenever they awoke in that night. When the wind breathed harder than usual, flapping the curtains of their tent, they remembered that they lay on the bank of the Merrimack, and not in their chamber at home. With their heads so low in the grass, they heard the river whirling, sucking and lapsing downward, kissing the shore as it went. The wind impressed them like a wakeful and inconsiderate person up at midnight.



2.2.9. FRIDAY



In this day, Henry David Thoreau continues talking about when they lay awake long before daybreak, listening to the rippling of the river and the rustling of the leaves. They were in suspense whether the wind blew up or down the stream because it could be favorable or unfavorable to their voyage. The wind in the woods sounded like an

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incessant waterfall dashing and roaring among rocks. It was because that night was the turning –point in the season.

When they returned to look for their boat, they found it in the dawn just as they had left it. Before five o'clock they pushed it into the fog, and began to sweep downward with the rushing river, keeping a sharp lookout for rocks. They soon passed the mouth of the Souhegan, and the village of Merrimack. As the mist gradually rolled away, they saw the cottages on the shore, and the shore itself. When they passed near enough to the shore, as they fancied, the fall had commenced. The cottages looked small and comfortable, and their inhabitants were seen only for a moment because they hid from the haunts of summer.

They heard the sound of the first autumnal wind, and even the water had acquired a grayer tone. The trees were already changed. Already the cattle were heard to low wildly



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in the pastures, as if in apprehension of the withering of the grass and of the approach of winter. Thoreau said that the low of cattle in the fields sounded like a hoarse symphony or running bass to the rustling of the leaves.

Thoreau loved to see the herd of men feeding heartily on coarse and succulent pleasures. According to Thoreau, there were many crooked and crabbled specimens of humanity among them. Thus is nature recruited from age to age, while the fair and palatable varieties die out, and have their period. Thoreau said, “How cheap must be the material of which so many men are made.”⁷² Thoreau said that a man cannot wheedle nor overawe his genius. It requires to be conciliated by nobler conduct than the world demands or can appreciate. Nothing was ever so unfamiliar and startling to a man as his own thoughts. Genius is the

⁷² Op. cit. Friday, p. 176



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worst of lumber, if the poet would float upon the breeze of popularity.

In this day, Thoreau wrote something about poets. He said that the poet is no tender slip of fairy stock, who requires peculiar institutions and edicts for his defense, but the toughest son of earth and of heaven, and by his greater strength and endurance his fainting companions will recognize the God in him. It is the worshippers of beauty, after all, who have done the real pioneer work of the world. The poet will prevail to be popular in spite of his faults and in spite of his beauties too. He makes us free of his hearth and heart, which is greater than to offer one the freedom of a city. The poet will write for his peers alone. He will remember only that he saw truth and beauty from his position, and expect the time when a vision as broad shall overlook the same field as freely.

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Thoreau said that we are often prompted to speak our thoughts to our neighbors, or the single travelers whom we meet on the road, but poetry is a communication from our home and solitude addressed to all intelligence. It never whispers in a private ear. Most of the time we talk of genius as if it were knack and the poet could only express what other men conceived. But in comparison with his task, the poet is the least talented of any; the writer of prose has more skill. When the poet is most inspired, is stimulated by an aura, then his talent is all gone, and he is no longer a poet. The gods do not grant him any skill more than another. Thoreau said, “To say that God has given a man many and great talents, frequently means that he has brought his heavens down within reach of his hands.”⁷³

The poet’s body, even, is not fed like other men’s, but he sometimes tastes the genuine nectar and ambrosia of the gods, and lives a divine life. Some poems are for

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, p. 177



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holidays only. The breath with which the poet utters his verse must be that by which he lives. Thoreau said something very important, “The true poem is not that which the public read. There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet’s life.”⁷⁴

After that, Thoreau continued telling about his trip. He said that that raw and gusty day, and the creaking of the oaks and pines on shore, reminded them of more northern climes than Greece, and more wintry seas than the Aegean.

Then he mentioned a Gaelic poet and hero, Ossian, who reminds us of the most refined eras, of Homer, Pindar, Isaiah, and the American Indian. It does not cost much for these heroes to live; they do not want much furniture. They are such forms of men as can only be seen far away

⁷⁴ Op. cit. p. 178



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through the mist, and have neither costume nor dialect, but for language there is the tongue itself, and for costume there are always the skins of beasts and the bark of trees to be had. They survive storms and the spears of their enemies.

Thoreau said that compared with this simple and fibrous life, our civilized history appears the chronicle of debility, of fashion, and the arts of luxury. But the civilized man misses no real refinement in the poetry of the rudest era. It reminds him that civilization does but dress man. It makes shoes, but it does not toughen the soles of the feet. It makes cloth of finer texture, but it does not touch the skin. Inside the civilized man stands the savage still in the place of honor. David Thoreau said that the splendor of similes is another feature which characterizes great poetry. For him, Ossian seemed to speak a gigantic and universal language.



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While they sailed fleetly before the wind, the thoughts of autumn coursed as steadily through their minds, and they observed less what was passing on the shore, than the dateless associations and impressions which the season awakened, anticipating in some measure the progress of the year. While they were sitting with their faces up the stream, they studied the landscape by degrees. There was variety enough for their entertainment in the metamorphoses of the simple objects. When they had traveled a few miles, they did not recognize the profiles even of the hills which overlook their native village. Through the clear atmosphere they saw that the works of a farmer, his ploughing and reaping, had a beauty to their eyes which he never saw. “How fortunate were we who did not own an acre of these shores, who had not renounced our title to the whole,”⁷⁵ said Thoreau. He who knew how to appropriate the true value of this world would be the poorest man in it.

⁷⁵ Op. cit. p. 182



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Thoreau said that he was a large owner in the Merrimack intervals.

When Thoreau visited again some haunt of his youth, he was glad to find that nature wears so well. The landscape is indeed something real, solid, and sincere, and he had not put his foot through it yet. Then Thoreau remembered a pleasant tract on the bank of the Concord, called Conantum. He had in his mind the old deserted farmhouse, the desolate pasture, the open wood, and many other things. He said in those places somebody may have many thoughts and not decide anything. When Thoreau's thoughts were sensible of change, he loved to see and sit on rocks which he had known.

Continuing with their voyage, by the time they reached Penichook Brook they were obliged to sit muffled in their cloaks, while the wind and current carried them along. Then they bounded swiftly over the rippling surface, by many



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cultivated lands, where the women and children stood outside to gaze at them. They glided past the mouth of the Nashua, and not long after, of Salmon Brook, without more company than the wind. The shadows chased one another swiftly over wood and meadow. They could distinguish the clouds which cast each one, though never so high in the heavens. Thoreau said that shadows referred to the source of light. They are pyramids whose bases are never greater than those of the substances which cast them.

The places where they had stopped or spent the night on their way up the river had already acquired a slight historical interest for them; for many upward days' voyagings were unraveled in that rapid downward passage. Already the banks and the distant meadows wore a sober and deepened tinge, for the September air had shorn them of their summer's pride.



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When they passed the New Hampshire line and reached the Horseshoe Interval in Tyngsborough, they climbed up the bank in haste to get a nearer sight of the autumnal flowers, asters, golden-rod, etc. For them asters and golden-rods were the uniform which nature wore at present. On every hillside, and in every valley, stood countless asters, coreopsis, pansies, golden-rods, and the whole race of yellow flowers.

According to the testimony of an old inhabitant of Tyngsborough, now dead, one of the floods in that river took place in October, 1785, and its height was marked by a nail driven into an apple-tree behind his house. One of his descendants has shown that to Thoreau, and he judged it to be at least seventeen or eighteen feet above the level of the river at the time. Before the Lowell and Nashua railroad was built, the engineer made inquiries of the inhabitants along the banks as to how high they had known the river to



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rise. When he came to that house the engineer was conducted to the apple tree, but the nail was not visible. Nobody remembered the river to have risen so high, so the engineer disregarded that statement.

Then they sat down to rest there upon the brink of the western bank, just above the head of Wicasuck Island, where they could observe some scows which were loading clay from the opposite shore, and also overlook the grounds of the farmer, who once entertained them for a night. He had on his farm the Canada plum under cultivation, fine porter apples, some peaches, and large patches of musk and watermelons, which he cultivated for the Lowell market. When they passed Wicasuck Island, there was a pleasure boat containing a youth and a maiden on the island brook, which they were pleased to see, because that proved that there were some hereabouts to whom their excursion would not be wholly strange.



With a bending sail they moved rapidly by Tyngsborough and Chelmsford. Henry and his brother were holding in one hand half of a tart country apple-pie which they had purchased to celebrate their return, and in the other a fragment of the newspaper in which it was wrapped. The wind on the horizon rolled like a flood over valley and plain, and every tree bent to the blast, and the mountains like school-boys turned their cheeks to it. The north-wind stepped readily into the harness which they had provided, and pulled them along with good will.

Sometimes they sailed watching the receding shores and the motions of their sail. It was the scale on which the varying temperature of distant atmospheres was graduated, and it was some attraction for them that the breeze it played with had been out of doors so long. Thus they sailed, not



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being able to fly, making a long furrow in the fields of the Merrimack toward their home.

When they reached the great bend just above Middlesex, they at length lost the aid of that propitious wind, though they contrived to make one long and judicious tack carry them nearly to the locks of the canal. They were there locked through at noon by their old friend, the lover of the higher mathematics, who seemed glad to see them safe, back again through so many locks; but they did not stop to consider any of his problems. Thoreau and his brother have heard much about the poetry of mathematics, but very little of it has yet been sung. The ancients had a better notion of their poetic value than they. All the moral laws are readily translated into natural philosophy, for often we have only to restore the primitive meaning of the words by which they are expressed, or to attend to their literal instead of their metaphorical sense. They are already supernatural

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philosophy. The whole body of what is now called moral or ethical truth existed in the golden age as abstract science. Although Thoreau said that if we prefer, we may say that the laws of nature are the purest morality. The Tree of Knowledge is a Tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Henry David said, “He is not a true man of science who does not bring some sympathy to his studies, and expect to learn something by behavior as well as by application.”⁷⁶ He also said that the study of geometry is a petty and idle exercise of the mind, if it is applied to no larger system than the starry one. He considered that mathematics should be mixed not only with physics but with ethics, and that is mixed mathematics. Anciently the faith of a philosopher was identical with his system, or, in other words, his view of the universe. Thoreau said that the most prominent scientific men of his country, and perhaps of that age, were either serving the arts and not pure science, or

⁷⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 189



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were performing faithful but quite subordinate labors in particular departments.

When they reached the Concord, they were forced to row once more in good earnest, with neither wind nor current in their favor, but by that time the rawness of the day had disappeared, and they experienced the warmth of a summer afternoon.

Now Thoreau cited in this part the three giants of Literature and some other poets, and he said, “What a contrast between the stern and desolate poetry of Ossian, and that of Chaucer, and even of Shakespeare and Milton, much more of Dryden, and Pope, and Gray.”⁷⁷ Then he wrote many paragraphs referring to Chaucer. He said that we have to narrow our vision somewhat to consider him, as if he occupied less space in the landscape, and did not stretch over hill and valley as Ossian does. Passing over

⁷⁷ Op. cit. p. 191



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the earlier continental poets, since we are bound to the pleasant archipelago of English poetry, Chaucer's is the first name after that misty weather in which Ossian lived, which can detain us long. Indeed, though he represents so different a culture and society, he may be regarded as in many respects the Homer of the English poets, and maybe he is the youthfulest of them all. Chaucer is so natural and cheerful, compared with later poets, that we might almost regard his as a personification of spring. Thoreau said that in Homer and Chaucer there was more of the innocence and serenity of youth than in the more modern and moral poets.

In this paragraph Thoreau wrote some descriptions of Chaucer, who had eminently the habits of a literary man and scholar. He was surrounded by the din of arms. He regarded himself always as one privileged to sit and converse with books. He helped to establish the literary



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class. His character as one of the fathers of the English language would alone make his works important, even those which have little poetical merit. He preferred his homely but vigorous Saxon tongue. Thoreau said, “If Greek sufficeth for Greek, and Arabic for Arabian, and Hebrew for Jew, and Latin for Latin, then English shall suffice for him.”⁷⁸ Chaucer is fresh and modern still, and no dust settles on his true passages. He was a homely and domestic man, and did breathe quite as modern men do.

There is no wisdom that can take the place of humanity, and we find that in Chaucer. On the whole, Chaucer impresses us as greater than his reputation, and not a little like Homer and Shakespeare, for he would have held up his head in their company. Among early English poets he is the landlord and host, and has the authority of such. We admire Chaucer for his sturdy English wit. The

⁷⁸ Op. cit. p. 192



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easy height he speaks from in his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales is as good as any particular excellence in it. But though it is full of good sense and humanity, it is not transcendent poetry. Humor takes a narrower view than enthusiasm. To his own finer vein he added all the common wit and wisdom of his time, and everywhere in his works his remarkable knowledge of the world, and nice perception of character, his common sense and proverbial wisdom, are apparent. He is not heroic, as Raleigh, nor pious, as Herbert, nor philosophical, as Shakespeare, but he is the child of the English muse, that child which is the father of the man. The charm of his poetry consists often only in an exceeding naturalness, perfect sincerity, with the behavior of a child rather than a man.

Chaucer's remarkably trustful and affectionate character appears in his familiar, yet innocent and reverent, manner of speaking of his God. If we have to wander



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through many passages in Chaucer, we have at least the satisfaction of knowing that it is not an artificial dullness, but too easily matched by many passages in life. Thoreau said that a true poem is distinguished not so much by a felicitous expression, or any thought it suggests, as by the atmosphere which surrounds it. Much of our poetry has the very best manners, but no character.

On this occasion, Thoreau said that there are two classes of men called poets. The one cultivates life, the other art; one seeks food for nutriment, the other for flavor; one satisfies hunger, the other gratifies the palate. He also said that there are two kinds of writing, both great and rare; one that of genius, or the inspired, the other of intellect and taste, in the intervals of inspiration. The first one is above criticism, always correct, giving the lie to criticism. It vibrates and pulsates with life forever. It is sacred, and to be read with reverence, as the works of nature are studied. Such a



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style removes us out of personal relations with its author; we do not take his words in our lips, but his sense into our hearts. The other kind of writing is self-possessed and wise. It is reverent of genius, and greedy of inspiration. It is conscious in the highest and the least degree. It consists of the most perfect command of the faculties. It dwells in a repose as of the desert, and objects are as distinct in it as oases or palms in the horizon of sand. The pen is only an instrument in its hand, and not instinct with life, like a longer arm. It leaves a thin varnish or glaze over all its work.

In summer they lived out of doors, and had only impulses and feelings, which were all of action. They were sensible that behind the rustling leaves and stacks of grain, and the bare clusters of the grape, there was the field of a wholly new life, which no man had lived; that even that earth was made for more mysterious and nobler inhabitants than men and women. In the colors of October sunsets,

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they saw the portals of other mansions than those which they occupied. The moon no longer reflected the day. Aster and golden-rods reigned along the way.

Men nowhere, east or west, lived a natural life. When they came down into a distant village, which was visible from the mountain-top, the nobler inhabitants with whom they peopled it had departed, and left only vermin in its desolate streets. Thoreau said that we love to hear some men speak, though we hear not what they say.

Henry David said that our present senses are but the rudiments of what they are destined to become. We are comparatively deaf, dumb, and blind, and without smell or taste or feeling. The ears were made, not for such trivial uses as men are wont to suppose, but to hear celestial sounds. The eyes were not made for such groveling uses as they are now put to and worn out by, but to behold

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beauty now invisible. The eye may see for the hand, but not for the mind.

Returning to the voyage, as it grew later in the afternoon and they rowed leisurely up the gentle stream, they seemed to detect the hues of their native sky on the southwest horizon. The shadows of the hills were beginning to steal over the stream; the whole river valley undulated with mild light, purer and more memorable than the noon. Two herons were seen traveling high over their heads. Bound to some Southern meadow, the two herons held on their stately, stationery flight and disappeared at length behind the clouds. The last vestiges of daylight at length disappeared, and as they rowed silently along with their backs toward home through the darkness, only a few stars being visible, they had little to stay.



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Finally, they had made fifty miles that day with sail and oar, and now, far into the evening, their boat was grating against the bulrushes of its native port, and its keel recognized the Concord mud. They leaped gladly on shore, drawing it up, and fastening it to the wild apple-tree, whose stem still bore the mark which its chain had worn in the chafing of the spring freshets.

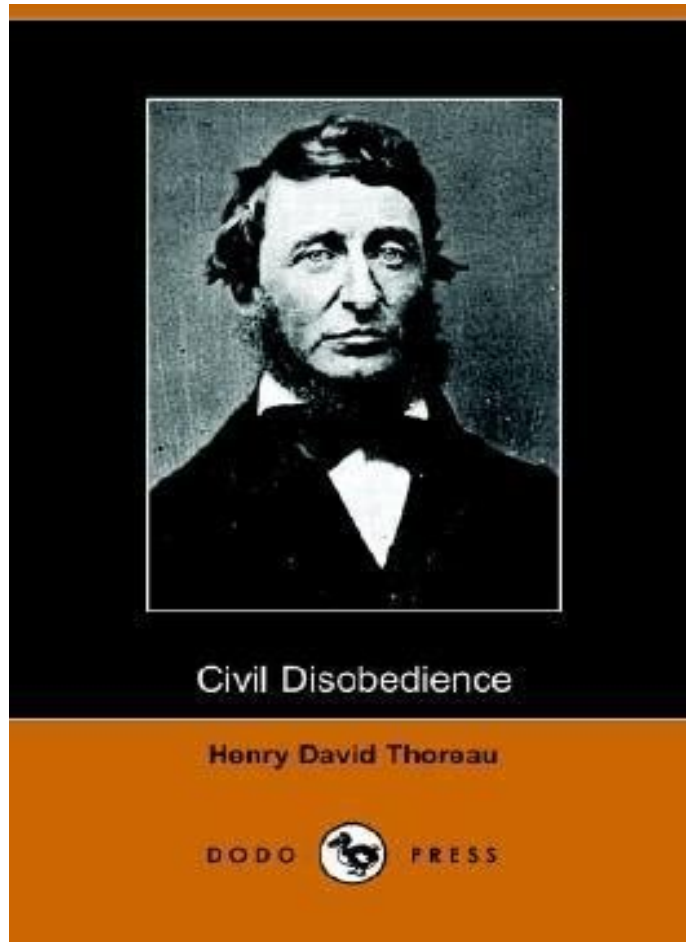


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CHAPTER Nº 3

THOREAU AS A THINKER

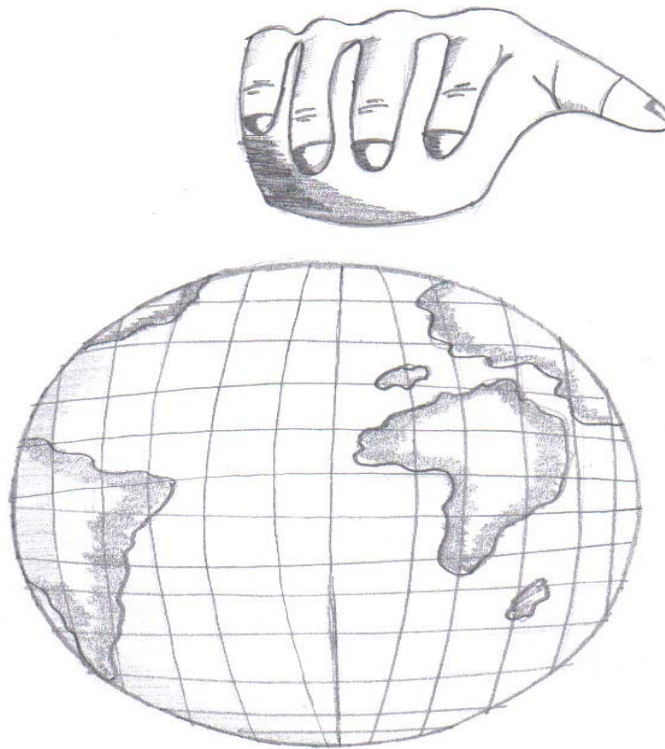


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3.1 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE



Civil Disobedience is one of the best works written by Henry David Thoreau, in 1849. This work has produced many changes in the way of thinking of important people like Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King. Civil Disobedience was written as a result of Thoreau's experience when he refused to pay the tax-bills which were used to finance the Mexican War.



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At the beginning of *Civil Disobedience* Thoreau caught the attention of his readers with two memorable phrases, which are “That government is best which governs least”⁷⁹ and “That government is best which governs not at all.”⁸⁰ Through these words Thoreau tried to explain that a government should let people be able to make their own decisions. Governments should guide their people to success, not impose their power over men. Moreover, Thoreau wanted to see a different kind of government that worked with people to achieve the progress of a country, instead of a government which has total control over the land. But for this it was important that people be prepared to accept change. According to Thoreau, a government had a purpose, which was to execute the will of the people. However, that objective was not accomplished completely because the governments had forgotten their mission. Besides, governments were used to making decisions that

⁷⁹ Wood Krutch, Joseph. *Walden and other writings by Henry David Thoreau*. The USA and Canada, Bantam Books, 1981, *Civil Disobedience*, p. 85

⁸⁰ Ibid



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did not have any relation to the people's will; a clear example of this was the Mexican War.

About the American government, Thoreau thought that it was a traditional government which unfortunately was losing its integrity with its actions and bad decisions. It was considered a wooden gun by the people themselves; maybe people needed to have an idea about a true government. Governments forgot their position in relation to the people, and sometimes they imposed on people to get their own advantage. Thoreau also wrote about the progress related to trade and commerce. He believed that the authorities did not do anything to achieve true progress, but rather they put obstacles to stop it. Thoreau asked for only one important thing, which was a better and more democratic government.



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Thoreau believed that power was related to injustice because most of the time governments were more powerful than their citizens. He considered that a government which ruled over all did not develop justice in his town. Moreover, he could realize that governments always tried to solve their personal problems, instead of those of their towns. According to Thoreau, citizens would forget that they had a conscience in order to govern completely; however, the question was why men had a conscience, if they were not able to follow their ideas and beliefs. For this reason he believed that people should be men with sensibility first, and demonstrate their needs, and then subject themselves to belong to a society. He thought that the most intelligent thing was to respect the right, and then the law, because the right helps people to grow up as men. On the other hand, the law was something imposed by the government to achieve “progress” within the society. The only obligation for Thoreau was to accomplish at any moment what he



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thought was right. Thoreau also analyzed the common and natural undue respect for the law, when files of soldiers, colonels, captains, and corporals went to the war against their will and their common sense.

People forget their conscience and do things against their will; sometimes people become slaves in their own country because they have to accomplish the thousands of desires of their governments.

According to Thoreau the standing army, militia, jailors, constables, etc. Served the state not as men but as machines, with their bodies. They did not have either will or conscience. They had the same price as dogs and horses; however, they were considered good citizens. There was also a group of people who served the state with their heads. They were lawyers, ministers, and office-holders. Finally, there were a few people, such as heroes, martyrs, patriots, and reformers in the great sense, who served the



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state with their conscience; unfortunately, they were treated as enemies by the state.

Thoreau talked about the right of revolution, that is, the way to resist a government when its tyranny and inefficiency were so great as to be unendurable. He thought that when a free country became a center of slaves, it was time that honest men rebelled and revolutionized, to get a happy world. He noticed that people were against slavery and war, but they did not know what to do, and so did nothing. People were passive because injustice dominated the countries. When something was wrong people accepted it, and they did not try to stop the bad things. Thoreau could observe that people only gave their votes as obligations, not as a right; unfortunately, the majority always had the reason. He considered the vote as a powerful arm to finish slavery, so people had in their hands the possibility of ending injustice. One of the reasons injustice prevailed was



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corruption, since the presidency was always made up of politicians by profession; political groups tried to help their members only; thus, everything was in relation to the government's fellows. The corruption in the government meant that thousands of people couldn't find possibilities within their area, so they had to abandon their town and try to find another place with better possibilities for themselves.

Thoreau considered it immoral that people defended other ideals, for example, when a person tried to accomplish the government's desires. He believed that men must work to get their own ideals. The government's power over the state was huge; under the title of “government” it was possible to commit terrible injustices, and unfortunately people helped to continue those mistakes, without paying attention. Thoreau considered that when people yield to the government's will they become an obstacle to accomplishing reform, because people support the



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government’s opinions and ideas without thinking if they are positive or negative.

All kinds of people were free to express their ideas, but Thoreau asked himself how a man can be happy if he does not express his ideas and beliefs. Citizens thought that if they rebelled against the government the consequences could be the worst. They felt scared about the result.

According to Thoreau, the government was a kind of machine that worked with every injustice committed by its citizens, so the state and the government worked together. In order to stop the government and the injustices Thoreau invited people to “break the law”, but in a reflective sense and an intelligent way; in fact, he thought if people changed their life and tried to stop injustice, that machine could not work. For Thoreau there was a remedy for the evil in the state; however, it took too much time, and men could run



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out of time. On the other hand, it was not easy to get the state and government to accept that remedy. It was hard for them, but it was as huge a change as birth or death.

For Thoreau, abolitionists should stop their support of the Government of Massachusetts both in person and property, before they suffered the right to perish. Thoreau also realized that if people wanted to have a meeting with a member of the government, they had to be at least tax-gatherers, since the government was full of injustices like that.

According to Thoreau, in Massachusetts the best place for a just man was jail, which obviously was contradictory. The only place where a man could show his honor was within the walls of a prison. The jail was a center where all kind of races were put together, and where differences disappeared. People lived in a kind of slavery because



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they had to pay their tax-bills to prevent violent and bloody measures, but the state could shed innocent blood. If people wanted to stop this injustice, Thoreau recommended that every person should resign his works as agents of government. Thoreau also spoke about the peaceful revolution that was to finish injustice in the government through the end of support by the citizens. A man within the state had to hide his goods and properties because the tax-bills that he had to pay increased according to his capacity and for that reason people were not honest.

In this essay Thoreau also remembered what happened when he refused to pay a certain amount of money in order to belong to a church. He asked why people who had a connection with God and who were members of a church needed to ask for money. Why didn't they consider that not all people had possibilities to pay? That was a terrible mistake, for Thoreau.



After some pages about slavery, injustice, state, and government, Thoreau described the jail where he was and his ideas and emotions within the prison. He spent one night in jail; it had walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick; the door was made of wood and iron, a foot thick; and the grating was of iron. He felt that there was a wall between him and the townsmen; he believed that he was the only man who refused to pay the taxes. He could realize that men thought that his most important desire was to be free. But it was not true, since Thoreau was not thinking about his freedom. In jail Thoreau knew that the state was weak; its power grew only when townsmen forgot their conscience.

Thoreau also wrote about the society that needed money to fulfill its function. Unfortunately, people did not have any importance if they did not give money. The



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strongest one within the society was always the man who had the most money. Power, money, and government were related; if people didn't have money they couldn't belong to society because there was not a place for them. Poor people were always at a low level. These kinds of things were called by the state “laws”.

Thoreau explained how the environment in jail was, and told of his conversation with a man who was accused of burning a barn. He told Thoreau that he had been drunk and had smoked his pipe while the barn burned. So he was waiting for his trial. He was considered a clever man, and it seemed that he was well treated in jail. There Thoreau could hear some other stories and gossip told by prisoners. Without a doubt, inside the jail people lived in another world, since the best poems and verses were written there, although they were not published. That night Thoreau experienced many new things, like a vision of his natal



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town; he heard the sound of the bell in the town; he became a spectator of the world.

After that, when Thoreau came out of prison, he did not perceive any changes. On the contrary, he had a clear idea about the State. He realized that people lived without knowing that in their own town there was an institution that compromised the freedom of its inhabitants. He distinguished real friends from casual friendship. He noticed that the rest of the townsmen were different from him because of their prejudices and superstitions. Finally, he explained his reason to refuse to pay the tax-bills; he said that he did not pay them because he did not want to show allegiance to the State.

Thoreau mentioned that he did not want to fight with anyone. His main objective was to convince people not to be conformists, but to try to achieve what they wanted with



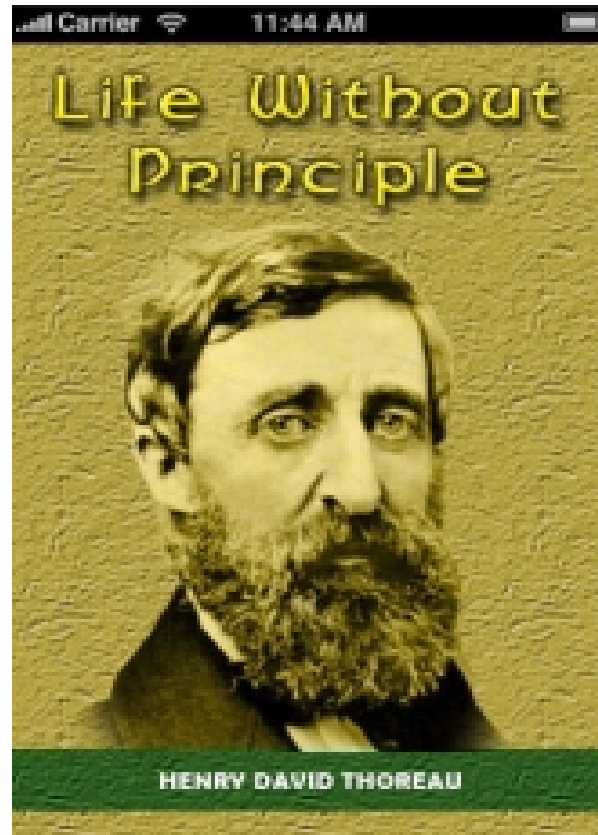
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effort and optimism. Every townsman should do something to prevent injustice, and the state must stop the existence of slavery in the country.

Finally, Thoreau finished writing Civil Disobedience by talking about democracy in the State and respect for the individual. Thoreau considered that the way to achieve democracy was by treating people as individuals with great advantages; encouraging them to grow up as persons instead of machines that work for the government.



3.2 LIFE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE



“Life without Principle” is an essay written by Henry David Thoreau, which was derived from the lecture “What Shall It Profit.” This lecture was first delivered on 6th December 1854. He delivered it several times over the next two years, and he edited it for publication before he died in 1862. “Life without Principle” was first published in October, 1863.

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At the very beginning, Thoreau said that he felt that the lecturer had chosen a theme too foreign to himself, and because of that it failed to interest him. Thoreau explained that the lecturer described things not in or near his heart, but toward his extremities and superficialities, and in that sense there was no truly central or centralizing thought in the lecture. Commonly, if men wanted anything of Thoreau, it was only to know how many acres he made of their land.

Thoreau continued by saying something to his readers: “Since you are my readers, and I have been much of a traveler, I will not talk about people a thousand miles off, but come as near as I can. As the time is short, I will leave out all the flattery, and retain all the criticism.”⁸¹

⁸¹ Wood Krutch, Joseph. Walden and other writings by Henry David Thoreau. The USA and Canada, Bantam Books, 1981, Life Without Principle, p. 355



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The most central idea of this essay is how Henry David Thoreau focused on the way in which we spend our lives. Thoreau started this part by telling us that this world is a place of business. He was angry at having to get up every night at the panting of the train, because it interrupted his dreams. He said that the only thing that people did was work, work, and work. He wanted to see mankind at leisure for once. An Irishman, who saw Thoreau in the field, thought that he was calculating his wages. Thoreau said, “I think that there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, ay, to life itself, than this incessant business.”⁸²

On the outskirts of the town there was a money-making man, who was going to build a bank-wall under the hill. That man wished Thoreau to spend three weeks digging there with him. He only wanted to get more money

⁸² Op. cit. p. 356



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to save, and leave it for his successors to spend foolishly.

So Thoreau thought and said that if he did this, people would speak well of him as an industrious and hard-working man; but if he chose to devote himself to certain labors which yield more real profit, they would be inclined to look on him as an idler.

Something interesting that Thoreau wrote in this essay is how two men differ according to what they do in the woods. For example, the first case is this: if a man walks in the woods because he likes them, and he spends half of each day doing this, he is in danger of being regarded as a lazy person who avoids work and wastes time. The second case is that if a man spends his whole day as a speculator, cutting down those woods and making the earth bald before her time, he is appreciated as an industrious and enterprising citizen. This shows us that the only interest of the town is to cut the forests down.

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Thoreau said that most men would feel insulted if someone asked them to do something idle only to get wages. But many people are no more worthily employed now. Thoreau said that if you got money as a writer or lecturer, you must be popular. When he observed that there were different ways of surveying, his employer asked which would give him the most land, not which was the most correct. Something very important that Thoreau mentioned here is that the aim of the laborer should not be to get a good or luxurious job, but to perform well a certain work. According to this, Thoreau said, “Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it.”⁸³ Then Thoreau also said that you may raise enough money to tunnel a mountain, but you cannot raise enough money to hire a man who is minding his own business. An efficient and valuable worker or man does and offers what

⁸³ Op. cit. p. 358



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he can, whether the community pays him for it or not.

Meanwhile, the inefficient offer their inefficiency to the highest bidder, and are forever expecting to be put into the best work positions. Thoreau was more than usually jealous with respect to his freedom.

Thoreau suggested that a man may be very industrious, and yet not spend his time well, and he said that there is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living. The most important thing for Thoreau was that we must get our living by loving. This means that we have to enjoy what we do. We have to get a job according to our likes, not according to the wages. One of the worst things that human beings do is to get jobs only paying attention to money. People say, “It does not matter what I have to do, if it will give me a lot of money.” And because of that there are cases in which people abandon their jobs or develop them in a wrong way.

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Then people will lie on their backs, talking about the fall of man, and never make an effort to get up.

Thoreau also explained the consequences of money in his essay, and he used the rush to California as a historical event to refer to “enterprise,” in which men are focused on money and not the most important thing, human values. The rush to California reflects the greatest disgrace on mankind.

Thoreau called the rush to California “enterprise” because in 1849, thanks to the discovery of gold, thousands of people from different parts of the world arrived in that place to get this precious metal. By means of gold, many people made their own fortune. They did not worry about what they had to do in order to become rich. Thoreau said, “If I could command the wealth of all the worlds by



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lifting my finger, I would not pay such a price for it.”⁸⁴ It makes us reflect on the importance and significance of each thing that we do. All people believed that gold was the salvation for their poverty, but they did not think about the consequences of this wonderful work (gold digging), which were fighting, obsession, ambition, and power. It is for cases like these that the famous saying says, “All that glitters is not gold.” Maybe if people had known what would be the results of getting gold, they would not have worked so hard finding it. “Mankind will hang itself upon a tree,”⁸⁵ said Thoreau, and this could be true, since people most of the time seek their own damage. Thoreau also emphasized that God did not say that “We have to get our living by digging for what we never planted.”⁸⁶ We have to work and look for our own wages. We do not have to wait for things that we never made.

⁸⁴ Op. cit. p. 361

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

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According to Thoreau “enterprise” means “That so many are ready to live by luck, and so get the means of commanding the labor of others less lucky, without contributing any value to society.”⁸⁷ People are more interested in profit, no matter what the consequences of getting it. One of the disadvantages of an enterprise is that if you win, society is the loser. It means that if you, the laborer, realize that it is better to “get your living by loving,”⁸⁸ you will be able to change your ideas about your job. You will start to ask yourself many questions about your employment, and finally you will have to make a decision: to continue with your profession or to throw it out. This situation is not convenient for enterprise because enterprise is focused on exploiting people in order to fulfill its goals, which are good profits, money, and power. The main goal of enterprise is to find any opportunity to get or

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.* p. 360

⁸⁸ It means that if you work because you enjoy what you are doing or because you want to contribute to society and to yourself, and not only to get money



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make money, and nothing else. It is ready to do anything to achieve its goal. Thoreau compared the rush to California with enterprise because people were ready to fight or even kill each other to get gold in California, and their main goal was to get gold, no matter what circumstances they had to overcome. An enterprise will not agree with Thoreau's important phrase: Do not hire a man who does your work for money, but him who does it for love of it. Enterprise will want the opposite: hire a man who does your work for money, but not him who does it for love of it. It is the irony of life. There are some cases in which people are praised for doing bad things and condemned for doing good things. The rush to California reflected the greatest disgrace on mankind because what caused the disgrace of men was gold, together with money. This event caused a lot of trouble among men. Thoreau was always in favor of human values and not monetary values.



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For Thoreau, human values are more important than material things because they are the ones which form a real man. A real man means a man who is important for his inner self, for his good contributions to society, and for his help of the rest of people, and not for his goods or for his money. Money does not make a man, but if that man allows money to become his best friend, he will be in danger. He will become envious and greedy. He will want more and more money all the time. He will not feel satisfied with little wealth, and in the end he will become selfish. He will consume the greater part of his life getting his living. Thoreau said that people should live instead of working for a living. It is another irony of life; sometimes a person works so hard every day. He does not rest or share time with his family and friends; he only works to increase his wealth. Then that person goes crazy because of too much work. Finally, he earns a lot of money, but he cannot spend it on pleasurable things or with his dearest persons. His money



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will only serve to take him to the doctor. We have to be conscious when we do anything because most of the time we only pay attention to the act, and not to the principle. For instance, when we work only looking for money or for a good remuneration, we forget about our health, our family, our feelings, our needs, etc., and we do not take care of the consequences of it. We can lose our family, and something even more important, we can lose our youth and life.

When you are going to look for a job, be sure to choose one which you like. In this way, you will be able to develop or apply Thoreau's idea, “Get your living by loving.” We should be aware that enterprises only want growth, over-production, and profits. We do not have to put away our important things, such as our family, our welfare, and our happiness, only for money. Money is not happiness at all. We can find true happiness in the persons who make us feel good and happy. But have you ever asked yourself



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why money is so important for almost all people? The answer is because our capitalist society is responsible for making us ambitious persons and causes us to think only about money and what we can do if we have a lot of money. So what we have to do is to enjoy every moment of our lives and be happy all the time. How can we develop a certain activity well if we do not enjoy our lives first?

When Thoreau read Howitt's account of the Australian gold diggings, he was very surprised because he imagined all the valleys cut up with foul pits and partly filled with water. In those places people furiously rushed to probe for their fortunes. People did not care about what they had to do in their thirst for riches. They stood in water for long periods of time, covered with mud and clay. They worked from dawn to dusk without resting. Hundreds of them even drowned in the pits. Lots of men moved very fast to



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California and Australia looking for gold, as if the true gold were to be found in that direction.

Thoreau cited one important thing that Howitt said of a man who found a great nugget, which weighed twenty-eight pounds, at the Bendigo diggings in Australia. Howitt said that this man soon began to drink, and when he met people, riding his horse all about, he called out and asked if they knew who he was, and then he informed everybody that he was the man who had found the biggest nugget. At last he rode full speed against a tree and knocked his brains out. Then Howitt added that he was a hopelessly ruined man.

It is remarkable that among all the preachers there are so few moral teachers. Thoreau said that the prophets are employed in excusing the ways of man. You should not ask how your bread was buttered; it will make you sick, if you



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do. A man had better starve at once than lose his innocence in the process of getting his bread. Thoreau also said that as we grow old, we live more coarsely; we relax a little in our disciplines, and to some extent cease to obey our finest instincts.

Thoreau then wrote that we select granite for the underpinning of our houses and barns; we build fences of stone; but we do not ourselves rest on an underpinning of granitic truth. Thoreau often accused his finest acquaintances of an immense frivolity, and he also said that there are manners and compliments we do not meet; we do not teach one another the lessons of honesty and sincerity that the brutes do, or of steadiness and solidity that the rocks do. Many men were making speeches to him all over the country, but each of them expressed only the thought, or the want of thought, of the multitude. So Henry Thoreau concluded that no man stood on truth.



The greater part of our conversation is hollow and ineffectual. When our life ceases to be inward and private, conversation degenerates into simple gossip. We rarely meet a man who can tell us any news without having read it before in the newspaper, or been told by his neighbor. Thoreau tried to read one newspaper a week, but it was too much for him, and it seemed to him that he had not dwelt in his native region. Thoreau said, “We may well be ashamed to tell what things we have read or heard in our day.”⁸⁹ Thoreau was astonished to see how willing men are to burden their minds with the news of the street, to entertain idle rumors and incidents of the most insignificant kind. Then Thoreau asked himself, “Shall the mind be a public arena, where the affairs of the street and the gossip of the tea table are chiefly discussed?”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *Op. cit.* p. 366

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.* p. 367



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Once, Thoreau was compelled to sit as a spectator and auditor in a court-room for some hours. There he could see his neighbors, who were not compelled, sitting in the court-room or tiptoeing about with washed hands and faces. They wanted to know what was going to happen with the criminal. To Thoreau it had seemed that the auditors and the witnesses, the jury and the counsel, the judge and the criminal at the bar, were all equally criminal.

Thoreau said that if he was to be a main stream, he would prefer that it be one of the mountain-brooks, or the Parnassian streams, and not the town-sewers. Then Thoreau mentioned something really certain, which is that we hear all kinds of gossip and receive many communications, but only the character of the hearer determines to which we should be open, and to which closed. Thoreau believed that the mind can be permanently profaned by the habit of attending to trivial



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things. He said that our very intellect could be macadamized. So if we have thus desecrated ourselves, the remedy is to reconsecrate ourselves. Thoreau suggested that we should treat our minds, meaning ourselves, as innocent and ingenuous children, whose guardians we are, and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention. He said, “Read not the times. Read the Eternities.”⁹¹ Knowledge does not come to us through details, but in flashes of light from heaven.

America is said to be the arena on which the battle of freedom is to be fought, but not freedom in a political sense. Thoreau asked some good questions: “Do we call this the land of the free? What is it to be free from King George and continue being the slaves of King Prejudice? What is it to be born free and not to live free? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom? Is it a freedom to be slaves, or a freedom to be free, of which we

⁹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 369



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boast?”⁹² He said that it is our children’s children who may perchance be really free. We tax ourselves unjustly. There is a part of us which is not represented. It is taxation without representation.

Thoreau said that we are still provincial, because we do not find our standards at home; because we do not worship truth, but the reflection of truth; because we are warped and narrowed by an exclusive devotion to trade and commerce and manufacture and agriculture and the like. Thoreau set the English Parliament as an example of provincialism. The finest manners in the world are awkwardness and fatuity, when contrasted with a finer intelligence. They appear but as the fashions of past days, mere courtliness, knee-buckles and small-clothes, out of date. It was not in this sense that the poet Decker called Christ “the first true gentleman that ever breathed.”

⁹² Ibid



For Thoreau government and legislation were respectable professions. Then he mentioned Numa, Lycurgus, and Solon, whose names at least may stand for ideal legislators. Then he said that if we think of legislating as regulating the breeding of slaves, or the exportation of tobacco, there is no legislation at all, because legislators do not worry about their own welfare.

The chief want, in every State that Thoreau investigated, was a high and earnest purpose in its inhabitants. He said that when we want culture more than potatoes, and illumination more than sugar-plums, then the great resources of the world are taxed and drawn out, and the result, or staple production, is not slaves, nor operatives, but men, those rare fruits called heroes, saints, poets, philosophers, and redeemers.



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Thoreau said that he never was concerned about politics, because for him politics is something comparatively superficial and inhuman. The newspapers dedicate some of their columns especially to politics or government without charge. He said that as he loved literature and the truth, he never read those columns at any rate. The newspapers are the ruling power. He concluded by saying that politics and daily routine are the things that engage the attention of men, and in a certain way they are vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed, like the corresponding functions of the physical body. Finally, he said that they are infra-human, a kind of vegetation.



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CHAPTER Nº 4

THOREAU'S HERITAGE



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4.1 HIS INFLUENCE DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



The American writer and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau, lived and wrote in the mid-19th century and had connections with a group known as the Transcendentalists. Henry David Thoreau was a nineteenth-century philosopher and writer who denounced materialistic modes of living and encouraged people to act according to their own beliefs of right and wrong. Thoreau said that if it was necessary or required, people even had to break the law. His writings,



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especially his call for nonviolent resistance to government injustice, inspired many later reformers.

These writers, poets, and philosophers placed an emphasis on individual self-reliance as both a natural-born right and a moral responsibility, and upon Nature as a guiding force in life rather than merely a resource to be exploited at will. Thoreau was a campaigner for civil liberties and an avowed Democrat, with a healthy respect for the ability of each individual to decide for himself how to live his or her life.

Thoreau's influence has been wide-ranging. He exerted a profound, enduring influence on American thought and letters. He was a precursor of the contemporary ecological movement's idea that we should live in harmony with nature rather than trying to dominate it.

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In relation to nature, there have been some writers such as Tolstoy and Chekhov, and the Irish poet WB. Yeats, who are known to have read and admired Walden. In politics, a number of prominent exponents of non-violent dissidence have been influenced by Thoreau. Gandhi, for instance, was impressed by Thoreau's essay on Civil Disobedience, and also by Walden, and these were influences in the development of Gandhi's own particular brand of non-violent action.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the most important nineteenth-century public thinker of America, and Thoreau's main intellectual influence came from his close friendship with him. Through Emerson, Thoreau met many other brilliant thinkers and writers of the time, including Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Amos Bronson Alcott. This group of transcendentalists supported a plain and simple lifestyle spent searching for the truth beyond one's

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taught beliefs. Unlike some of the other transcendentalists, Thoreau lived out many of their beliefs. In his great work, “Nature,” Emerson urged his followers to find themselves through the study of nature. So Thoreau dedicated himself to living this idea, exploring nature in every way possible. It could be by fishing and picking huckleberries, writing poetry and nature essays, counting tree rings and studying forest succession; and in the process, he found his own voice.

Thoreau is best known for two pieces of writing begun in 1845. In that year, he was arrested and sent to jail for refusing to pay his poll tax in protest against state support for slavery and the Mexican–American War. In the essay “Civil Disobedience,” which was originally published as “Resistance to Civil Government,” Thoreau makes the case that citizens should not allow government to eliminate individual conscience; and he said that we have a moral duty to oppose such terrible injustices as slavery and

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imperialism. He argued the superiority of moral law over statutory law and the priority of moral conscience over personal comfort and social conformity.

In the nineteenth century, Thoreau began a two-year experiment in simple living, at Walden Pond, on the outskirts of Concord village. There he built a sturdy one-room cabin; then he cleared a few acres of forest to grow potatoes and beans, walked, fished, watched the seasons come and go, and began to write an account of his stay. Over nine years and eight revisions, this work became Walden, one of the most important and enduring books written in America during the nineteenth century.

During the nineteenth century, Henry David Thoreau also wrote “A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.” It was his first work, which was published in 1849 and is

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considered the definitive statement of his transcendentalist beliefs. It was an account of a canoe trip he had taken with his brother, John, in 1839. In this book Thoreau combined poetry, historical background, and philosophical reflections with the narrative of the trip.

The nineteenth century was without a doubt an epoch in which Thoreau established his opposition to slavery. In 1854, Thoreau gave a speech on "Slavery in Massachusetts." Although he was not a member of any abolitionist societies, because he opposed the notion of societies, he was fervently opposed to slavery. Five years later, he gave an impassioned "Plea for Captain John Brown," defending the morality of Brown's violent revolution at Harper's Ferry and condemning the U.S. government for supporting slavery. Another speech which was given that year was called "The Last Days of John Brown." Both demonstrated that Thoreau had proceeded from passive

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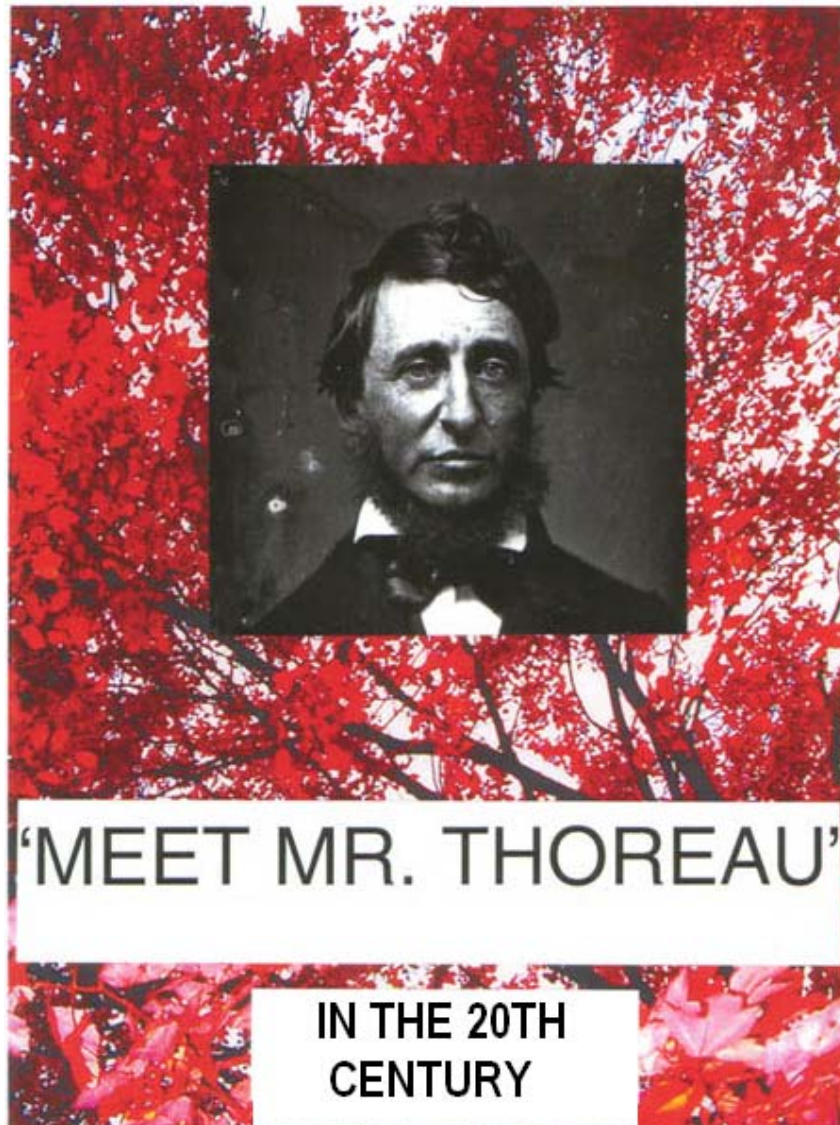
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resistance to the institution of slavery to support for armed rebellion as a means of ending the unreasonable institution.

Thoreau's elevation of conscientious integrity in an era of social conformism, his passionate opposition to the institutional degradation of human life and values, and his enduring literary production as an author, public speaker, and natural scientist, all expressed in a distinctive prose style at once classic and personal, place him at the heart of the era now known as the American Renaissance.



4.2 HIS INFLUENCE DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



The acknowledgment that Thoreau was one of America's greatest writers, like the recognition of Melville and Poe, has been a twentieth-century phenomenon.

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Thoreau is considered one of the most influential figures in American thought and literature. Thoreau became a popular icon for anti-war and pro-environment groups late in the 20th century.

Although his political essays have become reasonably famous, his works on natural science were not even published until the late twentieth century, and they help to give us a more complete picture of him as a thinker. Among the texts he left unfinished was a set of manuscript volumes filled with information on Native American religion and culture. Thoreau's work anticipates later developments in pragmatism, phenomenology, and environmental philosophy, and posed a constantly valuable challenge to our conception of the methods and intentions of philosophy itself.



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Essays published about Thoreau after his death, written by Lowell and Emerson, emphasized Thoreau's severe, Spartan qualities without giving adequate weight to his philosophical contributions. Thus, Thoreau was not well-appreciated during the nineteenth-century and was often seen as a lesser imitator of Emerson. Only beginning in the 1890s, after critical evaluation of his writings, Thoreau did come to be appreciated for his literary merit. In the twentieth century, he has come to be seen as one of the most significant nineteenth-century American writers.

The philosopher Stanley Cavell wrote that Thoreau's achievement "is still, if one can imagine it, not fully recognized." And literary scholar Lawrence Buell predicted that Thoreau would be "an even more luminous and inspirational figure in the 21st century than he has been in the twentieth."



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Lowell, shortly after Thoreau's death, accused him of having been a "skulker," who neglected his social responsibilities. But a few nineteenth-century friends like H. G. O. Blake, William Ellery Channing, and Emerson kept Thoreau's reputation alive until Norman Foerster, F. O. Matthiessen, and an expanded group of later twentieth-century critics became convinced of the qualities of mind and art that have elevated Thoreau into the first rank of American prose writers. The Recognition of Henry David Thoreau (Michigan, 1969) traced the unexpected changes of Thoreau's reputation from the publication of his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) to his present eminence in literary circles.

Walden is *unique*, though, and there are contemporary writers like Wendell Berry and E. B. White, who have evidently been influenced by this book in both style and thought. N. C. Wyeth, the American painter, confessed to



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being "an enthusiastic student of Thoreau." Of major twentieth-century writers, Frost was probably most indebted to Thoreau. Martin Luther King's philosophy of passive resistance to the state is clearly borrowed from Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government," now called "Civil Disobedience." Some Thoreau scholars have assessed Thoreau's influence on Yeats, Tolstoy, and Gandhi.

One of Thoreau's most important works, the essay "Civil Disobedience" (1849), grew out of an overnight stay in prison as a result of his conscientious refusal to pay a poll tax that supported the Mexican War, which to Thoreau represented an effort to extend slavery. Thoreau's encouragement of civil disobedience as a means for the individual to protest those actions of his government that he considers unfair has had a wide-ranging impact in three aspects: first, on the British Labor movement; second, on the passive resistance independence movement led by



Gandhi in India; and third, on the nonviolent civil-rights movement led by Martin Luther King in the United States.

In later years Thoreau’s interest in Transcendentalism vanished, and he became a dedicated abolitionist. His many nature writings and records of his wanderings in Canada, Maine, and Cape Cod exhibited the mind of a dedicated naturalist. After his death his collected writings were published in twenty volumes, and further writings have continued to appear in print. Thomas Carlyle called his work the one truly original American contribution to civilization.

Although a minority of one, largely ignored in his own day, Henry David Thoreau has since become a world influence. His criticism of living only for money and material values has apparently carried more conviction all the time. His support of Civil Disobedience against an unjust



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government, though it caused hardly a wave in his time, later influenced Mohandas Gandhi's campaign for Indian independence and still influences many of today's radicals. But Thoreau was not only a disseminator of major ideas. He was an excellent literary craftsman and the most notable American nature writer.

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4.3 HENRY DAVID THOREAU: HIS POSITION TODAY



Decades have passed, like water in a spring; everything has changed, and the entire world has suffered changes. Nowadays we are living in a world that is different from previous centuries. Now, human beings belong to a society where, unfortunately, wealth, money, and power

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rule brains and beliefs. Every day people are less conscious of the real meaning of life and the surrounding world.

In this century people have become more ambitious and selfish, since they spend their time trying to acquire more luxuries which are not necessary for life. But not all people have forgotten what the true objective in life is; there are a few people who know that the most important thing is not to achieve material things, but happiness.

To live a simple life with necessary commodities in a harmonious relationship with nature, obeying the right rules and laws, were Henry David Thoreau's legacy for people. But the question is: what is happening in our time? Maybe people have never heard or read about Thoreau and his beliefs, or maybe nobody in this century has any idea about who Thoreau was? Really, those questions are not easy to answer because it would be necessary to have an interview to talk about the theme with every person in the world.

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Obviously, this task is a little complicated. However, according to different investigations it has been possible to find an answer to all.

Henry David Thoreau was born in 1817; this year corresponds to the nineteenth century. He began to publish his first essays in “The Dial” because of his relationship with his friends, and due to Emerson’s influence most of his works reflected a close connection with transcendentalism’s beliefs and ideas. His writings show Thoreau as a man who constructed his life around basic truths, a person who listened to the inner voice of his conscience, a voice that all men have but few men are able to follow. He showed that “to be a philosopher it was not necessary to have subtle thoughts, nor even stay in a school, but to love wisdom so as to live, according to its dictates, a life of simplicity and



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trust.”⁹³ It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only
theoretically, but practically.

Thoreau spent his life writing and lecturing. He wanted to transmit his ideas and improve people’s minds through his writings. Unfortunately, he didn’t have much success, because his first works did not produce any effect on people. They did not attract people’s attention. Moreover, some of his best works were published by his friend, Emerson, after his death in 1865. While Thoreau lived nobody appreciated his ability to write well; for this reason he died relatively unappreciated in 1862.

Thoreau’s path to being a famous writer has been difficult. But after his death and through the years his name and writings have achieved, little by little, a huge impact on people. His reputation has grown slowly over these last decades. Thus, Thoreau was not well appreciated during the nineteenth century. He was seen as an imitator or a

⁹³ Willey, Basil. *Op. cit.*, p. 29



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shadow of Emerson. Only at the beginning of the 1890s, after critical evaluation of his writings, did Thoreau come to be appreciated for his literary works. In the twentieth century, he has come to be seen as one of the most important and significant nineteenth-century American writers. He also became a famous icon for anti-war and pro-environment groups in this century. The vision of Thoreau as a great thinker and writer was a twentieth-century phenomenon.

Today, in the 21st century, the recognition of Thoreau not only as an American writer but as a man who expressed his feelings, beliefs, emotions, and ideas is growing every day. He has become well known to people in many countries around the world.

Without a doubt, Thoreau's status as a literary figure and popular writer is due to his extraordinary wealth of thoughts and insights for people today. However, for other



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writers Thoreau is seen as an inspirational and fascinating figure that was born in the nineteenth century and got power in the 20th century.

In this century there are thousands of people that read Thoreau's famous works like Walden, Civil Disobedience, and Life Without Principle. This situation is very different because some years ago people did not pay attention to these readings. Nowadays, Thoreau is becoming a thinker with a lot of influence over the population. His ideas are being transmitted very quickly, so young and adult people spend their time reading his writings. In fact, in the American society most of the people have read his masterpiece, Walden. In American schools children learn about Civil Disobedience or Life Without Principle. This is very important because it shows the great influence that this author has achieved.



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Thoreau’s elevation of integrity in an era of social conformity, his passionate opposition to the institutional degradation of human life, and his enduring literary production as an author and natural scientist all expressed in a prose style at once classic and personal, place him at the heart of the era now known as the American Renaissance.

People have given many names to Thoreau, like “The Father of the Environment” and “Development Critic.” Now Thoreau is seen as a philosopher and creative artist because he dedicated his life, skills, and classical learning to Emerson’s call for the creation of an original American Literature and philosophy, in an era when “writer” was not a profession. He was a scientific originator, because he dedicated his life to the exploration of nature. He became an expert on wildlife and an experienced botanist. His "nature writing" progressed from the poetic symbolism of

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Walden to the scientific method in his later journals. He was an antislavery activist, despite his deep-rooted individualism, Thoreau was readily moved to activism against injustice. In the 1850s he was a risk-taker on the Underground Railroad, and an outspoken defender even of extremism to defeat proslavery forces in a divided America. He was a contributor to community life, remembered for his perennial humor, love of music, and easy way with children. Thoreau was a busy, committed member of his family and community, caring for loved ones, improving the family business, surveying property, innovating as an educator during his brief, stormy employment in Concord and later at the alternative school he ran with his brother. He contributed to continuing education, as we call it today, by booking lecturers for the public Lyceum. He was a restless river that ran deep: he filled a lifelong Journal thousands of pages long with feelings as well as factual observations. Thoreau's Journal was fully published only in the twentieth

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century, and is now recognized as a brilliant work in its own right.

On the other hand, not everything is good or fascinating. Thoreau became a great writer; however, it is a difficult task to apply his ideas and beliefs in this society. The landscape of the present world does not have any relation to the earth described by Thoreau in Walden. Nations today have too many malls and nuclear bases, and the phenomenon called Globalization is producing great changes. Also, there are not enough natural resources because men are the main destroyer of them. All this may indicate that Thoreau has nothing to offer contemporary readers, since the land that he portrayed has changed so dramatically during the last years. However, Walden's messages have even more relevance today than when Thoreau wrote the book. His advice of living simply and



simply living takes on greater urgency in this era of fanatical consumption.

Thoreau believed that human beings did not require massive luxuries in order to live a healthy and joyful life. Unfortunately, these ideas are changed because money and consumption are ruling our society.

Thoreau is also a writer who has inspired many in the ecology movements, and is regarded by many as a deep ecologist. He was one of the first American ecologists. Now, there are some movements that encourage the care of nature based on Thoreau's work.

Finally, Thoreau has won an important place in our society, although power, position, money, and wealth are



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growing. Obviously, the endeavor to apply Thoreau’s beliefs

has become more complicated, but not impossible.

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CHAPTER Nº 5

CONCLUSION

Nature, a world with treasures to discover, a place where man could find a harmonious relationship between himself and the world, a place full of life, peace, and quietness, was the reason for which Thoreau felt the necessity to express his feelings, emotions, knowledge, and the beauty that nature inspired in him.

We have understood the great importance that nature had for Thoreau, since he spent most of his life writing books about and praising the geniality of the environment. His works wanted to transmit to the readers a true sense of life, showing his principles, ideas, and beliefs.

Although Thoreau was not an outstanding and brilliant child at the very beginning, it was not an obstacle for him to show his capacity and ingenuity through writing. He



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became one of the well-known icons in our society, within literature. He was a sensible man before the situations which marked his life, like his brother's death. This event encouraged him to write a book in his honor called, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers.

In the same way, his uncomfortable feeling about the laws imposed by government and state was his inspiration to write a famous essay called Civil Disobedience. This work tried to teach citizens their rights and the power that they had over themselves. The capacity of choosing what to do with their lives, the possibility of deciding the fate of the country together with government, and trying to consider each person as an individual instead of a machine which only worked for the state, are some of the main themes which, without a doubt, have caught our attention and make us reflect about what is happening with our government and our country.

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The idea of spending time working only for money and luxuries, instead of loving what you do, is one of the principles that Thoreau wrote about in his work Life Without Principle. Unfortunately, nowadays it is almost impossible to achieve this idea in a globalized world, since money has become more necessary and indispensable to survive. Many times people cannot fulfill their dreams because when they do what they want, they do not receive what they hope for. Nevertheless, we should enjoy our every-day life, although we might not receive money in compensation for our sacrifices. The most important thing is to get satisfaction when we take pleasure doing what we like, rather than working to accumulate unnecessary wealth. The objective of life is to live it without complications, creating a peaceful atmosphere in our hearts. People should change their old ideas about money, because now it is time to build a new society based on moral values, where

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people can feel happiness and freedom without worrying about the destruction of man, through *money*.

Thoreau's works and his way of thinking made him write books in which every person can find something interesting and fascinating. His purpose of transmitting new and better ideas to society were of vital importance for Thoreau to become a great poet in our epoch, although at the beginning of his trajectory, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, people did not recognize him as what he was, a splendid writer.

Thus, at the end of a hard and exhaustive investigation about one of the lovers of nature and a deep thinker, named Henry David Thoreau, we can say that he will never be forgotten by different generations through the years. Without a doubt, Thoreau will always exist in the minds of people who have read or at least heard something about



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him. Thoreau has died, but he is alive in every person who considers nature as a different world, and in the hearts of the lovers of good literature. The advocate of nature, Henry David Thoreau is a man who showed us that simplicity is beauty.

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