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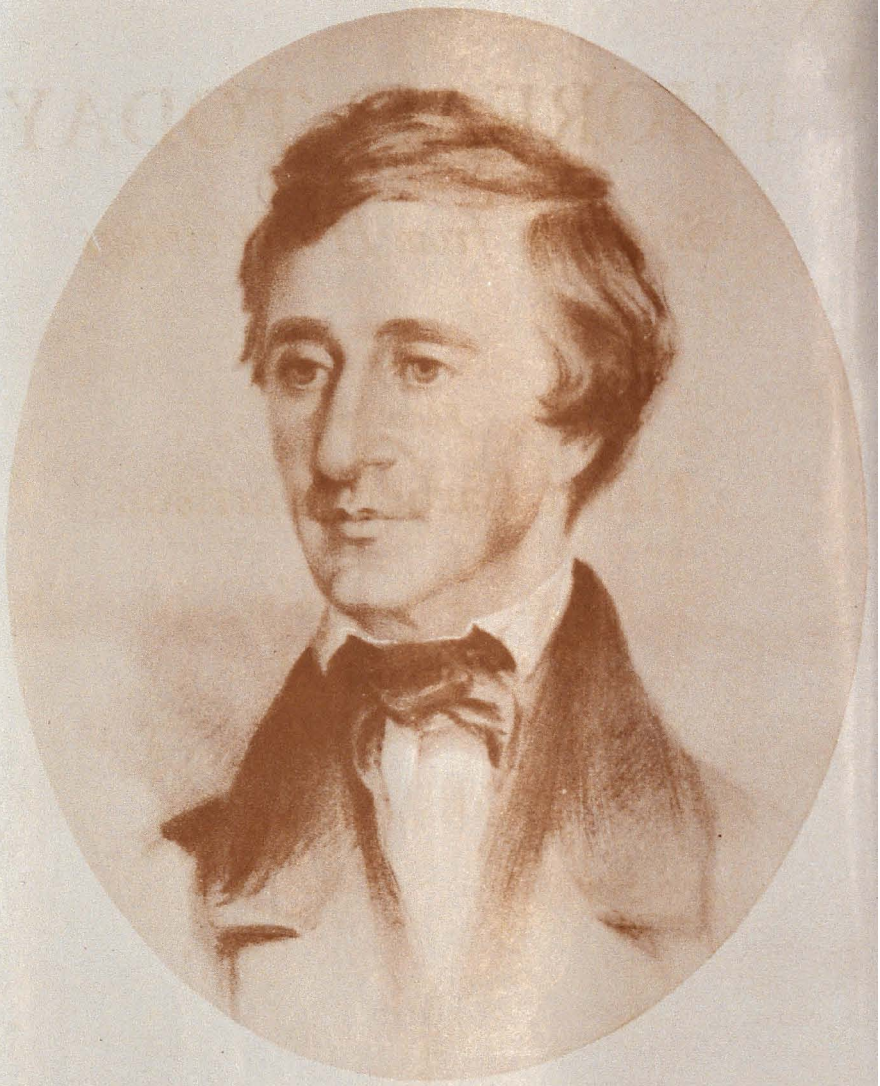
THOREAU TODAY



Portrait of Henry David Thoreau from the well-known crayon by Rowse in the Concord Public Library. Photograph by Keith Martin, Concord, Massachusetts.

THOREAU TODAY

Selections from His Writings

Edited by

Helen Barber Morrison

With an Introduction by

Odell Shepard

A REFLECTION BOOK

Comet Press Books New York, 1957

Manufactured in the United States of America

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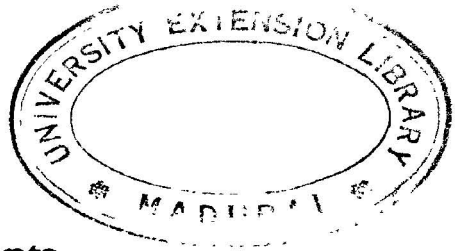
To my husband, Whitelaw Reid Morrison



Contents

Preface

Henry David Thoreau was a contemporary and fellow-townsman of a distinguished group of American literary figures who dwelt in Concord, Massachusetts, in the 19th century. One of them, Ralph Waldo Emerson, may have had Thoreau in mind when he said, "Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist." Thoreau was both.

Thoreau was born in Concord in 1817. He was graduated from Harvard College in 1837. In his commencement speech he touched off one of his earliest protests against things as they were. His subject was 'The Commercial Spirit.'

> "This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used. The order of things should be somewhat reversed; the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul,—in which to range this widespread garden, and drink in the soft influences and sublime revelations of Nature."

What was he to do after college? That was his problem. He tried school teaching for a time, but found it impossible to accept the pedagogy of his day. He helped his father in the lead pencil business but after he had succeeded in making a perfect pencil he was no longer interested. He wrote magazine articles. From time to time he lectured for the Lyceums. He took up surveying. In none of these pursuits,

however, did he find what he considered a satisfactory way of getting a living.

It was becoming apparent that he preferred and proposed to earn only as much money as he needed to provide himself with the minimum of food, shelter and clothing. Beyond this there *had* to be sufficient freedom to follow his genius wherever it should lead him. This meant withdrawal for the most part from the restrictions of state and society, but his aloofness from the latter was not in the sense of becoming a hermit or a recluse. He sought rather to discover and demonstrate a more sincere relationship to society and Nature herself.

In July, 1845, Thoreau went to live in his self-made house by the shore of Walden Pond, a mile and a half from the village of Concord, and remained there until September, 1847. With the exception of excursions to the Maine woods, New Hampshire, Canada, Cape Cod, New York, New Jersey, Staten Island, Minnesota, etc., he spent all his life in Concord and died there in 1862.

It did not bother Henry that he was thought eccentric and whimsical in his views or characteristics by his friends and neighbors. Always an individualist, he thought of himself as a joyous lover of life and common humanity, endowed with the right to live and act in his own way. He pursued diligently his inclination for observing and recording nature and her phenomena. His journal, fourteen volumes in length, constitute his fulfilment of this task.

Thoreau wanted, above all, to be a writer. "Be greedy of occasions to express your thoughts." In a letter to a friend he wrote, "I esteem it a rare happiness to be able to *write* anything . . . Time & Co. are, after all, the only quite honest and trustworthy publishers that we know." Surely, today, Time & Co. are testifying to the place that Thoreau's writings have achieved in the disposition of American literature.

One uncompromising discipline that Thoreau set for himself and his fellow man was the simplification of life. In his indifference to wealth, fine houses, fine clothes and

self-interest, his hatred of hypocrisy and artificialities, he set forth by example and practice the things he did believe in which would yield a nobler and truer way of using the gift of life.

What led me to gather together these passages from all of Thoreau's writings? It was the conviction that after a century of so-called modern 'progressive' living he had something helpful to say to readers today about the conduct of their lives. Let him, then, speak to our condition.

Oberlin, Ohio
July 1957

Helen B. Morrison

Acknowledgments

I extend courtesy credit to the Houghton Mifflin Company, authorized publishers of Thoreau's works. My selections are drawn from their fourteen volume edition of *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau* and their eleven volume edition of *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau.* The latter includes the *Familiar Letters* edited by F. B. Sanborn and the *Poems.*

For permission to quote from one of Thoreau's *College Essays* used in the *Preface,* I am indebted to Houghton Mifflin Company. It is taken from Henry Seidel Canby's *Thoreau.*

The excerpts used in the section of the book entitled *College Essays* are taken from F. B. Sanborn's book, *Henry David Thoreau,* and I owe the favor of using them to Mrs. Francis B. Sanborn of Westfield, New Jersey.

I thank Macmillan & Company, Ltd. of London, England, for permission to quote from H. S. Salt's *Life of Henry David Thoreau.*

Mrs. Caleb Wheeler of Concord, Massachusetts contributed the picture of Thoreau which appears as frontispiece. It is a photograph taken by Alfred Hosmer from the Rowse crayon.

I have had the unusual advantage of criticism and encouragement from Mr. Odell Shepard during the years I have been working on this book and for this help I express my deepest thanks and appreciation.

H. B. M.

Introduction

by

Odell Shepard

Thoreau Today is a bold, arresting title. At first the two words seem hardly to belong together, but as we consider them more closely the clash gives way to a chime. They affirm a paradox superficially absurd but deeply true. They declare that although the bones of Concord's odd-chores-man have been resting for almost a hundred years on the pine-clad bank of his beloved river, his influence has grown and grown. With a quietly explosive force they suggest that however remote he may seem from our present bewilderments he is in fact indispensable to their own solution.

Many a ridiculous blunder had to be made and confuted before we could reach that understanding. To begin with there was a widespread belief that Thoreau was a pale imitation of Emerson. Then the notion got abroad that he was mainly a naturalist. Many thought him a hermit and a hater of mankind. James Russell Lowell called him "selfish," John Burroughs thought him "a wild man," and to Robert Louis Stevenson he seemed at first "a skulker." From the start until now he has had against him, as he always will have, the solid sluggish mass of smug and timorous and genteel folk by whom everything that he did, said, and wrote was felt, quite rightly, as a rebuke. The growth of his reputation and influence has been slow because all of it has been made in an epoch increasingly banal and materialistic.

And yet he has triumphantly survived. No literary or

intellectual reputation of America's nineteenth century has better borne the test of time. India owes her freedom and the British Labor Party its present strength in no small degree to him. It is chiefly because of him that a famous Englishman has called Concord, Massachusetts, the most eligible place of pilgrimage for people of the English-speaking race. On the Fourth of July, 1945, a large concourse of people, most of them belonging to the Thoreau Society of America, gathered at Walden Pond to celebrate, on its hundredth anniversary, his private declaration of independence. Each of them added a stone from the water's edge to the great heap that had been growing there since Bronson Alcott, in 1872, prophesied that it would some day over-top the trees.

Thoreau's residence for two years and two months at Walden Pond undoubtedly contributed to the spread of his fame, but it was with no such intent that he went there. Neither his delight in solitude nor his passion for wild nature provided the principal motive. We must accept his own clear statement that he went "to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles," and that this business was mainly that of free speculation. At the age of twenty-eight he had found out that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," and he wanted to drive life into a corner so as to see whether it is really and necessarily so mean and dull as most of his neighbors thought. Furthermore, he felt that "no one can be an impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground of voluntary poverty." Therefore he deliberately kept himself poor, and found that he could earn all he needed by six weeks of labor per year. To have earned more than that would have seemed to him a waste of time and the act of a fool.

"Poor Thoreau!" the neighbors used to say. "He has nothing!" But their condescending pity was misdirected, for by reason of the numberless things he could afford to do without he was the richest man in Concord. He was rich in leisure, in freedom, and above all in the range and height

and depth of his thought. As compared with almost any contemporary that one might name he was intensely practical and realistic. He wanted happiness, as we all do, but he differed from most of us by making toward it in a straight line. "I am startled," he said, "that God can make me so rich even with my poor stores. It needs but a wisp of straw in the sun, or some small word dropped, or that has lain long in some book." Thus he came to love his life to the very core and rind. Every day was to him a new wonder, every hour an adventure, and his moments were often ecstatic. Among the most memorable of his utterances are these words: "If the day and night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal—that is your success."

That is a sentence to pause upon, to learn by heart, and to repeat in many an hour of need. It is valid on many levels, as for example, in its delicate poise and balance and sheer beauty of spoken sound, in the bold linking of man's life with the outer world, and in its assertion of a test by which each of us may know whether he is asleep or awake.

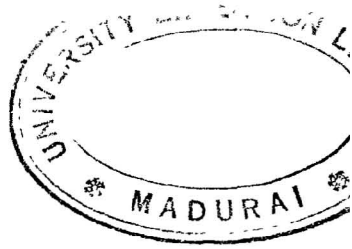
In a few hundred sentences such as that Henry Thoreau gave us the gist of his findings. They were precious exceedingly. Always he strove to boil his thought down into sentences, and these demand a reading as deliberate as the toil that made them.

We recall that the Cumaean Sibyl composed long ago nine prophetic books which she offered at a high price to the rulers of Rome. The offer was twice refused, and after each refusal she offered three fewer at the same price. At last they were bought and interpreted and put to work, so that Rome lived on for a thousand years.

In this book the editor has assembled many sentences by Henry Thoreau which, in our time when the gods are setting ever harder and harder examinations, may contribute to our survival. We shall do well to read them again and again. They represent Thoreau Today.

Sentences which are expensive, towards which so many volumes, so much life, went; which lie like boulders on the page, up and down or across; which contain the seed of other sentences, not mere repetition, but creation; which a man might sell his grounds and castles to build.

Journal, August 22, 1851



Alertness

No method nor discipline can supercede the necessity of being forever on the alert.

Walden: Ch. 4, Sounds

The art of spending a day! If it is possible that we may be addressed, it behooves us to be attentive . . . My profession is to be always on the alert, to find God in nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas in nature. Shall I not have words as fresh as my thoughts?

Excursions: Days and Nights in Concord

The American Indian

J. Hosmer showed me a pestle which his son had found this summer while plowing on the plain between his house and the river. It has a rude bird's head, a hawk's or eagle's, the beak and eyes serving for a nob or handle. It is affecting as a work of art by a people who have left so few traces of themselves, a step beyond the common arrowhead and pestle and axe. Something more fanciful, a step beyond pure utility. As long as I find traces of works of convenience merely, however much skill they show, I am not so much affected as when I discover works which evince the exercise of fancy and taste, however rude. It is a great step to find a pestle whose handle is ornamented with a bird's-head knob. It brings the maker still nearer to the races which so ornament their umbrella and cane handles. I have, then, evi-

dence in stone that men lived here who had fancies to be pleased, and in whom the first steps toward a complete culture were taken. It implies so many more thoughts such as I have. The arrowhead, too, suggests a bird, but a relation to it not in the least godlike. But here an Indian has patiently sat and fashioned a stone into the likeness of a bird, and added some pure beauty to that pure utility, and so far begun to leave behind him war, and even hunting, and to redeem himself from the savage state. In this he was leaving off to be a savage. Enough of this would have saved him from extermination.

Journal, November 29, 1853

The constitution of the Indian mind appears to be very opposite to that of the white man. He is acquainted with a different side of nature. He measures his life by winters, not summers. His year is not measured by the sun, but consists of a certain number of moons, and his moons are measured not by days, but by nights. He has taken hold of the dark side of nature; the white man, the bright side.

Journal, October 25, 1852

When I walk in the fields of Concord and meditate on the destiny of this prosperous slip of the Saxon family, the unexhausted energies of this new country, I forget that this which is now Concord was once Musketaquid, and that the *American race* has had its destiny also. Everywhere in the fields, in the corn and grain land, the earth is strewn with the relics of a race which has vanished as completely as if trodden in with the earth. I find it good to remember the eternity behind me as well as the eternity before. Wherever I go, I tread in the tracks of the Indian. I pick up the bolt which he has but just dropped at my feet. And if I consider destiny I am on his trail. I scatter his hearthstones with my feet, and pick out of the embers of his fire the simple but

enduring implements of the wigwam and the chase. In planting my corn in the same furrow which yielded its increase to his support so long, I displace some memorial of him.

Journal, March 19, 1842

To the Marlboro' road. Picked up an Indian gouge on Dennis's Hill. Some white oak acorns in the path by a woodside I found to be unexpectedly sweet and palatable, the bitterness being scarcely perceptible. To my taste they are quite as good as chestnuts. No wonder the first men lived on acorns. Such as these are no mean food, as they are represented to be. Their sweetness is like the sweetness of bread. The whole world is sweeter to me for having discovered such palatableness in this neglected nut. I am related again to the first men. What can be handsomer, wear better to the eye, than the color of the acorn, like the leaves on which it falls, polished or varnished. I should be at least equally pleased, if I were to find that the grass tasted sweet and nutritious. It increases the number of my friends, it diminishes the number of my foes. How easily, at this season, I could feed myself in the woods! There can be no question respecting the wholesomeness of this diet . . . Filled my pockets with acorns. Found another gouge on Dennis's Hill. To have found two Indian gouges and tasted sweet acorns, is it not enough for one afternoon?

Journal, October 8, 1851

The pine stands in the woods like an Indian, untamed, with a fantastic wildness about it, even in the clearings. If an Indian warrior were well painted, with pines in the background, he would seem to blend with the trees, and make a harmonious expression. The pitch pines are the ghosts of Philip and Massasoit. The white pine has the smoother features of the squaw.

Journal, May 9, 1841

There is scarcely a square rod of sand exposed, in this neighborhood, but you may find on it the stone arrowheads of an extinct race. Far back as that time seems when men went armed with bows and pointed stones here, yet so numerous are the signs of it. The finer particles of sand are blown away and the arrowpoint remains. The race is as clean gone —from here—as this sand is clean swept by the wind. Such are our antiquities. These were our predecessors. Why then make so great ado about the Roman and the Greek, and neglect the Indian? . . . Here is a print still more significant at our doors, the print of a race that has preceded us, and this the little symbol that Nature has transmitted to us. Yes, *this* arrow-headed character is probably more ancient than any other, and to my mind it has not been deciphered. Men should not go to New Zealand to write or think of Greece and Rome, nor more to New England. New earths, new themes expect us. Celebrate not the Garden of Eden, but your own.

Journal, October 22, 1857

A curious incident happened a few weeks ago which I think it worth while to record. John [*Thoreau's brother*] and I had been searching for Indian relics, and had been successful enough to find two arrow-heads and a pestle, when, of a Sunday evening, with our heads full of the past and its remains, we strolled to the mouth of Swamp Bridge Brook. As we neared the brow of the hill forming the bank of the river, inspired by my theme, I broke forth into an extravagant eulogy of the savage times, using most violent gesticulations by way of illustration. "There on Nawshawtuck," said I, "was their lodge, the rendezvous of the tribe, and yonder on Clamshell Hill, their feasting ground. This was no doubt a favorite haunt; here on this brow was an eligible look-out-post. How often have they stood on this very spot, at this very hour, when the sun was sinking behind yonder woods, and gilding with his last rays the waters of the

Musketaquid, and pondered the day's success and the morrow's prospects, or communed with the spirits of their fathers gone before them to the land of the shades! Here," I exclaimed, "stood Tahatowan, and there," to complete the period, "is Tahatowan's arrow-head." We instantly proceeded to sit down on the spot I had pointed to, and I, to carry out the joke, to lay bare an ordinary stone which my whim had selected, when lo! the first I laid hands on, the grubbing stone that was to be, proved a most perfect arrow-head, as sharp as if just from the hands of the Indian fabricator.

Journal, October 29, 1837

The charm of the Indian to me is that he stands free and unconstrained in Nature, is her inhabitant and not her guest, and wears her easily and gracefully. But the civilized man has the habits of the house. His house is a prison, in which he finds himself oppressed and confined, not sheltered and protected . . . His muscles are never relaxed. It is rare that he overcomes the house, and learns to sit at home in it, and roof and floor and walls support themselves, as the sky and trees and earth.

Journal, April 26, 1841

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.

Concord, August 18, 1857.

. . . It is worth the while to detect new faculties in man,—he is so much the more divine; and anything that fairly excites our admiration expands us. The Indian, who can find his way so wonderfully in the woods, possesses so much intelligence which the white man does not,—and it increases my own capacity, as well as faith, to observe it. I rejoice to find that intelligence flows in other channels than

I knew. It redeems for me portions of what seemed brutish before.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Amusement

It is well to find your employment and amusement in simple and homely things. These wear best and yield most. I think I would rather watch the motion of these cows in their pasture for a day, which I now see all headed one way and slowly advancing,—watch them and project their course carefully on a chart, and report all their behavior faithfully, —than wander to Europe or Asia and watch other motion there; for it is only ourselves that we report in any case, and perchance we shall report a more restless and worthless self in the latter case than in the first.

Journal, October 5, 1856

Fast-Day.—Some fields are dried sufficiently for the games of ball with which this season is commonly ushered in. I associate this day, when I can remember it, with games of baseball played over behind the hills in the russet fields toward Sleepy Hollow, where the snow was just melted and dried up, and also with the uncertainty I always experienced whether the shops would be shut, whether we should have an ordinary dinner, an extraordinary one, or none at all, and whether there would be more than one service at the meeting-house. This last uncertainty old folks share with me.

Journal, April 10, 1856

Art

The highest condition of art is artlessness.

Journal, June 26, 1840

The true art . . . is not a bald imitation or rival of Nature, but the restored original of which she is the reflection.

Journal, July 11, 1840

Art . . . can never match the luxury and superfluity of Nature. In Art all is seen; she cannot afford concealed wealth, and in consequence is niggardly; but Nature, even when she is scant and thin outwardly, contents us still by the assurance of a certain generosity at the roots.

Journal, August 13, 1841

All nature is classic and akin to art. The sumach and pine and hickory which surround my house remind me of the most graceful sculpture.

Journal, August 6, 1845

It has come to this,—that the lover of art is one, and the lover of nature another, though true art is but the expression of our love of nature. It is monstrous when one cares but little about trees but much about Corinthian columns, and yet this is exceedingly common.

Journal, October 9, 1857

Any surpassing work of art is strange and wild to the mass of men, as is genius itself.

Journal, February 16, 1859

Great works of art have endless leisure for a background, as the universe has space. Time stands still while they are created. The artist cannot be in a hurry.

Journal, September 24, 1859

Now the best works of art serve comparatively but to dissipate the mind, for they themselves represent transitionary and paroxysmal, not free and absolute, thoughts.

Journal, July 14, 1845

Aspiration

In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.:

Concord, May 20, 1860.

. . . Each reaching and aspiration is an instinct with which all nature consists and coöperates, and therefore it is not in vain . . . Where is the "unexplored land" but in your own untried enterprises? . . . You must make tracks into the Unknown. That is what you have your board and clothes for. Why do you ever mend your clothes, unless that, wearing them, you may mend your ways? Let us sing.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Beans

What shall I learn of beans or beans of me? I cherish them, I hoe them, early and late I have an eye to them; and this is my day's work.

Walden: Ch. 7, The Beanfield

Making the earth say beans instead of grass,—this was my daily work . . . I was determined to know beans.

Walden: Ch. 7, The Beanfield

Beauty

How much of beauty—of color, as well as form—on which our eyes daily rest goes unperceived by us! No one but a botanist is likely to distinguish nicely the different shades of green with which the open surface of the earth is clothed, —and not even a landscape-painter if he does not know the species of sedges and grasses which paint it . . . When your attention has been drawn to them, nothing is more charming than the common colors of the earth's surface.

Journal, August 1, 1860

It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know. I do not get nearer by a hair's breadth to any natural object so long as I presume that I have an introduction to it from some learned man. To conceive it with a total apprehension I must for the thousandth time approach it as something totally strange. In what book is this world and

its beauty described? Who has plotted the steps toward the discovery of beauty?

Journal, October 4, 1859

The perception of beauty is a moral test.

Journal, June 21, 1852

Bees

Now is the time to hunt bees and take them up, when their combs are full of honey, and before the flowers are so scarce that they begin to consume the honey they have stored . . . It is not in vain that the flowers bloom, and bloom late, too, in favored spots. To us they are a culture and a luxury, but to the bees meat and drink. The tiny bee which we thought lived far away there in a flower-bell, in that remote vale, is a great voyager, and anon he rises up over the top of the wood, and sets sail with his sweet cargo straight for his distant haven. How well they know the woods and fields and the haunt of every flower!

Journal, September 30, 1852

Berries

To Sam Barrett's by boat, and old Wheeler house . . .

I found so many berries on that rock road, between and about the careless farmers' houses and walls, that the soil

seemed more fertile than where I live. Every bush and bramble bears its fruit; the sides of the road are a fruit garden; blackberries, huckleberries, thimbleberries, fresh and abundant, no signs of drought; all fruits in abundance; the earth teems. What are the virtues of the inhabitants that they are thus blessed? Do the rocks hold moisture, or are there no fingers to pluck them? I seem to have wandered into a land of greater fertility, some up-country Eden. Are not these the delectable hills? It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Great shining blackberries peep out at me from under the leaves upon the rocks. There the herbage never withers. There are abundant dews.

Journal, July 18, 1854

Berrying

The huckleberries . . . are now generally in blossom . . . frequented by honey-bees, full of promise for the summer. One of the great crops of the year . . . The crop of oranges, lemons, nuts and raisins, and figs, quinces, etc., etc., not to mention tobacco and the like, is of no importance to us compared with these . . . This crop grows wild all over the country, wholesome, bountiful, and free,—a real ambrosia—and yet men—the foolish demons that they are—devote themselves to culture of tobacco, inventing slavery and a thousand other curses as the means,—with infinite pains and inhumanity go raise tobacco all their lives. Tobacco is the staple instead of huckleberries. Wreaths of tobacco smoke go up from this land, the incense of a million sensualists. With what authority can such distinguish between Christians and Mahometans? . . .

It would be worth while to ask ourselves weekly, Is our life innocent enough? Do we live *inhumanely*, toward man or beast, in thought or act? To be serene and successful we must be at one with the universe . . . The inhumanity of science concerns me, as when I am tempted to kill a rare snake that I may ascertain its species. I feel that this is not the means of acquiring true knowledge.

Journal, May 28, 1854

P. M. Carried party a-berrying to Conantum in boat . . . Conantum hillside is now literally thick with berries. What a profusion of this kind of food Nature provides, as if to compensate for the scarcity last year! Fortunate that these cows in their pasture do not love them, but pass them by. The blackberries are already softening, and of all kinds there are many, many more than any or all creatures can gather. They are literally five or six species deep . . . This favorable moist weather has expanded some of the huckleberries to the size of bullets. Each patch, each bush, seems fuller and blacker than the last. Such a profusion, yet you see neither birds nor beasts eating them, unless ants and the huckleberry bug! I carried my hands full of bushes to the boat, and, returning, the two ladies picked fully three pints from these alone, casting the bare bushes into the stream.

Journal, August 4, 1856

When I used to pick berries for dinner on the East Quarter hills I did not eat one till I had done, for going a-berrying implies more things than eating the berries. They at home got only the pudding: I got the forenoon out of doors, and the appetite for the pudding.

Journal, August 22, 1860

Berries are just beginning to ripen, and children are planning expeditions after them. They are important as introducing children to the fields and woods, and as wild fruits of which much account is made. During the berry season the schools have a vacation, and many little fingers are busy picking these small fruits. It is ever a pastime, not a drudgery. I remember how glad I was when I was kept home from school a half a day to pick huckleberries on a neighboring hill all by myself to make a pudding for the family dinner. Ah, they got nothing but the pudding, but I got invaluable experience beside! A half a day of liberty like that was like the promise of life eternal. It was emancipation in New England. O, what a day was there, my countrymen!

Journal, July 16, 1851

All our life, *i.e.* the living part of it, is a persistent dreaming awake. What is often called poverty, but which is a simpler and truer relation to nature, gives a peculiar relish to life, just as to be kept short gives us an appetite for food. The children have been bringing huckleberries to sell for nearly a week. They are suspected to have berries in them.

I served my apprenticeship and have since done considerable journey-work in the huckleberry-field, though I never paid for my schooling and clothing that way. It was itself some of the best schooling I got, and paid for itself.

Journal, August 27, 1859

I once came near speculating in cranberries. Being put to it to raise the wind, and having occasion to go to New York to peddle some pencils which I had made, as I passed through Boston I went to Quincy market and inquired the price of cranberries. The dealer took me down cellar, asked

if I wanted wet or dry, and showed them. I gave it to be understood that I might want an indefinite quantity. It made a slight sensation among the dealers, and for aught I know, raised the price of the berry for a time. I then visited various New York packets and was told what would be the freight on deck and in the hold, and one skipper was very anxious for my freight. When I got to New York, I again visited the markets as a purchaser, and "the best of eastern cranberries" were offered me by the barrel at a cheaper rate than I could buy them in Boston. I was obliged to manufacture $1,000 worth of pencils, and slowly dispose of, and finally sacrifice them, in order to pay an assumed debt of $100.

Journal, November 20, 1853

Birds

Stood within a rod of a downy woodpecker on an apple tree. How curious and exciting the bloodred spot on its hindhead! I ask why it is there, but no answer is rendered by these snow-clad fields. It is so close to the bark that I do not see its feet. It looks behind as if it had on a black cassock open behind and showing a white undergarment between the shoulders and down the back. It is briskly and incessantly tapping all round the dead limbs, but rarely twice in a place, as if to sound the tree and so see if it has any worm in it, or perchance to start them. How much he deals with the bark of trees, all his life long tapping and inspecting it! He it is that scatters those fragments of bark and lichens about on the snow at the base of trees. What a lichenist he must be!

Journal, January 8, 1854

Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds?

Walden: Ch. 7, The Beanfield

I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn.

Walden: Ch. 15, Winter Animals

There are a few sounds still which never fail to affect me. The notes of the wood thrush and the sound of a vibrating chord, these affect me as many sounds once did often, and as almost all should. The strains of the aeolian harp and of the wood thrush are the truest and loftiest preachers that I know now left on this earth. I know of no missionaries to us heathens comparable to them. They, as it were, lift us up in spite of ourselves. They intoxicate, they charm us . . . He that hath ears, let him hear. The contact of sound with a human ear whose hearing is pure and unimpaired is coincident with an ecstasy. Sugar is not so sweet to the palate, as sound to the healthy ear; the hearing of it makes men brave.

Journal, December 31, 1853

I heard a robin in the distance,—the first I had heard this spring—repeating the assurance . . . I knew it would not rain any more . . . It was no longer the end of a season, but the beginning . . . Trees seemed all at once to be fitly grouped, to sustain new relations to men and to one another. There was somewhat cosmical in the arrangement of nature. O the evening robin at the close of a New England day! If I could ever find the twig he sits upon! Where does the minstrel really roost?

Journal, March 26, 1846

Pratt, when I told him of this nest, said he would like to carry one of his rifles down there. But I told him I should be sorry to have them killed. I would rather save one of these hawks than have a hundred hens and chickens. It was worth more to see them soar, especially now that they are so rare in the landscape. It is easy to buy eggs, but not to buy hen-hawks. My neighbors would not hesitate to shoot the last pair of hen-hawks in town to save a few of their chickens! But such economy is narrow and grovelling. It is unnecessary to sacrifice the greater value to the less. I would rather never taste chickens' meat nor hens' eggs than never to see a hawk sailing through the upper air again. This sight is worth incomparably more than a chicken soup or a boiled egg. So we exterminate the deer and substitute the hog. It was amusing to observe the swaying to and fro of the young hawk's head to counterbalance the gentle motion of the bough in the wind.

Journal, June 13, 1853

What is the relation between a bird and the ear that appreciates its melody, to whom, perchance, it is more charming and significant than to any one else? Certainly they are intimately related, and the one was made for the other. It is a natural fact.

Journal, February 20, 1857

Those trees and shrubs which retain their withered leaves through the winter—shrub oaks and young white, red, and black oaks . . . seem to form an intermediate class between deciduous and evergreen trees. They may almost be called the ever-reds. Their leaves, which are falling all winter long, serve as a shelter to rabbits and partridges and other winter quadrupeds and birds. Even the little chickadees love to skulk amid them and peep out from behind them. I hear their faint, silvery, lisping notes, like tinkling glass, and

occasionally a sprightly *day-day-day,* as they inquisitively hop nearer and nearer to me. They are our most honest and innocent little bird, drawing yet nearer to us as the winter advances, and deserve best of any of the walker.

Journal, December 1, 1853

To make a perfect winter day like this, you must have a clear sparkling air. The tension of nature must not be relaxed. The earth must be resonant if bare, and you hear the lisping tinkle of chickadees from time to time and the unrelenting steel-cold scream of a jay, unmelted, that never flows into a song, a sort of wintry trumpet, screaming cold; hard, tense, frozen music, like the winter sky itself. It is like a flourish of trumpets to the winter sky. There is no hint of incubation in the jay's scream. Like the creak of a cartwheel. There is no cushion for sounds now. They tear our ears.

Journal, February 12, 1854

To Fair Haven Hill and plain below. Saw a large hawk circling over a pine wood below me, and screaming, apparently that he might discover his prey by their flight. Traveling ever by wider circles, what a symbol of the thoughts; now soaring, now descending, taking larger and larger circles, or smaller and smaller. It flies not directly whither it is bound, but advances by circles, like a courtier of the skies. No such noble progress! How it comes round, as with a wider sweep of thought! But the majesty is in the imagination of the beholder, for the bird is intent on its prey . . . Circling and ever circling, you cannot divine which way it will incline, till perchance it dives down straight as an arrow to its mark. It rises higher above where I stand like a great moth seen against the sky; a will-o'-the-wind, following its path through the vortices of the air; the poetry of motion . . . If there are two concentrically circling, it is such a

regatta as Southampton waters never witnessed. Flights of imagination! Coleridgean thoughts! So a man is said to rise in his thoughts ever to fresh woods and pastures new.

Journal, December 20, 1851

The different moods or degrees of wildness and poetry of which the song of birds is the keynote. The wood thrush Mr. Barnum never hired or can, though he could bribe Jenny Lind and put her into his cage. How many little birds of the warbler family are busy now about the opening buds, while I sit here by the spring! They are almost as much a part of the tree as its blossoms and leaves. They come and give it voice. Its twigs feel with pleasure their little feet clasping them.

Journal, May 11, 1853

I hear a robin singing cheerily from some perch in the wood, in the midst of the rain. His song is a singular antagonism and offset to the storm. As if Nature said, "Have faith, these *two* things I can do." It sings with power, like a bird of great faith that sees the bright future through the dark present, to reassure the race of man, like one to whom many talents were given and who will improve its talents . . . It is a pure immortal melody.

Journal, April 21, 1852

When I hear a robin sing at sunset, I cannot help contrasting the equanimity of Nature with the bustle and impatience of man. We return from the lyceum and caucus with such stir and excitement, as if a crisis were at hand; but no natural scene or sound sympathizes with us, for Nature is always silent and unpretending as at the break of day. She but rubs her eyelids.

Journal, April 25, 1841

I no sooner step out of the house than I hear the bluebirds in the air, and far and near, everywhere except in the woods, throughout the town you may hear them,—the blue curls of their warblings,—harbingers of serene and warm weather, little azure rills of melody trickling here and there from out the air . . .

I pluck dry sprigs of pennyroyal, which I love to put in my pocket, for it scents me thoroughly and reminds me of garrets full of herbs . . .

The bluebird at once fills the air with his sweet warbling, and the song sparrow from the top of a rail pours forth his most joyous strain. Both express their delight at the weather which permits them to return to their favorite haunts. They are the more welcome to man for it . . .

This is the foreglow of the year, when the walker goes home to dream of summer. To-day I first smelled the earth.

Journal, March 18, 1853

The bluebird carries the sky on his back.

Journal, April 3, 1852

The bluebird which some woodchopper or inspired walker is said to have seen in that sunny interval between the snow-storms is like a speck of clear blue sky seen near the end of a storm, reminding us of an ethereal region and a heaven which we had forgotten. Princes and magistrates are often styled serene, but what is their turbid serenity to that ethereal serenity which the bluebird embodies? His Most Serene Birdship! His soft warble melts in the ear, as the snow is melting in the valleys around. The bluebird comes and with his warble drills the ice and sets free the rivers and ponds and frozen ground. *Journal, March 2, 1859*

The thrush alone declares the immortal wealth and vigor that is in the forest. Here is a bird in whose strain the story

is told, though Nature waited for the science of aesthetics to discover it to man. Whenever a man hears it, he is young, and Nature is in her spring. Wherever he hears it, it is a new world and a free country, and the gates of heaven are not shut against him . . . This bird never fails to speak to me out of an ether purer than that I breathe, of immortal beauty and vigor. He deepens the significance of all things seen in the light of his strain. He sings to make men take truer and higher views of things. He sings to amend their institutions.

Journal, July 5, 1852

As I come over the hill, I hear the wood thrush singing his evening lay . . . It lifts and exhilarates me. It is inspiring. It is a medicative draught to my soul. It is an elixir to my eyes and a fountain of youth to all my senses. It changes all hours to an eternal morning. It banishes all trivialness. It reinstates me in my dominion, makes me the lord of creation, is the chief musician of my court . . . This thrush's song is a *ranz des vaches* to me.

Journal, June 22, 1853

To live where you would hear the first brown thrasher! . . . Surveying seemed a noble employment which brought me within hearing of the bird . . . I was trying to get the exact course of a wall thickly beset with shrub oaks and birches, making an opening through them with axe and knife, while the hillside seemed to quiver or pulsate with the sudden melody . . . You would fain devote yourself to the melody, but you will hear more of it if you devote yourself to your work.

Journal, April 30, 1856

Ah, the beauty of this last hour of the day—when a power stills the air and smooths all waters and all minds—that

partakes of the light of the day and the stillness of the night! . . .

The wood thrush has sung for some time. He touches a depth in me which no other bird's song does . . . Other birds may whistle pretty well, but he is the master of a finer-toned instrument. His song is musical, not from association merely, not from variety, but the character of its tone. It is all divine,—a Shakespeare among birds, and a Homer too.

Journal, May 17, 1853

The earth is worthy to inhabit . . .

I hear a wood thrush here, with a fine metallic ring to his note. This sound most adequately expresses the immortal beauty and wildness of the woods.

Journal, April 30, 1852

In the sunshine and the crowing of cocks I feel an illimitable holiness, which makes me bless God and myself.

Journal, February 7, 1841

Let a full-grown but young cock stand near you. How full of life he is, from the tip of his bill through his trembling wattles and comb and his bright eye to the extremity of his clean toes! How alert and restless, listening to every sound and watching every motion! How various his notes, from the finest and shrillest alarum as a hawk sails over, surpassing the most accomplished violinist on the short strings, to a hoarse and terrene voice or cluck! He has a word for every occasion . . . He gathers impetus and air and launches forth that world-renowned ear-piercing strain! not a vulgar note of defiance, but the mere effervescence of life, like the bursting of a bubble in a wine-cup. Is any gem so bright as his eye?

Journal, October 1, 1858

The Body

Why need I travel to seek a site, and consult the points of the compass? My eyes are south windows, and out of these I command a southern prospect. The eye does the least drudgery of any of the senses. It oftenest escapes to a higher employment. The rest serve and escort and defend it . . . It is the oldest servant in the soul's household . . . We see truth. We are children of light.

Journal, October 3, 1840

My body is all sentient. As I go here or there, I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery . . . The age of miracles is each moment thus returned. Now it is wild apples, now river reflections, now a flock of lesser redpolls. In winter, too, resides immortal youth and perennial summer. Its head is not silvered; its cheek is not blanched but has a ruby tinge to it . . .

What if we could daguerreotype our thoughts and feelings! For I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribute of another world and condition of things. Here the invisible seeds settle, and spring, and bear flowers and fruits of immortal beauty.

Journal, December 11, 1855

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead.

Walden: Ch. 11, Higher Laws

A man may be old and infirm. What, then, are the thoughts he thinks? what the life he leads? They are, like himself,

infirm. But a man may be young, athletic, active, beautiful. Then, too, his thoughts will be like his person. If you are well, then how brave you are! How you hope! You are conversant with joy! A man thinks as well through his legs and arms as his brain. We exaggerate the importance and exclusiveness of the head-quarters. Do you suppose they were a race of consumptives and dyspeptics who invented Grecian mythology and poetry? The poet's words are, "You would almost say the body thought!" I quite say it. I trust we have a good body then.

Journal, December 31, 1859

The care of the body is the highest exercise of prudence. If I have brought this weakness to my lungs, I will consider calmly and disinterestedly how the thing came about, that I may find out the truth and render justice. Then, after patience, I shall be a wiser man than before.

Let us apply all our wit to the repair of our bodies, as we would mend a harrow, for the body will be dealt plainly and implicitly with. We want no moonshine nor surmises about it. This matter of health and sickness has no fatality in it, but is the subject of the merest prudence.

Journal, February 23, 1841

Books

Books of natural history make the most cheerful winter reading. I read in Audubon with a thrill of delight, when the snow covers the ground, of the magnolia, and the Florida keys, and their warm sea breezes; or of the breaking up of winter in Labrador. I seem to hear the melting of the snow on the forks of the Missouri as I read. I imbibe

some portion of health from these reminiscences of luxuriant nature . . .

In society you will not find health, but in nature. You must converse much with field and woods, if you would imbibe such health into your mind and spirit as you covet for your body. Society is always diseased, and the best is the sickest. There is no scent in it so wholesome as that of the pines, nor any fragrance so penetrating and restorative as that of everlasting in the high pastures . . .

I should like to keep some book of natural history always by me as a sort of elixir, the reading of which would restore the tone of my system and secure me true and cheerful views of life.

Journal, December 31, 1841

There is always room and occasion enough for a true book on any subject; as there is room for more light the brightest day and more rays will not interfere with the first.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Spent the day in Cambridge Library . . . Saw a large flock of geese go over Cambridge and heard the robins in the College Yard. The Library is a wilderness of books. Looking over books on Canada written within the last three hundred years, you could see how one had been built upon another, each author consulting and referring to his predecessors. You could read most of them without changing your legs on the steps. Books that are books are all that you want, and there are but half a dozen in any thousand.

Journal, March 16, 1852

Many college text-books which were a weariness and a stumbling-block when *studied,* I have since read a little in with pleasure and profit . . . Much study a weariness of the

flesh, eh? But did they not intend that we should read and ponder, who covered the whole earth with alphabets, primers or bibles,—coarse or fine print? . . . As by an inevitable decree, we have come to times at last when our very waste paper is printed. Was not He who creates lichens the abettor of Cadmus when he invented letters? Types almost arrange themselves into words and sentences as dust arranges itself under the magnet. Print! it is a close-hugging lichen that forms on a favorable surface, which paper offers. . . . Who placed us with eyes between a microscopic and a telescopic world?

Journal, February 19, 1854

Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.

Walden: Ch. 3, Reading

The best books are not read even by those who are called good readers.

Walden: Ch. 3, Reading

How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!

Walden: Ch. 3, Reading

Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.

Walden: Ch. 3, Reading

For a year or two past, my *publisher*, falsely so called, has been writing from time to time to ask what disposition should be made of the copies of "A Week on the Concord

and Merrimack Rivers" still on hand, and at last suggesting that he had use for the room they occupied in his cellar. So I had them all sent to me here, and they have arrived to-day by express, filling the man's wagon,—706 copies out of an edition of 1000 which I bought of Munroe four years ago and have been ever since paying for, and have not quite paid for yet. The wares are sent to me at last, and I have an opportunity to examine my purchase. They are something more substantial than fame, as my back knows, which has borne them up two flights of stairs to a place similar to that to which they trace their origin. Of the remaining two hundred and ninety and odd, seventy-five were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber half as high as my head, my *opera omnia.* This is authorship; these are the work of my brain. There was just one piece of good luck in the venture. The unbound were tied up by the printer four years ago in stout wrappers, and inscribed,—

H. D. Thoreau's
Concord River
50 cops.

So Munroe had only to cross out "River" and write "Mass." and deliver them to the express man at once. I can see now what I write for, the result of my labors.

Nevertheless, in spite of this result, sitting here beside the inert mass of my works, I take up my pen to-night to record what thought or experience I may have had, with as much satisfaction as ever. Indeed, I believe that this result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer.

Journal, October 28, 1853

From a letter to his sister Sophia at Roxbury, Mass.
Concord, January 23, 1840

. . . What Latin are you reading? I mean *reading*, not studying. Blessed is the man who can have his library at hand, and oft peruse the books, without the fear of a task-master! he is far enough from harmful idleness, who can call in and dismiss these friends when he pleases. An honest book's the noblest work of Man. There's a reason, now, not only for your reading, but for writing something, too. You will not lack readers,—here am I, for one. If you cannot compose a volume, then try a tract. It will do the world no good, hereafter, if you merely exist, and pass life smoothly or roughly; but to have thoughts, and write them down, that helps greatly.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Capacity

Man's capacities have never been measured; nor are we to judge of what he can do by any precedents, so little has been tried.

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

Cape Cod

The time must come when this coast will be a place of resort for those New-Englanders who really wish to visit the

seaside. At present it is wholly unknown to the fashionable world, and probably it will never be agreeable to them . . . What are springs and waterfalls? Here is the spring of springs, the waterfall of waterfalls. A storm in the fall or winter is the time to visit it; a light-house or a fisherman's hut the true hotel. A man may stand there and put all America behind him.

Cape Cod, Ch. X, Provincetown

Character

Nothing is so attractive and unceasingly curious as character. There is no plant that needs such tender treatment, there is none that will endure so rough. It is the violet and the oak. It is the thing we mean, let us say what we will. We mean our own character, or we mean yours. It is divine and related to the heavens, as the earth is by the flashes of the Aurora. It has no acquaintance nor companion. It goes silent and unobserved longer than any planet in space, but when at length it does show itself, it seems like the flowering of all the world, and its before unseen orbit is lit up like the trail of a meteor.

Journal, November 30, 1841

The Church and Religion

There is no infidelity so great as that which prays, and keeps the Sabbath, and founds churches . . . The church is the hospital for men's souls, but the reflection that he may one

day occupy a ward in it should not discourage the cheerful labors of the able-bodied man. Let him remember the sick in their extremities, but not look thither as to his goal.

Journal, January 1, 1842

The ringing of the church bell is a much more melodious sound than any that is heard within the church.

Journal, January 2, 1842

With by far the greater part of mankind, religion is a habit; or rather habit is a religion. However paradoxical it may seem, it appears to me that to reject "religion" is the first step toward moral excellence; at least no man ever attained to the highest degree of the latter by any other road.

From an early essay of 1837.
Source: H. S. Salt's *Life of Henry David Thoreau.*

What is religion? That which is never spoken.

Journal, August 18, 1858

I sometimes hear a prominent but dull-witted worthy man say, or hear that he has said, rarely, that if it were not for his firm belief in "an overruling power," or a "perfect Being," etc., etc. But such poverty-stricken expressions only convince me of his habitual doubt and that he is surprised into a transient belief. Such a man's expression of faith, moving solemnly in the traditional furrow, and casting out all free-thinking and living souls with the rusty mould-board of his compassion or contempt, thinking that he has Moses and all the prophets in his wake, discourages and saddens me as an expression of his narrow and barren want of faith. I see that the infidels and skeptics have formed themselves

into churches and weekly gather together at the ringing of a bell.

Journal, February 4, 1857

The only faith that men recognize is a creed. But the true creed which we unconsciously live by, and which rather adopts us than we it, is quite different from the written or preached one. Men anxiously hold fast to their creed, as to a straw, thinking this does them good service because their sheet anchor does not drag.

Journal, September 3, 1838

The bells are particularly sweet this morning. I hear more, methinks, than ever before. How much more religion in their sound, than they ever call men together to! Men obey their call and go to the stove-warmed church, though God exhibits himself to the walker in a frosted bush to-day, as much as in a burning one to Moses of old.

Journal, January 2, 1853

It is a singular infatuation that leads men to become clergymen in regular, or even in irregular, standing. I pray to be introduced to new men, at whom I may stop short and taste their peculiar sweetness. But in the clergyman of the most liberal sort I see no perfectly independent human nucleus, but I seem to see some indistinct scheme hovering about, to which he has lent himself, to which he belongs. It is a very fine cobweb in the lower stratum of the air, which stronger wings do not even discover. Whatever he may say, he does not know that one day is as good as another. Whatever he may say, he does not know that a man's creed can never be written, that there are no particular expressions of belief that deserve to be prominent. He dreams of a certain sphere to be filled by him, something less in

diameter than a great circle, maybe not greater than a hogshead. All the staves are got out, and his sphere is already hooped. What's the use of talking to him? . . . If he doesn't know something that nobody else does, that nobody told him, then he's a telltale. What great interval is there between him who is caught in Africa and made a plantation slave of in the South, and him who is caught in New England and made a Unitarian minister of? In course of time they will abolish the one form of slavery, and, not long after, the other. I do not see the necessity for a man's getting into a hogshead and so narrowing his sphere, nor for putting his head into a halter. Here is a man who can't butter his own bread, and he has just combined with a thousand like him to make a dipped toast for all eternity!

Journal, February 28, 1857

Little fishes are seeking the sources of the brooks, seeking to disseminate their principles. Talk about a revival of religion! and business men's prayer-meetings! with which all the country goes mad now! What if it were as true and wholesome a *revival* as the little fishes feel which come out of the sluggish waters and run up the brooks toward their sources? All Nature revives at this season. With her it is really a *new life*, but with these church-goers it is only a revival of religion or hypocrisy. They go downstream to still muddier waters . . .

No wonder we feel the spring influences. There is a motion in the very ground under our feet. Each rill is peopled with new life rushing up it . . .

We, too, are out, obeying the same law with all nature. Not less important are the observers of the birds than the birds themselves.

Journal, March 20, 1858

A great cheerfulness have all great wits possessed, almost a

profane levity to such as understood them not, but their religion had the broader basis in proportion as it was less prominent. The religion I love is very laic. The clergy are as diseased, and as much possessed with the devil, as the reformers. They make their topic as offensive as the politician, for our religion is as unpublic and incommunicable as our poetic vein, and to be approached with as much love and tenderness.

Journal, March 15, 1841

Though he [the traveller] hears the sound of family prayers and sees sanctified faces and a greasy Bible or prayer-book, he feels not the less that he is in the hands of the Philistines, and perceives not the less the greasy and musty scent of a household whose single purpose is to scrape more pennies and it is to be preserved and abetted in this enterprise that together, when it has already more than enough for *its uses*, they pray. What's the use of ushering the day with prayer, if it is thus consecrated to turning a few more pennies merely? All genuine goodness is original and as free from cant and tradition as the air. It is heathen in its liberality and independence on tradition. The accepted or established church is in alliance with the graveyards.

Journal, June 16, 1857

If Henry Ward Beecher knows so much more about God than another, if he has made some discovery of truth in this direction, I would thank him to publish it in Stilliman's Journal, with as few flourishes as possible.

It is the spirit of humanity, that which animates both so-called savages and civilized nations, working through a man, and not the man expressing himself, that interests us most. The thought of a so-called savage tribe is generally far more just than that of a single civilized man.

Journal, February 3, 1859

The church, the state, the school, the magazine, think they are liberal and free! It is the freedom of a prison-yard . . . What is it you tolerate, you church to-day? Not truth, but a lifelong hypocrisy. Let us have institutions framed not out of our rottenness, but out of our soundness. This factitious piety is like stale gingerbread. I would like to suggest what a pack of fools and cowards we mankind are. They want me to agree not to breathe too hard in the neighborhood of their paper castles. If I should draw a long breath in the neighborhood of these institutions, their weak and flabby sides would fall out, for my own inspiration would exhaust the air about them. The church! It is eminently the timid institution, and the heads and pillars of it are constitutionally and by principle the greatest cowards in the community. The voice that goes from the monthly concerts is not so brave and so cheering as that which rises from the frog-ponds of the land. The best "preachers," so called, are an effeminate class; their bravest thoughts wear petticoats. If they have any manhood they are sure to forsake the ministry, though they were to turn their attention to baseball. Look at your editors of popular magazines. I have dealt with two or three of the most liberal of them. They are afraid to print a whole sentence, a *round* sentence, a free-spoken sentence. I have been into many of these cowardly New England towns where they *profess* Christianity, —invited to speak, perchance, where they were trembling in their shoes at the thought of the things you might say, as if they knew their weak side,—that they were weak on all sides. The devil they have covenanted with is a timid devil . . .

The further you go up country, I think the worse it is, the more benighted they are. On one side you will find a barroom which holds the "Scoffers," so called, on the other a vestry where is a monthly concert of prayer. There is just as little to cheer you in one of these companies as the other. It may be often the truth and righteousness of the barroom that saves the town. There is nothing to redeem the bigotry and moral cowardice of New-Englanders in my eyes. What

is called faith is an immense prejudice . . . They do not think; they adhere like oysters to what their fathers and grandfathers adhered to. How often is it that the shoemaker, by thinking over his last, can think as valuable a thought as he makes a valuable shoe?

Journal, November 16, 1858

Some years ago, the State met me in behalf of the Church, and commanded me to pay a certain sum toward the support of a clergyman whose preaching my father attended, but never I myself. "Pay," it said, "or be locked up in the jail." I declined to pay. But, unfortunately, another man saw fit to pay it. I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster . . . However, at the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing: "Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." This I gave to the town clerk; and he has it. The State, having thus learned that I did not wish to be regarded as a member of that church, has never made a like demand on me since.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Classics

What are the classics but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? . . . We might as well omit to study Nature because she is old.

Walden: Ch. 3, Reading

Clothing

I was struck by the perfect neatness, as well as elaborateness and delicacy, of a lady's dress the other day. She wore some worked lace or gauze over her bosom, and I thought it was beautiful, if it indicated an equal inward purity and delicacy,—if it was the soul she dressed and treated thus delicately.

Journal, August 7, 1853

I am inclined to think that my hat, whose lining is gathered in midway so as to make a shelf, is about as good a botany-box as I could have and far more convenient, and there is something in the darkness and the vapors that arise from the head—at least if you take a bath—which preserves flowers through a long walk. Flowers will frequently come fresh out of this botany-box at the end of the day, though they have had no sprinkling.

Journal, June 23, 1852

No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes; yet I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

I say, beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made to fit? If you have any enterprise before you, try it in your old clothes.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

I just had a coat come home from the tailor's. Ah me! Who am I that should wear this coat? It was fitted on one of the devil's angels about my size. Of what use that measuring of me if he did not measure my character, but only the breadth of my shoulders, as it were a peg to hang it on. This is not the figure that I cut. This is the figure the tailor cuts. That presumptuous and impertinent fashion whispered in his ear, so that he heard no word of mine. As if I had said, "Not my will, O Fashion, but thine be done . . ." Oh, with what delight I could thrust a spear through her vitals or squash her under my heel! Every village might well keep constantly employed a score of knights to rid it of this monster. It changes men into bears or monkeys with a single wave of its wand. The head monkey at Paris, Count D'Orsay, put on the traveller's cap, and now all the monkeys in the world do the same things. He merely takes the breadth of my shoulders and proceeds to fit the garment to Puck, or some other grotesque devil of his acquaintance to whom he has sold himself. I despair of ever getting anything quite simple and honest done in this world by the help of men. They would have to be passed through a powerful press, *à la* cider-mill, that their old notions might be thoroughly squeezed out of them, and it would be some time before they would get on their legs again.

Journal, January 14, 1854

The walker and naturalist does not wear a hat, or a shoe, or a coat, to be looked at, but for other uses. When a citizen comes to take a walk with me I commonly find that he is lame,—disabled by his shoeing. He is sure to wet his feet, tear his coat, and jam his hat, and the superior qualities of my boots, coat and hat appear. I once went into the woods with a party for a fortnight. I wore my old and common clothes, which were of Vermont gray. They wore, no doubt, the best they had for such an occasion,—of a fashionable

color and quality. I thought they were a little ashamed of me while we were in the towns. They all tore their clothes badly but myself, and I, who, it chanced, was the only one provided with needles and thread, enabled them to mend them. When we came out of the woods I was the best dressed of any of them.

Journal, March 26, 1860

Mizzles and rains all day, making sloshy walking, which sends us all to the shoemaker's. Bought me a pair of cow-hide boots to be prepared for winter walks. The shoemaker praised them, because they were made a year ago. I feel like an armed man now. The man who has bought his boots feels like him who has got in his winter's wood. There they stand beside me in the chamber, expectant, dreaming of far woods and wood paths of frost-bound or sloshy roads, or of being bound with skate-straps and clogged with ice-dust.

Journal, December 3, 1856

How different are men and women, *e.g.* in respect to the adornment of their heads! Do you ever see an old jammed bonnet on the head of a woman at a public meeting? But look at any assembly of men with their hats on; how large a proportion of the hats will be old, weather-beaten, and indented, but I think so much the more picturesque and interesting! One farmer rides by my door in a hat which it does me good to see, there is so much character in it,—so much independence to begin with, and then affection for his old friends, etc., etc. I should not wonder if there were lichens on it . . . But go to a lyceum and look at the bonnets and various other headgear of the women and girls, who, by the way, keep their hats on, it being too dangerous and expensive to take them off!! Why, every one looks as fragile as a butterfly's wings, having just come out of a bandbox,—as it will go into a bandbox again when the lyceum is over.

Men wear their hats for use; women theirs for ornament. I have seen the greatest philosopher in the town with what the traders would call "a shocking bad hat" on, but the woman whose bonnet does not come up to the mark is at best a "bluestocking." The man is not particularly proud of his beaver and musquash, but the woman flaunts her ostrich and sable in your face.

Journal, December 25, 1859

Clouds

I have not heard that watching white clouds, like white houses, made any one's eyes ache. They are the flitting sails in that ocean whose bounds no man has visited. They are like all great themes, always at hand to be considered, or they float over us unregarded. Far away they float in the serene sky, the most inoffensive of objects, or, near and low, they smite us with their lightnings and deafen us with their thunder . . . What could a man learn by watching the clouds? The objects which go over our heads unobserved are vast and indefinite . . . They are among the most glorious objects in nature. A sky without clouds is a meadow without flowers, a sea without sails.

Journal, June 24, 1852

I love very well this cloudy afternoon, so sober and favorable to reflection, after so many bright ones. What if the clouds shut out the heavens, provided they consecrate my thoughts and make a more celestial heaven below! I hear the crickets plainer. I wander less in my thoughts, am less dissipated, am aware how shallow was the current of my

thoughts before . . . The very wind on my cheek seems more fraught with meaning.

Journal, October 12, 1851

Thank God they cannot cut down the clouds!

Miscellanies: Biographical Sketch by R. W. Emerson

College Essays (1833-1837)

We find, on looking around us, even within the small circle of our acquaintances, many who, though not at all deficient in understanding, cannot muster resolution enough to commence any undertaking, even the most trifling, without consulting a friend; who are too diffident of their ability to judge for themselves, and who, eventually, after a certain degree of solicitation, after the requisite number of arguments has been brought forward, almost invariably yield; though perhaps their good sense tells them better . . .

One principal cause of this is a false shame which many feel, lest they be considered singular or eccentric; and therefore they run into the opposite extreme,—become all things to all men, and conform to existing customs and rules, whether good or bad. This grows into a habit, and thus an entire change takes place in the disposition and character of the man.

From *Following the Fashion*

. . . Every one can think, but comparatively few can express their thoughts. Indeed, how often do we hear one complain of his inability to express what he feels! . . . But if each one

would occupy a certain portion of each day in looking back upon the time which has passed, and in writing down his thoughts and feelings, in reckoning up his daily gains . . . he would be ready to turn over a new leaf . . .

From *Shall We Keep Journals?*

. . . Innocent and easily procurable pleasures constitute man's most lasting happiness: these are such as literature and imagination are both able and willing to afford. That undefinable misery, that insupportable tediousness, the curse of those who have nothing to do, is inconsistent with that relish for literature and science, which is a source of continual gratification to the mind. . . . Happy the man who is furnished with all the advantages to relish solitude! he is never alone and yet may be retired in the midst of a crowd; he holds sweet converse with the sages of antiquity, and gathers wisdom from their discourse; he enjoys the fruit of their labors,—their knowledge is his knowledge, their wisdom his inheritance.

It is knowledge that creates the difference between man and man,—that raises one man above another. The mind that is filled with this valuable furniture is "a magazine richly furnished," a storehouse of the wisdom of ages; from which Reflection, who is doorkeeper, and has charge of the keys, draws forth from time to time, as the Mind, the proprietor, has need of them. The sentiments of such a mind are sublime truths, of a pure and noble cast; rising above what is ignoble and mean, they breathe truth, "the essence of good": thus, inspired with a presentiment of virtue, man "is led through nature up to nature's God."

From *The Literary Life* (1835)

If we would aim at perfection in anything, Simplicity must not be overlooked. If the author would acquire literary fame, let him be careful to suggest such thoughts as are

simple and obvious, and to express his meaning distinctly and in good language. To do this, he must, in the first place, omit all superfluous ornament, which, though very proper in its place,—if, indeed, it can be said to have any in good composition,—tends rather to distract the mind, than to render a passage more clear and striking, or an idea more distinct . . .

Another very common fault is that of using uncommon words,—words which neither render our meaning more obvious, nor our composition more elegant. In this case the reader's attention is withdrawn from the subject, and is wholly employed upon the rare, and for that reason offensive, expression,—offensive, too, because it argues study and premeditation in the author. Obscurity may properly be called the opposite of simplicity. Hence, whatever contributes to this, as far-fetched metaphors and images,—in fact, all that kind of ornament that forms the characteristic of the Florid Style,—is not merely superfluous, but absolutely incompatible with excellence.

From *The Simple Style* (1835)

Man is an intellectual being. Without the least hesitation, as well as from the most careful investigation (if indeed there be any question about it), we are led to conclude that the Intellect is to be cultivated. Indeed, the doubt, if any exist, cannot be solved without the exercise, and consequently the cultivation of the intellectual faculties. We could not, if we would, put a stop entirely and effectually, to their gradual expansion and development, without offering violence to the organs through which they act . . .

In supplying his physical wants Man but obeys the dictates of Nature's law; shall the intellectual be neglected? If Reason was given us for any one purpose more than another, it was that we might so regulate our conduct as to ensure our eternal happiness. The cultivation of the mind,

then, is conducive to our happiness. But this consists in the cultivation of its several faculties.

What we call the Imagination is one of these faculties; hence does its culture conduce in a measure to the happiness of the individual . . .

Whatever the senses perceive or the mind takes cognizance of, affords food for the Imagination. In whatever a situation a man may be placed, to whatever straits he may be reduced, this faculty is ever busy. Its province is unbounded, its flights are not confined to space; the past and the future, time and eternity all come within the sphere of its range . . . Unlike most other pleasures, those of the Imagination are not momentary and evanescent; its powers are rather increased than worn out by exercise.

From *Imagination as an Element of Happiness*

. . . Death itself is sublime. It has all the attributes of sublimity,—Mystery, Power, Silence,—a sublimity which no one can resist . . .

The emotion excited by the Sublime is the most unearthly and godlike we mortals experience. It depends for the peculiar strength with which it takes hold on and occupies the mind, upon a principle which lies at the foundation of that worship which we pay to the Creator himself. And is fear the foundation of that worship? Is fear the ruling principle of our religion? Is it not, rather, the mother of superstition?

Yes,—the principle which prompts us to pay an involuntary homage to the Infinite, the Incomprehensible, the Sublime, forms the very basis of our religion. It is a principle implanted in us by our Maker,—a part of our very selves. We cannot eradicate it, we cannot resist it; fear may be overcome, death may be despised; but the Infinite, the Sublime, seize upon the soul and disarm it. We may overlook them, or, rather, fall short of them; we may pass them by,—but so sure as we meet them face to face, we yield.

From *The Sublimity of Death*

The justice of a nation's claim to be regarded as civilized seems to depend mainly upon the degree in which Art has triumphed over Nature. Civilization is the influence of Art, and not Nature, on Man. He mingles his own will with the unchanged essences around him, and becomes in his turn the creature of his own creations.

The end of life is education. An education is good or bad according to the disposition or frame of mind it induces. If it tends to cherish and develop the religious sentiment,—continuity to remind man of his mysterious relation to God and Nature,—and to exalt him above the toil and drudgery of this matter-of-fact world, it is good.

Civilization we think not only does not accomplish this, but is directly averse to it. The civilized man is the slave of Matter. Art paves the earth, lest he may soil the soles of his feet; it builds walls that he may not see the Heavens; year in, year out, the sun rises in vain to him; the rain falls and the wind blows, but they do not reach him . . . Who says that this is not mockery? So much for the influence of Art . . . The savage is far-sighted . . . He looks far into futurity, wandering as familiarly through the Land of Spirits, as the civilized man through his wood lot or pleasure grounds. His life is practical poetry, a perfect epic. The earth is his hunting-ground; he lives summers and winters; the sun is his time-piece,—he journeys to its rising or its setting . . . He never listens to the thunder but he is reminded of the Great Spirit,—it is *his* voice. To him the lightning is less terrible than it is sublime; the rainbow less beautiful than it is wonderful; the sun less warm than it is glorious . . . A nation may be ever so civilized, and yet lack wisdom. Wisdom is the result of education; and education being the bringing-out or development of that which is in man . . . that which is Life,—is far safer in the hands of Nature than of Art.

From *Barbarism and Civilization*

Color

Even the color of the subsoil excites me, as if I were already getting near to life and vegetation.

Journal, January 29, 1852

Color, which is the poet's wealth, is so expensive that most take to mere outline or pencil sketches and become men of science.

Journal, February 13, 1852

As you approach midsummer, the color of flowers is more intense and fiery. The reddest flower is the flower especially. Our blood is not white, nor is it yellow, nor even blue.

Journal, May 17, 1853

With what a variety of colors we are entertained! Yet most colors are rare or in small doses, presented to us as a condiment or spice . . . The eye feasts on the colors of flowers as on titbits; they are its spices.

Journal, June 1, 1853

The prevalence of this light, dry color perhaps characterizes November,—that of bleaching withered grass, of the fuzzy gray goldenrods, harmonizing with the cold sunlight, and that of the leaves which still hang on deciduous trees.

Journal, October 30, 1853

How plain, wholesome, and earthy are the colors of quadrupeds generally! The commonest I should say is the tawny

or various shades of brown, answering to the russet which is the prevailing color of the earth's surface, perhaps, and to the yellow sands beneath. The darker brown mingled with this answers to the darker-colored soil of the surface. The white of the polar bear, ermine, weasel, etc., answers to the snow; the spots of the pards, perchance, to the earth spotted with flowers or tinted leaves of autumn; the black, perhaps, to night, and muddy bottoms and dark waters. There are few or no bluish animals.

Journal, February 21, 1855

On the surface of the water amid the maples . . . I noticed some of the most splendid iridescence or opalescence from some oily matter, where the water was smooth amid the maples, that I ever saw. It was where some sucker or other fish, perchance, had decayed. The colors are intense blue and crimson, with dull golden . . . like the fragments of a most wonderfully painted mirror . . . How much color or expression can reside in so thin a substance! With such accompaniments does a sucker die and mix his juices with the river. This beauty like the rainbow and sunset sky marks the spot where his body has mingled with the elements. A somewhat similar beauty reappears painted on the clam's shell. Even a dead sucker suggests a beauty and so a glory of its own. I leaned over the edge of my boat and admired it as much as I ever did a rainbow or sunset sky. The colors were not faint, but strong and fiery, if not angry.

Journal, May 18, 1856

When colors come to be taught in the schools, as they should be, both the prism (or the rainbow) and these fungi should be used by way of illustration, and if the pupil does not learn colors, he may learn fungi, which perhaps is better. You almost envy the wood frogs and toads that hop amid such gems,—some pure and bright enough for a breastpin.

Out of every crevice between the dead leaves oozes some vehicle of color, the unspent wealth of the year, which Nature is now casting forth, as if it were only to empty herself.

Journal, September 1, 1856

Spring is brown; summer, green; autumn, yellow; winter, white; November, gray.

Journal, October 26, 1857

Think how much the eyes of painters, both artisans and artists, and of manufacturers of cloth and paper, and the paper-stainers, etc., are to be educated by these autumnal colors. The stationer's envelopes may be of very various tints, yet not so various as those of the leaves of a single tree sometimes. If you want a different shade or tint of a particular color, you have only to look further within or without the tree, or the wood. The eye might thus be taught to distinguish color and appreciate a difference of tint or shade.

Journal, October 22, 1858

The brilliant autumnal colors are red and yellow and the various tints, hues, and shades of these. Blue is reserved to be the color of the sky, but yellow and red are the colors of the earth flower. Every fruit, on ripening, and just before its fall, acquires a bright tint. So do the leaves; so the sky before the end of the day, and the year near its setting. October is the red sunset sky, November the later twilight. Color stands for all ripeness and success.

Journal, October 24, 1858

Perhaps those patches of emerald sky, sky just tinged with

green, which we sometimes see, far in the horizon or near it, are produced in the same way as I thought the green ice was,—some yellow glow reflected from a cloud mingled with the blue of the atmosphere. One might say that the yellow of the earth mingled with the blue of the sky to make the green of vegetation.

Journal, March 8, 1859

These earth colors, methinks, are never so fair as in the spring. Now the green mosses and lichens contrast with the brown grass, but ere long the surface will be uniformly green. I suspect that we are more amused by the effects of color in the skin of the earth now than in summer. Like the skin of a python, greenish and brown, a fit coat for it to creep over the earth and be concealed in. Or like the skin of a pard, the great leopard mother that Nature is, where she lies at length, exposing her flanks to the sun . . . Brown is the color for me, the color of our coats and our daily lives, the color of the poor man's loaf.

Journal, March 28, 1859

It will show how our prejudices interfere with our perception of color, to state that yesterday morning, after making a fire in the kitchen cooking-stove, as I sat over it I thought I saw a little bit of red or scarlet flannel on a chink near a bolt-head on the stove, and I tried to pick it out,—while I was a little surprised that I did not smell it burning. It was merely the reflection of the flame of fire through a chink, on the dark stove. This showed me what the true color of the flame was, but when I knew what this was, it was not very easy to perceive it again. It appeared now more yellowish. I think that my senses made the truest report the first time.

Journal, March 31, 1859

Water overflowing the ice at an opening in the river, and mixing with thin snow, saturating it, seen now on one side at right angles with the sun's direction, is as black as black cloth. It is surprising what a variety of distinct colors the winter can show us, using but few pigments, so to call them. The principal charm of a winter walk over ice is perhaps the peculiar and pure colors exhibited.

Journal, February 3, 1860

The reason why naturalists make so little account of color is because it is so insignificant to them; they do not understand it. But the lover of flowers or animals makes very much of color. To a fancier of cats it is not indifferent whether one be black or gray, for the color expresses *character.*

Journal, October 5, 1861

Common Sense

One piece of good sense would be more memorable than a monument as high as the moon.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Companions

I have several friends and acquaintances who are very good companions in the house or for an afternoon walk, but whom I cannot make up my mind to make a longer excur-

sion with; for I discover, all at once, that they are too gentlemanly in manners, dress, and all their habits. I see in my mind's eye that they wear black coats, considerable starched linen, glossy hats and shoes, and it is out of the question . . . It would be too much of a circumstance to enter a strange town or house with such a companion. You could not travel incognito; you might get into the papers. You should travel as a common man . . . No, you must be a common man, or at least travel as one, and then nobody will know that you are there or have been there.

Journal, June 3, 1857

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

Walden: Ch. 18, Conclusion

I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude.

Walden: Ch. 5, Solitude

Compensation

If we will be ready and quiet enough we shall find compensation in every disappointment. If a shower drives us for shelter to the maple grove or the trailing branches of the pine, yet in their recesses with microscopic eye we discover some new wonder in the bark, or the leaves, or the fungi at our feet. We are interested by some new resource of insect

economy, or the chickadee is more than usually familiar. We can study Nature's nooks and corners then.

Journal, September 23, 1838

For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Conscience

I must confess I see no resource but to conclude that conscience was not given us to no purpose, or for a hindrance, but that, however flattering order and expediency may look, it is but the repose of a lethargy; and we will choose rather to be awake, though it be stormy, and maintain ourselves on this earth and in this life as we may, without signing our death-warrant in the outset . . . Let us see if we cannot stay here, where God has put us, on his own conditions.

Journal, March 16, 1842

The Constitution

The judges and lawyers, all men of expediency, consider not whether the Fugitive Slave Law is right, but whether it is what they call constitutional. They try the merits of the case by a very low and incompetent standard. Pray, is virtue constitutional, or vice? Is equity constitutional, or inequity? It is as impertinent, in important moral and vital questions

like this, to ask whether a law is constitutional or not, as to ask whether it is profitable or not. They persist in being the servants of men, rather than the servants of God . . . Is the Constitution a thing to live by? or die by? No, as long as we are alive we forget it, and when we die we have done with it. At most it is only to swear by. While they are hurrying off Christ to the cross, the ruler decides that he cannot *constitutionally* interfere to save him. The Christians, now and always, are they who obey the higher law, who discover it to be according to their constitution to interfere. They at least cut off the ears of the police; the others pocket the thirty pieces of silver. This was meaner than to crucify Christ, for he could better take care of himself.

Journal, June 17, 1854

Courage

The coward wants resolution, which the brave man can do without. He recognizes no faith above a creed, thinking this straw by which he is moored does him good service, because his sheet anchor does not drag . . . It is not enough that our life is an easy one. We must live on the stretch, retiring to our rest like soldiers on the eve of battle, looking forward with ardor to the strenuous sortie of the morrow. To the brave soldier the rust and leisure of peace are harder than the fatigues of war . . . Our souls thrive best on unrest and discontent . . . I like those men who do their Maker the compliment not to fear Him; who grow bolder as great crises approach; who sit, even in the presence of the gods, and shrink not . . . It would be worth while to remember, daily, that we are to make great demands on Heaven and on ourselves . . . We feel our future deeds bestir themselves

within us, and move grandly to a consummation . . . What we really need to know is very simple. The course of our lives lies plain before us, as that river's valley . . . We have but to try; nothing really stands in the way to success, everything in the way to failure.

Miscellanies: The Service

Not how many, but where the enemy are . . . In the meanest are all the materials of manhood; only they are not rightly disposed. We say justly that the weak person is "flat,"—for, like all flat substances, he does not stand in the direction of his strength, that is, on his edge. Most things are strong in one direction,—a straw longitudinally, a board in the direction of its edge . . . But the brave man is a perfect sphere, which cannot fall on a flat side, and is equally strong in every way. The grand and majestic have always somewhat of the undulatoriness of the sphere. It is the secret of majesty in the rolling gait of the elephant, and of all grace in action and in Art. Always the line of beauty is a curve.

Miscellanies: The Service

We should impart our courage, and not our despair, our health and ease, and not our disease, and take care that this does not spread by contagion.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Cremation

How may a man most cleanly and graciously depart out of nature? . . . Our true epitaphs are those which the sun and wind write upon the atmosphere around our graves so con-

clusively that the traveller does not draw near to read the lie on our tombstones. Shall we not be judged rather by what we leave behind us, than by what we bring into the world? The guest is known by his leavings. When we become intolerable to ourselves, shall we be tolerable to heaven? . . . When Nature finds man returned on her hands, he is not simply the pure elements she had contributed to his growth. May not man cast his shell with as little offense as the mussel, and it, perchance, be a precious relic to be kept in the cabinets of the curious? . . . The ancients were more tidy than we, who subjected the body to the purification of fire before they returned it upon nature, for fire is the true washer; water only displaces the impurity. Fire is thorough, water is superficial.

Journal, December 14, 1840

Danger

What danger is there if you don't think of any?

Walden: Ch. 6, Visitors

Dawn, Day

Day would not dawn if it were not for The Inward Morning.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expression of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

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.

Walden: Ch. 10, The Baker Farm

Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

Walden: Ch. 18, Conclusion

To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature . . . If the bell rings, why should we run?

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

Death

I have touched a body that was flexible and warm, yet tenantless—warmed by what fire? When the spirit that animated some matter has left it, who else, what else, can animate it? The matter which composed the body of our first human father still exists under another name.

(After the death of his father.)
Journal, February 3, 1859

Duty

I have many affairs to attend to, and feel hurried these days. Great works of art have endless leisure for a background, as the universe has space. Time stands still while they are created. The artist cannot be in a hurry. The earth moves round the sun with inconceivable rapidity, and yet the surface of the lake is not ruffled by it. It is not by compromise, it is not by a timid and feeble repentance, that a man will save his soul, and live at last. He must conquer a clear field, letting Repentance & Co. go, that well-meaning but weak firm that has assumed the debts of an old and worthless one. You are to fight in a field where no allowances will be made, no courteous bowing to one-handed knights. You are expected to do your duty, not in spite of every thing but *one*, but in spite of *every thing*.

Journal, September 24, 1859

Dwelling

When I think of acquiring for myself one of our luxurious dwellings, I am deterred, for, so to speak, the country is not yet adapted to *human* culture, and we are still forced to cut our *spiritual* bread far thinner than our forefathers did their wheaten. Not that all architectural ornament is to be neglected even in the rudest periods; but let our houses first be linked with beauty, where they come in contact with our lives, like the tenement of the shell-fish, and not overlaid with it.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

So I went on for some days cutting and hewing timber, and also studs and rafters, all with my narrow axe, not having many communicable or scholar-like thoughts, singing to myself,—

Men say they know many things;
But lo! they have taken wings,—
The arts and sciences,
And a thousand appliances:
The wind that blows
Is all anybody knows.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Education

Many go to Europe *to finish their education,* and when they have returned their friends remark that the most they have acquired is a correct pronunciation of English. It is a premature hardening but hollowing of the shell. They become valuable utensils of the gourd kind, but have no palatable and nutritious inside. Instead of acquiring nutritious and palatable qualities to their pulp, it is all absorbed into a prematurely hardened shell. They went away squashes, and they return gourds. They are all expressed or squeezed out; their essential oil is gone . . . They pronounce with the sharp precise report of a rifle, but the likeness is in the sound only, for they have no bullets to fire.

Journal, July 30, 1853

From a letter to Richard F. Fuller, brother of Margaret Fuller, at Cambridge, Mass.
Concord, April 2, 1843.
. . . What I was learning in college was chiefly, I think, to express myself, and I see now, that as the old orator pre-

scribed, 1st, action; 2d, action; 3d, action; my teachers should have prescribed to me, 1st, sincerity; 2d, sincerity; 3d, sincerity. The old mythology is incomplete without a god or goddess of sincerity, on whose altars we might offer up all the products of our farms, our workshops, and our studies . . . I mean sincerity in our dealing with ourselves mainly; any other is comparatively easy . . . I believe I have but one text and one sermon.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Adult Education

We of Massachusetts boast a good deal of what we do for the education of our people, of our district-school system; and yet our district-schools are as it were but infant-schools, and we have no system for the education of the great mass who are grown up. I have yet to learn that one cent is spent by this town, this political community called Concord, directly to educate the great mass of its inhabitants who have long since left the district school; for the Lyceum, important as it is comparatively, though absolutely trifling, is supported by individuals. There are certain refining and civilizing influences, as works of art, journals and books, and scientific instruments, which this community is amply rich enough to purchase, which would educate this village, elevate its tone of thought, and, if it alone improved these opportunities, easily make it the centre of civilization in the known world, put us on a level at once with London and Arcadia, and secure us a culture at once superior to both. Yet we spend sixteen thousand dollars for a Town House, a hall for our political meetings mainly, and nothing to educate ourselves who are grown up. Pray is there noth-

ing in the market, no advantages, no intellectual food worth buying? Yet we are contented to be countrified, to be provincial. I am astonished to find that in this Nineteenth Century, in this land of free schools, we spend absolutely nothing as a town on our own education, cultivation, civilization. It is not that the town cannot well afford to buy these things, but it is unaspiring and ignorant of its own wants . . . If the London *Times* is the best newspaper in the world, why does not the village of Concord take it, that its inhabitants may read it, and not the second best?

Journal, September 27, 1851

El Dorado

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.:
Concord, January 1, 1859
. . . What a fool he must be who thinks that his El Dorado is anywhere but where he lives!

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Enjoyment

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 6, 1856.
. . . I am grateful for what I am and have. My thanksgiving is perpetual. It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite,—only a sense of existence. Well, anything for variety. I am ready to try this for the next ten

thousand years, and exhaust it. How sweet to think of! my extremities well charred, and my intellectual part too, so that there is no danger of worm or rot for a long while. My breath is sweet to me. O how I laugh when I think of my vague indefinite riches. No run on my bank can drain it, for my wealth is not possession but enjoyment.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Eternity

As if you could kill time without injuring eternity.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Ether

If I have got false teeth, I trust that I have not got a false conscience. It is safer to employ the dentist than the priest to repair the deficiencies of nature.

By taking ether the other day I was convinced how far asunder a man could be separated from his senses. You are told that it will make you unconscious, but no one can imagine what it is to be unconscious . . . The value of the experiment is that it does give you experience of an interval as between one life and another,—a greater space than you ever travelled. You are a sane mind without organs,—groping for organs,—which if it did not soon recover its old senses would get new ones. You expand like a seed in the ground. You exist in your roots, like a tree in the winter.

If you have an inclination to travel, take the ether. You go beyond the furthest star.

Journal, May 12, 1851

Evidence

Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.

Journal, November 11, 1854

Evil

There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Expectation

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.
Concord, May 28, 1850.
. . . Is not the attitude of expectation somewhat divine?—a sort of home-made divineness? Does not it compel a kind of sphere-music to attend on it? And do not its satisfactions merge at length, by insensible degrees, in the enjoyment of the thing expected?

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

What is hope, what is expectation, but a seed-time whose harvest cannot fail, an irresistible expedition of the mind, at length to be victorious?

Journal, February 20, 1857

Experience

Of course it is the spirit in which you do a thing which makes it interesting, whether it is sweeping a room or pulling turnips. Peaches are unquestionably a very beautiful and palatable fruit, but the gathering of them for the market is not nearly so interesting as the gathering of huckleberries for your own use . . . The value of any experience is measured, of course, not by the amount of money, but by the amount of development we get out of it.

Journal, November 26, 1860

One may almost doubt if the wisest man has learned anything of absolute value by living. Practically, the old have no very important advice to give the young, their own experience has been so partial, and their lives have been such miserable failures, for private reasons, as they must believe.

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

Faith and Fear

It is the faith with which we take medicine that cures us. Otherwise we may be cured into greater disease. In a violent

tempest we both fear and trust. We are ashamed of our fear, for we know that a righteous man would not suspect danger, nor incur any. Wherever a man feels fear, there is an avenger . . . Science affirms too much. Science assumes to show *why* the lightning strikes a tree, but it does not show us the moral *why* any better than our instincts did. It is full of presumption. Why should trees be struck? It is not enough to say because they are in the way. Science answers, *Non scio*, I am ignorant. All the phenomena of nature need to be seen from the point of view of wonder and awe, like lightning; and on the other hand, the lightning itself needs to be regarded with serenity.

Journal, June 27, 1852

Miss Martineau's last book is not so bad as the timidity which fears its influence. As if the popularity of this or that book would be so fatal, and man would not still be man in the world. Nothing is so much to be feared as fear. Atheism may comparatively be popular with God himself.

Journal, September 7, 1851

Flowers, Weeds, Etc.

Each humblest plant, or weed, as we call it, stands there to express some thought or mood of ours; and yet how long it stands in vain! I had walked over those Great Fields so many Augusts . . . I had brushed against them and trodden on them, forsooth; and now, at last, they, as it were, rose up and blessed me. Beauty and true wealth are always thus cheap and despised. Heaven might be defined as the place which men avoid.

Excursions: Autumnal Tints

Now too, the first of October, or later, the Elms are at the height of their autumnal beauty,—great brownish yellow masses, warm from their September oven, hanging over the highway. Their leaves are perfectly ripe. I wonder if there is any answering ripeness in the lives of the men who live beneath them. As I look down our street, which is lined with them, they remind me both by their form and color of yellowing sheaves of grain, as if the harvest had indeed come to the village itself, and we might expect to find some maturity and *flavor* in the thoughts of the villagers at last.

Excursions: Autumnal Tints

Nature does not cast her pearls before swine. There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate, not a grain more . . . A man sees only what concerns him.

Excursions: Autumnal Tints

I would fain improve every opportunity to wonder and worship, as a sunflower welcomes the light.

Journal, August 30, 1856

There is a flower for every mood of the mind.

Journal, June 25, 1852

Wild Flowers

How fitting to have every day in a vase of water on your table the wild flowers of the season which are just blossoming! Can any be said to be furnished without them? Shall

we be so forward to pluck the fruits of Nature and neglect her flowers? They are surely her finest influences. So may the season suggest the fine thoughts it is fitted to suggest. Shall we say, "A penny for your thoughts," before we have looked into the face of Nature? Let me know what picture she is painting, what poetry she is writing, what ode composing, now.

Journal, July 5, 1852

The Fringed Gentian

At 5 P.M. I found the fringed gentian . . . At this hour the blossoms are tightly rolled and twisted, and I see that the bees have gnawed round holes in their sides, to come at the nectar. They have found them, though I had not. "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen" by man. An hour ago I doubted if fringed gentians were in Concord now, but, having found these, they as it were surrender . . . It is too remarkable a flower not to be sought out and admired each year, however rare. It is one of the errands of the walker, as well as of the bees, for it yields him a more celestial nectar still. It is a very singular and agreeable surprise to come upon this conspicuous and handsome and withal blue flower at this season, when flowers have passed out of our minds and memories; the latest of all to begin to bloom . . . *Vide* Bryant's verses on the Fringed Gentian . . . It is remarkable how tightly the gentians roll and twist up at night, as if that were their constant state. Probably those bees were working late that found it necessary to perforate the flower.

Journal, October 19, 1852

Lilies

Boated up the Assabet. Sweet water-lily, pond lily, in bloom. A superb flower, our lotus, queen of the waters . . . How sweet, innocent, wholesome its fragrance! How pure its white petals, though its root is in the mud! To-morrow, then, will be the first Sabbath when the young men, having bathed, will walk soberly and slowly to church in their best clothes, each with a lily in his hand or bosom, with as long a stem as he could get. At least I used to see them go by and come into church smelling a pond-lily, when I used to go myself. So that the flower is to some extent associated with bathing in Sabbath mornings and going to church, its odor contrasting and atoning for that of the sermon. We have now roses on the land and lilies on the water,—both land and water have done their best,—now *just* after the longest day. Nature says, "You behold the utmost I can do." . . . I have a faint recollection of pleasure derived from smoking dried lily stems before I was a man. I had commonly a supply of these. I have never smoked anything more noxious. I used to amuse myself with making the yellow drooping stamens rise and fall by blowing through the pores of the long stem.

Journal, June 26, 1852

The Shad-bush

The shad-bush is leafing again by the sunny swamp-side. It is like a youthful or poetic thought in old age. Several times I have been cheered by this sight when surveying in former years. The chickadee seems to lisp a sweeter note at the

sight of it. *I* would not fear the winter more than the shad-bush which puts forth fresh and tender leaves on its approach. In the fall I will take this for my coat-of-arms. It seems to detain the sun that expands it. These twigs are so full of life that they can hardly contain themselves. They ignore winter. They anticipate spring. What faith! . . . In my later years, let me have some *shad-bush* thoughts.

Journal, October 13, 1859

Food

You need not rest your reputation on the dinners you give.

Walden: Ch. 6, Visitors

I have been popping corn to-night, which is only a more rapidly blossoming of the seed under a greater than July heat. The popped corn is a perfect winter flower, hinting of anemones and houstonias . . . The law by which flowers unfold their petals seem only to have operated more suddenly under the intense heat . . . Here has blossomed for my repast such a delicate blossom as will soon spring by the wall-sides. And this is as it should be. Why should not Nature revel sometimes, and genially relax and make herself familiar at my board? I would have my house a bower fit to entertain her. It is a feast of such innocence as might have snowed down. By my warm hearth sprang these cerealious blossoms; here was the bank where they grew.

Methinks some such visible token of approval would always accompany the simple and healthy repast. There would be such a smiling and blessing upon it.

Journal, January 3, 1842

These apples which I get nowadays—russets and Baldwins —are the ripest of all, being acted on by the frost and partly left because they were slightly over-ripe for keeping. I come home with a heavy bagful and rob no one . . .

Men prefer foolishly the gold to that of which it is a symbol,—simple, honest, independent labor. Can gold be said to buy food, if it does not buy an appetite for food? It is fouler and uglier to have too much than not to have enough.

Journal, November 18, 1855

Like many of my contemporaries I had rarely for many years used animal food, or tea or coffee, etc., etc., not so much because of any ill effects which I had traced to them in my own case, though I could theorize extensively in that direction, as because it was not agreeable to my imagination. It appeared to be more beautiful to live low and fare hard in many respects. I carry less religion to the table, ask no blessing, not because I am wiser than I was, but, I am obliged to confess, because, however much it is to be regretted, with years I have grown more coarse and indifferent. The repugnance to animal food and the rest is not the result of experience, but is an instinct.

Journal, November 27, 1852

Another finger-cold evening, which I improve in pulling my turnips,—the usual amusement of such weather—before they shall be frozen in. It is worth the while to see how green and lusty they are yet, still adding to their stock of nutriment for another year; and between the green and also withering leaves it does me good to see their great crimson round or scalloped tops, sometimes quite above the ground, they are so bold . . . All kinds of harvestry, even pulling turnips when the first cold weather numbs your fingers, are interesting, if you have been the sower, and have not sown too many.

Journal, November 21, 1860

Freedom

I must not lose any of my freedom by being a farmer and landholder. Most who enter on any profession are doomed men. The world might as well sing a dirge over them forthwith . . . When the right wind blows or a star calls, I can leave this arable and grass ground, without making a will or settling my estate . . . My life must undulate still. I will not feel that my wings are clipped when once I have settled on ground which the law calls my own.

Journal, March 27, 1841

Men talk of freedom! How many are free to think? free from fear, from perturbation, from prejudice? Nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand are perfect slaves. How many can exercise the highest human faculties? He is the man truly—courageous, wise, ingenious—who can use his thoughts and ecstasies as the material of fair and durable creations.

Journal, May 6, 1858

Perhaps I am more than usually jealous with respect to my freedom. I feel that my connection with and obligation to society are still very slight and transient . . . I foresee that if my wants should be much increased, the labor required to supply them would become a drudgery. If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, as most appear to do, I am sure that for me there would be nothing left worth living for.

Miscellanies: Life Without Principle

There is something servile in the habit of seeking after a law which we may obey. We may study the laws of matter at

and for our convenience, but a successful life knows no law. It is an unfortunate discovery certainly, that of a law which binds us where we did not know before that we were bound. Live free, child of the mist,—and with respect to knowledge we are all children of the mist. The man who takes the liberty to live is superior to all the laws, by virtue of his relation to the lawmaker.

Excursions: Walking

I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

As long as possible live free and uncommitted.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

The law will never make men free; it is men who have got to make the law free. They are the lovers of law and order who observe the law when the government breaks it.

From Thoreau's speech on Capt. John Brown made in Framingham, Mass., 1854

Friends

Minott is, perhaps, the most poetical farmer—who most realizes to me the poetry of the farmer's life—that I know. He does nothing with haste and drudgery, but as if he loved it. He makes the most of his labor, and takes infinite satisfaction in every part of it. He is not looking forward to the

sale of his crops or any pecuniary profit, but he is paid by the constant satisfaction which his labor yields him. He has not too much land to trouble him—too much work to do—no hired man or boy—but simply to amuse himself and live. He cares not so much to raise a large crop as to do his work well. He knows every pin and nail in his barn. If another linter* is to be floored, he lets no hired man rob him of that amusement, but he goes slowly to the woods and, at his leisure, selects a pitch pine tree, cuts it, and hauls it or gets it hauled to the mill; and so he knows the history of his barn floor.

(**linter* is perhaps a corruption of *lean-to*. Webster.)

Journal, October 4, 1851

Talked, or tried to talk, with R. W. E. [Emerson] Lost my time—nay, almost my identity. He, assuming a false opposition where there was no difference of opinion, talked to the wind—told me what I knew—and I lost my time trying to imagine myself somebody else to oppose him.

Journal, May 24, 1853

Friendship

How I love the simple, reserved countrymen, my neighbors, who mind their own business and let me alone, who never waylaid nor shot at me, to my knowledge, when I crossed their fields, though each one has a gun in his house! For nearly twoscore years I have known at a distance, these long-suffering men, whom I never spoke to, who never spoke to me, and now feel a certain tenderness for them, as if this long probation were but the prelude to an eternal friendship. What a long trial we have withstood, and how much

more admirable we are to each other, perchance, than if we had been bedfellows! I am not only grateful because Veias, and Homer, and Christ, and Shakespeare have lived, but I am grateful for Minott, and Rice, and Melvin, and Goodwin, and Puffer even. I see Melvin all alone filling his sphere, in russet suit, which no other could fill or suggest. He takes up as much room in nature as the most famous.

Journal, December 3, 1856

Where is the actual friend you love? Ask from what hill the rainbow's arch springs! It adorns and crowns the earth. Our friends are our kindred, of our species. There are very few of our species on the globe.

Journal, February 24, 1857

I love my friends very much, but I find it is no use to go and see them. I hate them commonly when I am near them. They belie themselves and deny me continually. I have certain friends whom I visit occasionally, but I commonly part from them early, with a certain bitter-sweet sentiment. That which we love is so mixed and entangled with what we hate in one another, that we are more grieved and disappointed —aye, and estranged from one another—by meeting them than by absence. Some men may be my acquaintances merely; but one whom I have been accustomed to regard, to idealize, to have dreams about, as a friend, can never degenerate into an acquaintance. I must know him on that higher ground, or not know him at all. Our friend must be broad. His must be an atmosphere coextensive with the universe, in which we can expand and breathe. For the most part we are smothered and stifled by one another. I go to see my friend and try his atmosphere. If our atmospheres do not mingle,—if we repel each other strongly,—it is of no use to stay.

Journal, November, 1851

How happens it that I find myself making such an enormous demand on men and so constantly disappointed? Are my friends aware how disappointed I am? Is it all my fault? Have I no heart? Am I incapable of expansion and generosity? I shall accuse myself of everything else sooner. I have never met with a friend who furnished me sea-room. I have only tacked a few times and come to anchor—not sailed—made no voyage, carried no venture. Do they think me eccentric because I refuse this chicken's meat, this babe's food?

Journal, August 24, 1852

I sometimes awake in the night and think of friendship and its possibilities, a new life and revelation to me, which perhaps I had not experienced for many months . . . I wake up in the night to see these higher levels of life, as to a day that begins to dawn, as if my intervening life had been a long night. I catch an echo of the great strain of Friendship played somewhere, and feel compensated for months and years of commonplace. I rise into a diviner atmosphere, in which simply to exist and breathe is a triumph, and my thoughts inevitably tend toward the grand and infinite . . . It is as if I were serenaded, and the highest and truest compliments were paid me. The universe gives me three cheers.

Journal, July 13, 1857

My friend is one who takes me for what I am. A stranger takes me for something else than what I am . . . What men call social virtues, good fellowship, is commonly but the virtue of pigs in a litter which lie close together to keep each other warm. It brings men together in crowds and mobs in bar-rooms and elsewhere, but it does not deserve the name of virtue.

Journal, October 23, 1852

Friends

Just spent a couple of hours (8 to 10) with Miss Mary Emerson at Holbrook's; [Ralph Waldo Emerson's aunt] the wittiest and most vivacious woman I know, certainly that woman among my acquaintances whom it is most profitable to meet, the least frivolous, who will most surely provoke to good conversation. She is singular among women, at least, in being really and perseveringly interested to know what thoughtful people think. She relates herself surely to the intellectual wherever she goes. It is perhaps her greatest praise and peculiarity that she more surely than any other woman gives her companion occasion to utter his best thought. In spite of her own biases, she can entertain a large thought with hospitality, and is not prevented by any intellectuality in it, as women commonly are. In short, she is a genius, as woman seldom is, reminding you less often of her sex than any woman I know. Thus she is capable of a masculine appreciation of poetry and philosophy. I have never talked with any other woman who I thought accompanied me so far in describing a poetic experience. Miss Fuller is the only other I think of in this connection, and of her rather from her fame than from my knowledge of her.

Journal, November 13, 1851

P.M. By path around Walden . . . I see the pale-faced farmer out again on his sled, for the five thousandth time. Cyrus Hubbard, a man of a certain New England probity and worth, immortal and natural, like a natural product, like the sweetness of a nut, like the toughness of hickory. He, too, is a redeemer for me. How superior actually to the faith he professes! He is not an office-seeker. What an institution, what a revelation is a man! We are wont foolishly to think that the creed a man professes is more significant

than the fact that he is. It matters not how hard the conditions seem, how mean the world, for a man is a prevalent force, and a new law himself. He is system whose law is to be observed. The old farmer condescends to countenance still this nature and order of things. It is a great encouragement that an honest man makes this world his abode. He rides on the sled drawn by oxen world-wise, yet comparatively so young, as if they had seen scores of winters. The farmer spoke to me, I can swear, clear, cold, moderate, as the snow. He does not melt the snow where he stands. Yet what a faint impression that encounter may make on me after all! Moderate, natural, true, as if he were made of earth, stone, wood, snow. I thus meet in this universe kindred of mine, composed of these elements. I see men like frogs. Their peeping I partially understand.

Journal, December 1, 1856

I have devoted most of my day to Mr. Alcott. He is broad and genial, but indefinite; some would say feeble; [Alcott was then 50 years old]; forever feeling about vainly in his speech and touching nothing. But this is a very negative account of him, for he thus suggests far more than the sharp and definite practical mind. The feelers of his thought diverge,—such is the breadth of their grasp,—not converge; and in his society almost alone can I express at my leisure, with more or less success, my vaguest but most cherished fancy or thought. There are never any obstacles in the way of our meeting. He has no creed. He is not pledged to any institution. The sanest man I ever knew; the fewest crotchets, after all, has he . . . When we walk it seems as if the heavens—whose mother-o'-pearl and rainbow tints come and go, form and dissolve—and the earth had met together, and righteousness and peace had kissed each other. I have an ally against the arch-enemy. We walk together like the most innocent children, going after wild pinks with case-knives. Most with whom I endeavor to talk soon fetch up

against some institution or particular way of viewing things, theirs not being a universal view. They will continually bring their own roofs or—what is not much better—their own narrow skylights between us and in the sky, when it is the unobstructed heavens I would view.

Journal, May 9, 1853

Green corn now, and melons have begun. That month, surely, is distinguished when melons ripen. July could not do it. What a moist, fertile heat now!

Alcott spent the day with me yesterday. He spent the day before with Emerson. He observed that he had got his wine and now he had come after his venison. Such was the compliment he paid me. The question of a livelihood was troubling him. He knew of nothing which he could do for which men would pay him. He could not compete with the Irish in cradling grain. His early education had not fitted him for a clerkship. He had offered his services to the Abolition Society, to go about the country and speak for freedom as their agent, but they declined him. This is very much to their discredit; they should have been forward to secure him. Such a connection with him would confer unexpected dignity on their enterprise. But they cannot tolerate a man who stands by a head above them. They are as bad—Garrison and Phillips, etc.—as the overseers and faculty of Harvard College. They require a man who will train well *under* them. Consequently they have not in their employ any but small men, trainers.

Journal, August 10, 1853

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, January 1, 1859.

. . . I met Mr. James [Henry James, Sr.] the other night at Emerson's, at an Alcottian conversation, at which, however, Alcott did not talk much, being disturbed by James's oppo-

sition. The latter is a hearty man enough, with whom you can differ very satisfactorily, on account of both his doctrines and his good temper. He utters *quasi* philanthropic dogmas in a metaphysic dress; but they are for all practical purposes very crude. He charges society with all the crime committed, and praises the criminal for committing it. But I think that all the remedies he suggests out of his head —for he goes no farther, hearty as he is—would leave us about where we are now. For, of course, it is not by a gift of turkeys on Thanksgiving Day that he proposes to convert the criminal, but by a true sympathy with each one.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to R. W. Emerson in England. Thoreau was staying with the Emerson family during his absence.
Concord, November 14, 1847.

. . . I heartily wish I could be of good service to this household. But I, who have only used the ten digits so long to solve the problem of a living, how can I? The world is a cow that is hard to milk,—life does not come so easy,—and oh, how thinly it is watered ere we get it! But the young bunting calf, he will get at it. There is no way so direct. This is to earn one's living by the sweat of his brow. It is a little like joining a community, this life, to such a hermit as I am; and as I don't keep the accounts, I don't know whether the experiment will succeed or fail finally. At any rate it is good for society, and I do not regret my transient nor my permanent share in it.

Lidian [Mrs. Emerson] and I make very good housekeepers. She is a very dear sister to me. Ellen and Edith and Eddy [Emerson's children] keep up the tragedy and comedy and tragic-comedy of life as usual . . .

I do not know what to say of myself. I sit before my green desk, in the chamber at the head of the stairs, and attend to my thinking, sometimes more, sometimes less distinctly.

I am not unwilling to think great thoughts if there are any in the wind, but what they are I am not sure. They suffice to keep me awake while the day lasts, at any rate. Perhaps they will redeem some portion of the night ere long.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Mrs. Lucy Brown at Plymouth, Mass.
Concord, October 5, 1841.

. . . What makes the value of your life at present? what dreams have you, and what realizations? You know there is a high table-land which not even the east wind reaches. Now can't we walk and chat upon its plane still, as if there were no lower latitudes? Surely our two destinies are topics interesting and grand enough for any occasion.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Mrs. R. W. Emerson at Concord.
Staten Island, May 22, 1843

I believe a good many conversations with you were left in an unfinished state, and now indeed I don't know where to take them up. But I will resume some of the unfinished silence. I shall not hesitate to know you. I think of you as some elder sister of mine, whom I could not have avoided, —a sort of lunar influence,—only of such age as the moon, whose time is measured by her light. You must know that you represent to me woman, for I have not traveled very far or wide, and what if I had? I like to deal with you for I believe you do not lie or steal, and these are very rare virtues. I thank you for your influence for two years. I was fortunate to be subjected to it, and am now to remember it. It is the noblest gift we can make; what signify all others that can be bestowed? You have helped to keep my life "on loft," as Chaucer says of Griselda, and in a better sense. You always

seemed to look down at me as from some elevation—some of your high humilities—and I was the better for having to look up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your expectation; for could there be any accident so sad as to be respected for something better than we are? It was a pleasure even to go away from you, as it is not to meet some, as it apprised me of my high relations; and such a departure is a sort of further introduction and meeting. Nothing makes the earth seem so spacious as to have friends at a distance; they make the latitudes and longitudes.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to R. W. Emerson at Concord.
Staten Island, July 8, 1843.

. . . My thoughts revert to those dear hills and that *river* which so fills up the world to its brim,—worthy to be named with Mincius and Alpheus,—still drinking its meadows while I am far away. How can it run heedless to the sea, as if I were there to countenance it? . . .

I am pleased to think of Channing as an inhabitant of the gray town. Seven cities contended for Homer dead. Tell him to remain at least long enough to establish Concord's right and interest in him. I was beginning to know the man. In imagination I see you pilgrims taking your way by the red lodge and the cabin of the brave farmer man, so youthful and hale, to the still cheerful woods. And Hawthorne, too, I remember as one with whom I sauntered, in old heroic times, along the banks of the Scamander, amid the ruins of chariots and heroes. Tell him not to desert, even after the tenth year . . . Staying at home is the heavenly way.

And Elizabeth Hoar, my brave townswoman, to be sung of poets,—if I may speak of her whom I do not know. Tell Mrs. Brown that I do not forget her, going her way under

the stars through this chilly world,—I did *not* think of the wind,—and that I went a little way with her. Tell her not to despair. Concord's little arch does not span all our fate, nor is what transpires under it law for the universe.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to his sister Helen at Roxbury, Mass.
Staten Island, July 21, 1843.

. . . I believe I have not told you anything about Lucretia Mott. It was a good while ago that I heard her at the Quaker Church in Hester Street. She is a preacher, and it was advertised that she would be present on that day. I liked all the proceedings very well, their plainly greater harmony and sincerity than elsewhere. They do nothing in a hurry . . . The women come in one after another in their Quaker bonnets and handkerchiefs, looking all like sisters or so many chickadees. At length, after a long silence—waiting for the Spirit—Mrs. Mott rose, took off her bonnet, and began to utter very deliberately what the Spirit suggested. Her self-possession was something to see, if all else failed; but it did not. Her subject was, "The Abuse of the Bible," and thence she straightway digressed to slavery and the degradation of women. It was a good speech,—transcendentalism in its mildest form. She at length sat down, and, after a long and decorous silence, in which some seemed to be really digesting her words, the elders shook hands, and the meeting dispersed. On the whole I liked their ways and the plainness of their meeting-house. It looked as if it was indeed made for service . . . Tell all my friends in Concord that I do not send my love, but retain it still.

Your affectionate brother.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Mrs. Emerson at Concord.
Staten Island, June 20, 1843.
. . . My dear friend, it was very noble in you to write me so trustful an answer. It will do as well for another world as this; such a voice is for no particular time nor person, but it makes him who may hear it stand for all that is lofty and true in humanity. The thought of you will constantly elevate my life; it will be something always above the horizon to behold, as when I look up at the evening star. I think I know your thoughts without seeing you, as well here as in Concord. You are not at all strange to me . . .

My actual life is unspeakably mean compared with what I know and see that it might be. Yet the ground from which I see and say this is some part of it. It ranges from heaven to earth, and is all things in an hour. The experience of every past moment but belies the faith of each present. We never conceive the greatness of our fates. Are not these faint flashes of light which sometimes obscure the sun their certain dawn? . . .

What wealth is it to have such friends that we cannot think of them without elevation! And we can think of them any time and anywhere, and it costs nothing but the lofty disposition . . .

I send my love to my other friend and brother, whose nobleness I slowly recognize.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Walt Whitman, Alcott and Thoreau Meet

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Eagleswood, N. J., November 19, 1856.
. . . I have read three of my old lectures to the Eagleswood people, and, unexpectedly, with rare success, *i.e.*, I was

aware that what I was saying was silently taken in by their ears.

You must excuse me if I write a business letter now, for I am sold for the time, am merely Thoreau the surveyor here,—and solitude is scarcely obtainable in these parts.

Alcott has been here three times, and Saturday before last I went with him and Greeley, by invitation of the last, to G's farm, thirty-six miles north of New York. The next day A. and I heard Beecher preach; and what was more, we visited Whitman the next morning (A. had already seen him), and were much interested and provoked. He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. Kings and aristocracy go by the board at once, as they had long deserved to. A remarkably strong though coarse nature, of a sweet disposition, and much prized by his friends. Though peculiar and rough in his exterior . . . he is essentially a gentleman. I am still somewhat in a quandry about him,—feel that he is essentially strange to me, at any rate; but I am surprised by the sight of him. He is very broad, but, as I have said, not fine. He said that I misapprehended him. I am not quite sure that I do. He told us that he loved to ride up and down Broadway all day on an omnibus, sitting beside the driver, listening to the roar of the carts, and sometimes gesticulating and declaiming Homer at the top of his voice.

Note: In November, 1856, Thoreau was invited to go to Eagleswood, Perth Amboy, N. J. to give lectures and to survey an estate which was to become a community for educational and social purposes.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Think of the importance of Friendship in the education of men. It will make a man honest; it will make him a hero; it will make him a saint. It is the state of the just dealing

with the just, the magnanimous dealing with the magnanimous, the sincere with the sincere, man with man.

A Friend is one who incessantly pays us the compliment of expecting from us all the virtues, and who can appreciate them in us. It takes two to speak the truth,—one to speak, and another to hear.

Friendship takes place between those who have an affinity for one another, and is a perfectly natural and inevitable result . . . It is a drama in which the parties have no part to act . . . But they who are Friends do not what they *think* they must, but what they *must*.

Friendship is, at any rate, a relation of perfect equality.

My Friend is one whom I can associate with my choicest thought. I always assign to him a nobler employment in my absence than I ever find him engaged in! and I imagine that the hours which he devotes to me were snatched from a higher society.

It is one proof of a man's fitness for Friendship that he is able to do without that which is cheap and passionate. A true Friendship is as wise as it is tender.

I am ready to believe that as private and intimate a relation may exist by which three are embraced, as between two. Indeed we cannot have too many friends; the virtue which we appreciate we to some extent appropriate, so that thus we are made at last more fit for every relation of life.

Friendship is evanescent in every man's experience, and remembered like heat lightning in past summers.

There is on the earth no institution which Friendship has established; it is not taught by any religion; no scripture contains its maxims. It has no temple, nor even a solitary column.

No word is oftener on the lips of men than Friendship, and indeed no thought is more familiar to their aspirations.

We are continually acting a part in a more interesting drama than any written. We are dreaming that our Friends are our *Friends,* and that we are our Friends' *Friends.*

What is commonly honored with the name of Friendship is no very profound or powerful instinct. Men do not, after all, *love* their Friends greatly . . . They are not often transfigured and translated by love in each other's presence. I do not observe them purified, and elevated by the love of a man. If one abates 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. Nor do the farmers' wives lead lives consecrated to Friendship . . . Even the utmost good-will and harmony and practical kindness are not sufficient for Friendship, for Friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody. We do not wish for Friends to feed and clothe our bodies,—neighbors are kind enough for that,—but to do the like office to our spirits. For this few are rich enough, however well disposed they may be.

I require one who will make an equal demand on me with my own genius. Such a one will always be rightly tolerant . . . I value and trust those who love and praise my aspiration rather than my performance. If you would not stop to look at me, but look whither I am looking and further, then my education could not dispense with your company.

It is impossible to say all that we think even to our truest Friend.

We must accept or refuse one another as we are. I could tame a hyena more easily than my Friend. He is a material which no tool of mine will work . . . I cannot hew the smallest chip out of the character of my Friend, either to beautify or deform it.

Our life without love is like coke and ashes.

As surely as the sunset in my latest November shall translate

me to the ethereal world, and remind me of the ruddy morning of youth . . . so surely my Friend shall forever be my Friend, and reflect a ray of God to me, and time shall foster and adorn and consecrate our Friendship . . . As I love nature, as I love singing birds, and gleaming stubble, and flowing rivers, and morning and evening, and summer and winter, I love thee, my Friend.

Even the death of Friends will inspire us as much as their lives. They will leave consolation to the mourners.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers: Aeolian Harp

Fruits

The less you get, the happier and richer you are. The rich man's son gets cocoanuts, and the poor man's, pignuts; but the worst of it is that the former never goes a-cocoanutting, and so he never gets the cream of the cocoanut as the latter does the cream of the pignut . . .

It is a grand fact that you cannot make the finer fruits or parts of fruits matter of commerce. You may buy a servant or slave, in short, but you cannot buy a friend. You can't buy the finer part of any fruit—*i.e.* the highest use and enjoyment of it. You cannot buy the pleasure which it yields to him who truly plucks it; you cannot buy a good appetite even.

Journal, November 28, 1860

Gathering Fuel

Yesterday toward night, gave Sophia [Thoreau's sister] and mother a sail as far as the Battleground. One-eyed John

Goodwin, the fisherman, was loading into a handcart and conveying home the piles of driftwood which of late he had collected with his boat. It was a beautiful evening, and a clear amber sunset lit up all the eastern shores, and that man's employment, so simple and direct (though he is regarded by most as a vicious character), whose whole motive was so easy to fathom, thus to obtain his winter's wood, charmed me unspeakably. So much do we love actions that are simple. They are all poetic . . . Now I should love to get my fuel so, and have got some of it so. If I buy one necessary of life, I cheat myself to some extent . . . "If I go to Boston every day and sell tape from morning till night," says the merchant (which we will admit is not a beautiful action), "some time or other I shall be able to buy the best of fuel without stint." Yes, but not the pleasure of picking it up by the river side, which, I may say, is of even more value than the warmth it yields. It is to give no account of my employment to say that I cut wood to keep me from freezing, or cultivate beans to keep me from starving. Oh, no, the greatest value of these labors is received before the wood is teamed home, or the beans are harvested . . . As for the complex ways of living, I love them not, however much I practice them.

Journal, October 22, 1853

Yesterday I got a perfectly sound oak timber, eight inches square and twenty feet long which had lodged on some rocks. It probably had been the sill of a building. As it was too heavy to lift aboard, I towed it. As I shall want some shelves to put my Oriental books on, I shall begin to save boards now.

I deal so much with my fuel,—what with finding it, loading it, conveying it home, sawing and splitting it,—get so many values out of it, am warmed in so many ways by it, that the heat that it will yield when in the stove is of a lower

temperature and a lesser value in my eyes, though when I feel it I am reminded of all my adventures. I just turned to put on a stick. I had my choice in the box of a gray chestnut rail, black and brown snag of an old stump, dead white pine top, gray and round with stubs of limbs, or else an old bridge plank, and chose the last. Yes, I lose sight of the ultimate uses of this wood and work, the immediate ones are so great, yet most of mankind, those called most successful in obtaining the necessaries of life,—getting their living,—obtain none of this, except a mere vulgar and perhaps stupefying warmth.

Journal, November 9, 1855

I have collected and split up now quite a pile of driftwood, —rails and riders and stems and stumps of trees,—perhaps half or three quarters of a tree. It is more amusing, not only to collect this with my boat and bring it up from the river on my back, but to split it also, than it would be to speak to a farmer for a load of wood and to saw and split that. Each stick I deal with has a history, and I read it as I am handling it, and, last of all, I remember my adventures in getting it, while it is burning in the winter evening. That is the most interesting part of its history. It has made part of a fence or a bridge, perchance, or has been rooted out of a clearing and bears the mark of fire on it. When I am splitting it I study the effects of water on it, and, if it is a stump, the curiously winding grain by which it separates into so many prongs,—how to take advantage of its grain and split it most easily . . . I got out some good knees for a boat. Thus one half the value of my wood is enjoyed before it is housed, and the other half is equal to the whole value of an equal quantity of the wood which I buy.

Some of my acquaintances have been wondering why I took all this pains, bringing some nearly three miles by water, and have suggested various reasons for it. I tell them

in my despair of making them understand me that it is a profound secret,—which it has proved—yet I did hint to them that one reason was that I wanted to get it. I take some satisfaction in eating my food, as well as being nourished by it. I feel well at dinner-time as well as after it. The world will never find out why you don't love to have your bed tucked up for you,—why you will be so perverse. I enjoy more drinking water at a clear spring than out of a goblet at a gentleman's table. I like best the bread which I have baked, the shelter which I have constructed, the fuel which I have gathered.

Journal, October 20, 1855

Genius

My life has become my amusement and never ceased to be novel . . . Follow your genius closely enough, and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every hour. Housework was a pleasant pastime.

Walden: Ch. 4, Sounds

If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him; and yet that way, as he grows more resolute and faithful, his road lies . . . No man ever followed his genius till it misled him.

Walden: Ch. 11, Higher Laws

To elevate the little into the great is genius.

Expression of Thoreau's in his last year, 1861. Quoted by W. E. Channing in "Thoreau the Poet-Naturalist."

Let no man be afraid of sleep, if his weariness comes of obeying his genius.

Journal, September 12, 1851

A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically or intellectually or morally. We hear and apprehend only what we already half know. If there is something which does not concern me, which is out of my line, which by experience or by genius my attention is not drawn to, however remarkable it may be, if it is spoken, we hear it not, if it is written, we read it not, or if we read it, it does not detain us. Every man thus *tracks himself* through life, in all his hearing and reading and observation and travelling. His observations make a chain. The phenomenon or fact that cannot in any wise be linked with the rest which he has observed, he does not observe. By and by we may be ready to receive what we cannot now.

Journal, January 5, 1860

What is called genius is the abundance of life or health, so that whatever addresses the senses, as the flavor of these berries, or the lowing of that cow, which sounds as if it echoed along a cool mountainside just before night, where odoriferous dews perfume the air and there is everlasting vigor, serenity, and expectation of perpetual untarnished morning,—each sight and sound and scent and flavor,—intoxicates with a healthy intoxication . . . I am thrilled to think that I owe a perception to the commonly gross sense of taste, that these berries have fed my brain. After I had been eating these simple, wholesome, ambrosial fruits on this high hillside, I found my sense whetted, I was young again, and whether I stood or sat I was not the same creature.

Journal, July 11, 1852

Talk of Fate! How little one can know what is fated to another! What he can do and what he cannot do. I doubt whether one can give or receive any very pertinent advice. In all important crises, one can only consult his genius. Though he were the most shiftless and craziest of mortals, if he still recognizes that he has any genius, none may presume to go between him and her. They, methinks, are poor stuff and creatures of a miserable fate who can be advised and persuaded in very important steps. Show me a man who consults his genius, and you have shown me a man who cannot be advised. You may know what a thing costs or is worth to you, you can never know what it costs or is worth to me. The man of genius knows what he is aiming at. Nobody else knows, and he alone knows when something comes between him and his object. In the course of generations, however, men will excuse you for not doing as they do, if you will bring enough to pass in your own way.

Journal, December 27, 1858

I sometimes think that I may go forth and walk hard and earnestly, live a more substantial life, get a glorious experience, be much abroad in heat and cold, day and night, live more, expend more atmospheres, be weary often, etc., etc. But then swiftly the thought comes to me, Go not so far out of your way for a truer life, keep strictly onward in that path alone which your genius points out, do the things which lie nearest to you, but which are difficult to do, live a purer, a more thoughtful and laborious life, more true to your friends and neighbors, more noble and magnanimous, and that will be better than a wild walk.

Journal, January 12, 1852

Obey the spur of the moment. These accumulated it is that make the impulse and the impetus of the life of genius. These are the spongioles or rootlets by which its trunk is fed. If you neglect the moments, if you cut off your fibrous

roots, what but a languishing life is to be expected? Let the spurs of countless moments goad us incessantly into life. I feel the spur of the moment thrust deep into my side. The present is an inexorable rider. The moment always spurs either with a sharp or a blunt spur. Are my sides calloused? Let us trust the rider, that he knows the way, that he knows when speed and effort are required . . .

The truest account of heaven is the fairest, and I will accept none which disappoints expectation. It is more glorious to expect a better, than to enjoy a worse.

Journal, January 26, 1852

Duty belongs to the understanding, but genius is not dutiful, the highest talent is dutiful. Goodness results from the wisest use of talent. The perfect man has both genius and talent. The one is his head, the other his foot; by one he is, by the other he lives.

The unconsciousness of man is the consciousness of God, the end of the world.

The very thrills of genius are disorganizing. The body is never quite acclimated to *its* atmosphere, but how often succumbs and goes into a decline!

Journal, February 13, 1840

Getting a Living

I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely . . . It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

I would not have any one adopt *my* mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I

may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue *his own* way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead . . . We may not arrive at our port within a calculable period, but we would preserve the true course.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Let not to get a living be thy trade, but thy sport. Enjoy the land, but own it not.

Walden: Ch. 10, The Baker Farm

Surveyed White Pond yesterday . . .

There is little or nothing to be remembered written on the subject of getting an honest living. Neither the New Testament nor Poor Richard speaks to our condition. I cannot think of a single page which entertains, much less answers, the questions which I put to myself on this subject. How to make the getting our living poetic! for if it is not poetic, it is not life but death that we get. Is it that men are too disgusted with their experience to speak of it? or that commonly they do not question the common modes? The most practically important of all questions, it seems to me, is how I shall get my living, and yet I find little or nothing said to the purpose in any book. Those who are living on the interest of money inherited, or dishonestly, *i.e.* by false methods, acquired, are of course incompetent to answer it. I consider that society with all its arts, has done nothing for us in this respect. One would think, from looking at literature, that this question had never disturbed a solitary individual's musings. Cold and hunger seem more friendly to my nature than those methods which men have adopted and advised to ward them off. If it were not that I desire

to do something here,—accomplish some work,—I should certainly prefer to suffer and die rather than be at the pains to get a living by the modes men propose.

Journal, February 18, 1851

The year is in the grasp of the crickets, and they are hurling it round swiftly on its axle . . .

How trivial and uninteresting and wearisome and unsatisfactory are all employments for which men will pay you money! The ways by which you may get money all lead downward. To have done anything by which you have earned money merely is to have been truly idle. If the laborer gets no more than the wages his employer pays him, he is cheated, he cheats himself. Those services which the world will most readily pay for, it is most disagreeable to render. You are paid for being something less than a man. Even the poet-laureate would rather not have to celebrate the accidents of royalty.

Journal, August 7, 1853

When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, some sad experience in conforming to the wishes of friends being fresh in my mind to tax my ingenuity, I thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries; that surely I could do, and its small profits might suffice, so little capital it required, so little distraction from my wonted thoughts, I foolishly thought . . . While my acquaintances went unhesitatingly into trade or professions, I thought this occupation as most like theirs; ranging the hills all summer to pick the berries which came in my way, which I might carelessly dispose of; so to keep the flocks of King Admetus. My greatest skill has been to want but little. I also dreamed that I might gather the wild herbs, or carry evergreens to such villagers as loved to be reminded of the woods and so find my living got. But I have since learned

that trade curses everything it handles; and though you *trade* in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business.

Journal, July 19, 1851

The recent rush to California and the attitude of the world, even of its philosophers and prophets, in relation to it appears to me to reflect the greatest disgrace on mankind. That so many are ready to get their living by the lottery of gold-digging without contributing any value to society, and that the great majority who stay at home justify them in this both by precept and example! . . . I know of no more startling development of the morality of trade and all the modes of getting a living than the rush to California affords. It makes God to be a moneyed gentleman who scatters a handful of pennies in order to see mankind scramble for them. Going to California. It is only three thousand miles nearer to hell. I will resign my life sooner than live by luck. The world's raffle . . .

Did God direct us to get our living, digging where we never planted,—and He would perchance reward us with lumps of gold? It is a text, oh! for the Jonahs of this generation, and yet the pulpits are as silent as immortal Greece, silent, some of them, because the preacher is gone to California himself. The gold of California is a touchstone which has betrayed the rottenness, the baseness, of mankind. Satan, from one of his elevations, showed mankind the kingdom of California, and they entered into a compact with him at once.

Journal, February 1, 1852

I hate the present modes of living and getting a living. Farming and shopkeeping and working at a trade or profession are all odious to me. I should relish getting my living in a simple, primitive fashion. The life which society pro-

poses to me to live is so artificial and complex—bolstered up on many weak supports, and sure to topple down at last—that no man surely can even be inspired to live it, and only "old fogies" ever praise it. At best some think it their duty to live it. I believe in the infinite joy and satisfaction of helping myself and others to the extent of my ability. But what is the use of trying to live simply, raising what you eat, making what you wear, building what you inhabit, burning what you cut or dig, when those to whom you are allied insanely want and will have a thousand other things which neither you nor they can raise and nobody else, perchance, will pay for? The fellow-man to whom you are yoked is a steer that is ever bolting right the other way . . .

I know many children to whom I would fain make a present on some one of their birthdays, but they are so far gone in the luxury of presents—have such perfect museums of costly ones—that it would absorb my entire earnings for a year to buy them something which would not be beneath their notice.

Journal, November 5, 1855

I think that men generally are mistaken with regard to amusements. Every one who deserves to be regarded as higher than the brute may be supposed to have an earnest purpose, to accomplish which is the object of his existence, and this is at once his work and his supremest pleasure; and for diversion and relaxation, for suggestion and education and strength, there is offered the never-failing amusement of getting a living—never-failing, I mean, when temperately indulged in. I know of no such amusement—so wholesome and in every sense profitable,—for instance, as to spend an hour or two in a day picking some berries or other fruits which will be food for the winter, collecting driftwood from the river for fuel, or cultivating the few beans or potatoes which I want. Theatres and operas, which intoxicate for a season, are as nothing compared to these

pursuits. And so it is with all the true arts of life. Farming and building and manufacturing and sailing are the greatest amusements that were ever invented (for God invented them), and I suppose that the farmers and mechanics know it, only I think they indulge to excess generally, and so what was meant for a joy becomes the sweat of the brow. No amusement has worn better than farming. It tempts men just as strongly to-day as in the day of Cincinnatus. Healthily and properly pursued, it is not a whit more grave than huckleberrying, and if it takes any airs on itself as superior there's something wrong about it.

I have aspired to practice in succession all the honest arts of life, that I may gather all their fruits. But then, if you are intemperate, if you toil to raise an unnecessary amount of corn, even the large crop of wheat becomes as a small crop of chaff.

Journal, October 29, 1857

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, May 2, 1848

. . . How shall we earn our bread is a grave question; yet it is a sweet and inviting question. Let us not shirk it, as is usually done. It is the most important and practical question which is put to man. Let us not answer it hastily. Let us not be content to get our bread in some gross, careless, and hasty manner. Some men go a-hunting, some a-fishing, some a-gaming, some to war; but none have so pleasant a time as they who in earnest seek to earn their bread. It is true actually as it is true really; it is true materially as it is true spiritually, they who seek honestly and sincerely, with all their hearts and lives and strength, to earn their bread, do earn it, and it is sure to be very sweet to them. A very little bread,—a very few crumbs are enough, if it be of the right quality, for it is infinitely nutritious. Let each man, then, earn at least a crumb of bread for his body before he

dies, and know the taste of it,—that it is identical with the bread of life, and that they both go down at one swallow.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau: Edited by F. B. Sanborn

You must get your living by loving.

It is remarkable that there is little or nothing to be remembered written on the subject of getting a living; how to make getting a living not merely honest and honorable, but altogether inviting and glorious; for if *getting* a living is not so, then living is not.

Miscellanies: Life Without Principle

Glass

How perfect an invention is glass! There is a fitness in glass windows which reflect the sun morning and evening, windows, the doorways of light, thus reflecting the rays of that luminary with a splendor only second to itself. This invention one would say was anticipated in the arrangement of things. The sun rises with a salute and leaves the world with a farewell to our windows. To have, instead of opaque shutters or dull horn or paper, a material like solidified air, which reflects the sun thus brightly! It is inseparable from our civilization and enlightenment. It is encouraging that this intelligence and brilliancy or splendor should belong to the dwellings of men, and not to the cliffs and micaceous rocks and lakes exclusively.

Journal, July 5, 1852

God

The only prayer for a brave man is to be a-doing. This is the prayer that is heard. Why ask God for a respite when he has not given it? Has he not done his work, and made man equal to his occasions, but he must needs have recourse to him again? God cannot give us any other than self-help.

Journal, October 13, 1840

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.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. *Next* to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. *Next* to us is not the workman whom we have hired, but the workmen whose work we are.

Walden: Ch. 5, Solitude

All true greatness runs as level a course, and is as unaspiring, as the plow in the furrow. It wears the homeliest dress and speaks the homeliest language . . . Heaven is the inmost place. The good have not to travel far. What cheer may we not derive from the thought that our courses do not diverge, and we wend not asunder, but as the web of destiny is woven it is fulled, and we are cast more and more into the centre! There is no wisdom which can take the place of humanity . . . I wish I could be as still as God is. I can

recall to my mind the stillest summer hour, in which the grasshopper sings over the mulleins, and there is a valor in that time the memory of which is armor that can laugh at any blow of fortune . . . Death is that expressive pause in the music of the blast. I would be as clean as ye, O woods. I shall not rest till I be as innocent as you.

These motions everywhere in nature must surely be the circulations of God. The flowing sail, the running stream, the waving tree, the roving wind,—whence else their infinite health and freedom? I can see nothing so proper and holy as unrelaxed play and frolic in this bower God has built for us. The suspicion of sin never comes to this thought . . .

In the coldest day it melts somewhere.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

The great God is very calm withal. How superfluous is any excitement in his creatures! He listens equally to the prayers of the believer and the unbeliever. The moods of man should unfold and alternate as gradually and placidly as those of nature . . . The sun shines for aye! The sudden revolutions of these times and this generation have acquired a very exaggerated importance. They do not interest me much, for they are not in harmony with the longer periods of nature. God does not sympathize with the popular movements.

Journal, January 7, 1842

My path hitherto has been like a road through a diversified country, now climbing high mountains, then descending into the lowest vales. From the summits I saw the heavens; from the vales I looked up to the heights again. In prosperity I remember God, or memory is one with consciousness; in adversity I remember my own elevations, and only hope to see God again . . .

The death of friends should inspire us as much as their

lives. If they are great and rich enough, they will leave consolation to the mourners before the expenses of their funerals. It will not be hard to part with any worth, because it is worthy. How can any good depart? It does not go and come, but we. Shall we wait for it? Is it slower than we? [Thoreau's brother John died January 11, 1842]

Journal, February 20, 1842

God did not make this world in jest; no, nor in indifference.

Journal, March 31, 1852

Government and Politics

Any man, more right than his neighbors, constitutes a majority of one.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

I heartily accept the motto,—"That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its efficiency are great and unendurable.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Even voting *for the right* is *doing* nothing for it.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

That certainly is the best government where the inhabitants are least often reminded of the government . . . Where it is the most natural thing in the world for a government that does not understand you to let you alone.

Journal, August 21, 1851

What is called politics is comparatively something so superficial and inhuman, that practically I have never fairly recognized that it concerns me at all.

Miscellanies: Life Without Principle

The fate of the country does not depend on how you vote at the poles,—the worst man is as strong as the best at that game; it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning.

Miscellanies: Slavery in Massachusetts

Is it not possible that an individual may be right and a government wrong?

Miscellanies: A Plea for Captain John Brown

Happiness

Man is the artificer of his own happiness. Let him beware how he complains of the disposition of circumstances, for it is his own disposition he blames. If this is sour, or that rough, or the other steep, let him think if it be not his

work. If his looks curdle all hearts, let him not complain of a sour reception; if he hobble in his gait, let him not grumble at the roughness of the way; if he is weak in the knees, let him not call the hill steep. This was the pith of the inscription on the wall of the Swedish inn: "You will find at Trolhate excellent bread, meat, and wine, provided you bring them with you!"

Journal, January 21, 1838

A man asked me the other night whether such and such persons were not as happy as anybody, being conscious, as I perceived, of much unhappiness himself and not aspiring to much more than an animal content. "Why!" said I, speaking to his condition, "the stones are happy, Concord River is happy, and I am happy too. When I took up a fragment of walnut-shell this morning, I saw by its very grain and composition, its form and color, etc., that it was made for happiness. The most brutish and inanimate objects that are made suggest an everlasting and thorough satisfaction; they are the homes of content. Wood, earth, mould, etc., exist for joy. Do you think that Concord River would have continued to flow these millions of years by Clamshell Hill and round Hunt's Island, if it had not been happy,—if it had been miserable in its channel, tired of existence, and cursing its maker and the hour that it sprang?"

Journal, January 6, 1857

Health

In a happy state, the constant experience is a pleasurable sensation or sentiment. For instance, in such a state I find myself in perfect connection with nature, and the perception and remembrance even, of any natural phenomena is

attended with a gentle, pleasurable excitement. Prevailing sights and sounds make the impression of beauty and music on me. But in sickness all is deranged. I had yesterday a kink in my back and a general cold, and as usual it amounted to a cessation of life. I lost for the time my support or relation to nature. Sympathy with nature is an evidence of perfect health. You cannot perceive beauty but with a serene mind. The cheaper your amusements, the safer and surer. They who think much of theatres, operas, and the like, are beside themselves. Each man's necessary path, though as obscure and apparently uneventful as that of a beetle in the grass, is the way to the deepest joys he is susceptible of. Though he converses only with moles and fungi, and disgraces his relatives, it is no matter, if he knows what is steel to his flint.

Journal, November 18, 1857

Our panaceas cure but few ills . . . We must set up another Hygeia than is now worshipped.

Miscellanies: Paradise (To Be) Regained

Health is a sound relation to nature.

Journal, July 14, 1854

Heaven

Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads.

Walden: Ch. 16, The Pond in Winter

Housekeeping

Sophia [Thoreau's sister] says, bringing company into my sanctum, by way of apology, that I regard the dust on my

furniture like the bloom on fruits, not to be swept off. Which reminds me that the bloom on fruits and stems is the only dust which settles on Nature's furniture.

Journal, September 15, 1856

I boiled some rice at the carry, for our dinner, in cooking which I consider myself adept, having had a good deal of experience in it. P. [Thoreau's Indian guide] said he sometimes used it, but boiled it till it all fell apart, and finding this mess unexpectedly soft though quickly prepared, he asked if it had not been cooked before.

Washing the dishes, especially the greasy ones, is the most irksome duty of the camp, and it reminded me of that sacred band in Fourier's scheme, who took upon themselves the most disagreeable services. The consequence is that they do not often get washed.

The Maine Woods

A lady once offered me a mat, but as I had no room to spare within the house, nor time to spare within or without to shake it, I declined it, preferring to wipe my feet on the sod before my door. It is best to avoid the beginnings of evil.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Humanity

I see but little difference between a Christian and a Mahometan . . . As if a Christian's dog were something better than a Mahometan's! I perceive no triumphant superiority in the so-called Christian over the so-called Mahometan. That nation is not Christian where the principles of humanity do not prevail, but the prejudices of race. I expect the Christian not to be superstitious, but to be distinguished

by the clearness of his knowledge, the strength of his faith, the breadth of his humanity.

Journal, September 25, 1851

To attain to a true relation to one human creature is enough to make a year memorable.

Journal, March 30, 1851

Humor

Sanborn tells me that he was waked up a few nights ago in Boston about midnight by the sound of a flock of geese passing over the city, probably about the same night I heard them here. They go honking over cities where the arts flourish, waking the inhabitants, over state-houses and capitols, where legislatures sit, over harbors where fleets lie at anchor,—mistaking the city, perhaps for a swamp or the edge of a lake, about settling into it, not suspecting that it is preoccupied by greater geese than themselves.

Journal, December 13, 1855

Humor, however broad and genial, takes a narrower view than enthusiasm. Humor delays and looks back.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Hunting and Fishing

When some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes,—remembering that it was one of the best

parts of my education,—*make* them hunters, though sportsmen only at first, if possible, mighty hunters at last . . . hunters as well as fishers of men . . . No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which holds its life by the same tenure that he does . . . Such is oftenest the young man's introduction to the forest, and the most original part of himself. He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind . . . I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish without falling a little in self-respect. I have tried it again and again. I had skill at it, and, like many of my fellows, a certain instinct for it, which revives from time to time, but always when I have done I feel that it would have been better if I had not fished.

Walden: Ch. 11, Higher Laws

Hurry

Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? . . . As for work, we haven't any of any consequence.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

Nothing can be more useful to a man than a determination not to be hurried.

Journal, March 22, 1842

Imagination

Sometimes in our prosaic moods, life appears but a certain number of days like those which we have lived, to be

cheered not by more friends and friendship but probably fewer and less. As, perchance, we anticipate the end of this day before it is done, close the shutters, and with a cheerless resignation commence the barren evening whose fruitless end we clearly see, and despondingly think that all of life that is left is only this experience repeated a certain number of times. And so it would be, if it were not for the faculty of imagination.

Journal, February 13, 1859

Insects

I see and hear one bumblebee . . . inaugurating the summer with his deep bass. May it be such a summer to me as it suggests . . . I have learned to suspect him, as I do all fortune-tellers. But no sound so brings round the summer again.

Journal, May 1, 1858

How pleasing and soothing are some of the first and least audible sounds of awakened nature in the spring, as this first humming of bees, etc., and the stuttering of frogs! They cannot be called musical,—are no more even than a noise . . . But it is in part an expression of happiness, an ode that is sung and whose burden fills the air. It reminds me of the increased genialness of nature.

Journal, April 17, 1859

The chirp of crickets may be heard at noon over all the land. As in summer they are heard only at nightfall, so now by their incessant chirp they usher in the evening of the year.

Journal, Fall, 1839

The creaking of the crickets seems at the very foundation of all sound. At least I cannot tell it from a ringing in my ears. It is a sound from within, not without. You cannot dispose of it by listening to it. In proportion as I am stilled I hear it. It reminds me that I am a denizen of the earth.

Journal, July 14, 1851

Why was there never a poem on the cricket? Its creak seems to me to be one of the most prominent and obvious facts in the world, and the least heeded. In the report of a man's contemplations I look to see somewhat answering to this sound.

Journal, September 3, 1851

The traveller now has the creak of the cricket to encourage him on all country routes, out of the fresh sod, still fresh as in the dawn, not interrupting his thoughts. Very cheering and refreshing to hear so late in the day, this morning sound.

Journal, June 19, 1852

I hear the *steady* (not intermittent) shrilling of apparently the alder cricket, clear, loud, and autumnal, a season sound. Hear it, but see it not. It reminds me of past autumns and the lapse of time, suggests a pleasing, thoughtful melancholy, like the sound of the flail. Such preparation, such an outfit has our life, and so little brought to pass!

Journal, August 18, 1856

[*After describing the battle of the ants which Thoreau witnessed from his wood-pile in Walden woods:*]
I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference.

Walden: Ch. 12, Brute Neighbors

Nature loves variety in all things, so she adds glow-worms to fireflies.

Journal, June 25, 1852

Be ever so little distracted, your thoughts so little confused, your engagements so few, your attention so free, your existence so mundane, that in all places and in all hours you can hear the sound of crickets in those seasons when they are to be heard. It is a mark of serenity and health of mind when a person hears this sound much.

Journal, July 7, 1851

The rambler in the most remote woods and pastures little thinks that the bees which are humming so industriously on the rare wild flowers he is plucking for his herbarium, in some out-of-the-way nook, are, like himself, ramblers from the village, perhaps from his own yard, come to get their honey for his hives . . . I feel the richer for this experience. It taught me that even the insects in my path are not loafers, but have their special errands. Not merely and vaguely in this world, but in this hour, each is about its business.

Journal, September 30, 1852

Inspiration

Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; for those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever and anon reminded of them.

Journal, September 7, 1851

We hug the earth,—how rarely we mount! Methinks we might elevate ourselves a little more. We might climb a tree at least.

Excursions: Walking

Instinct

I was impressed as it were by the intelligence of the brook, which for ages in the wildest regions, before science is born, knows so well the level of the ground and through whatever woods or other obstacles finds its way. Who shall distinguish between the *law* by which a brook finds its river, the *instinct* by which a bird performs its migrations, and the *knowledge* by which a man steers his ship round the globe? The globe is the richer for the variety of its inhabitants.

Journal, May 17, 1854

Inventions

Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already too easy to arrive at.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Journal

"What are you doing now?" he asked. [Emerson ?] "Do you keep a Journal?" So I make my first entry to-day.

Journal, October 22, 1837

My Journal should be a record of my love. I would write in it only the things I love, my affection for any aspect of this world, what I love to think of. I have no more distinctness or pointedness in my yearnings than an expanding bud, which does indeed point to flower and fruit, to summer and autumn, but is aware of the warm sun and spring influence only. I feel ripe for something, yet do nothing, can't discover what that thing is. I feel fertile merely. It is seedtime with me. I have lain fallow long enough.

Notwithstanding a sense of unworthiness which possesses me, not without reason, notwithstanding that I regard myself as a good deal of a scamp, yet for the most part the spirit of the universe is unaccountably kind to me, and I enjoy perhaps an unusual share of happiness. Yet I question sometimes if there is not some settlement to come.

Journal, November 16, 1850

I would fain make two reports in my Journal, first the incidents and observations of to-day; and by to-morrow I review the same and record what was omitted before, which will often be the most significant and poetic part. I do not know at first what it is that charms me. The men and things of to-day are wont to lie fairer and truer in to-morrow's memory . . . Men talk to me about society as if I had none and they had some, as if it were only to be got by going to the sociable or to Boston.

Journal, March 27, 1857

My Journal is that of me which would else spill over and run to waste, gleanings from the field which in action I reap . . . I must not live for it, but in it for the gods. They are my correspondent, to whom daily I send off this sheet postpaid. I am clerk in their counting-room, and at evening transfer the account from day-book to ledger . . . It is always a chance scrawl, and commemorates some accident, —as great as earthquake or eclipse. Like the sere leaves in

yonder vase, these have been gathered far and wide. Upland and lowland, forest and field have been ransacked.

Journal, February 8, 1841

A Journal is a record of experience and growth, not a preserve of things well done or said. I am occasionally reminded of a statement which I have made in conversation and immediately forgotten, which would read much better than what I put in my journal. It is a ripe, dry fruit of long-past experience which falls from me easily, without giving pain or pleasure. The charm of the journal must consist in a certain greenness, though freshness, and not in maturity. Here I cannot afford to be remembering what I said or did, my scurf cast off, but I am and aspire to become.

Journal, January 24, 1856

Is not the poet bound to write his own biography? Is there any other work for him but a good journal? We do not wish to know how his imaginary hero, but how he, the actual hero, lived from day to day.

Journal, October 21, 1857

Joy

Surely joy is the condition of life.

Excursions: Natural History of Massachusetts

If rivers come out of their icy prison thus bright and immortal, shall I not too resume my spring life with joy and hope? Have I no hopes to sparkle on the surface of Life's current?

Journal, February 27, 1852

So we may measure our lives by our joys. We have lived, not in proportion to the number of years we have spent on earth, but in proportion as we have enjoyed.

A fact stated barely is dry. It must be the vehicle of some humanity in order to interest us, Ultimately the moral is all in all. It must be warm, moist, incarnated,—have been breathed on at least. A man has not seen a thing who has not felt it.

Journal, February 23, 1860

I feel as if this coolness would do me good. If it only makes my life more pensive! Why should pensiveness be akin to sadness? There is a certain fertile sadness which I would not avoid, but rather earnestly seek. It is positively joyful to me. It saves my life from being trivial . . . Ah! if I could so live that there should be no desultory moment in all my life! that in the trivial season, when small fruits are ripe, my fruits might be ripe also! that I could match nature always with my moods! that in each season when some part of nature especially flourishes, then a corresponding part of me may not fail to flourish! Ah, I would walk, I would sit and sleep, with natural piety! What if I could pray aloud or to myself as I went along by the brooksides a cheerful prayer like the birds! For joy I could embrace the earth; I shall delight to be buried in it. And then to think of those I love among men, who will know that I love them though I tell them not! I did not despair of worthier moods, and now I have occasion to be grateful for the flood of life that is flowing over me. I am not so poor: I can smell the ripening apples; the very rills are deep; the autumnal flowers feed my spirit, endear the earth to me, make me value myself and rejoice. I thank you, God. I do not deserve anything. I am unworthy of the least regard; and yet I am made to rejoice. I am impure and worthless, and yet the world is gilded for my delight and holidays are prepared for me, and my path is strewn with flowers. But I cannot thank the

Giver. It seems to me that I am more rewarded for my expectations than for anything that I do or can do. Ah, I would not tread on a cricket in whose song is such a revelation, so soothing and cheerful to my ear! Oh, keep my senses pure!

Journal, August 17, 1851

Knowledge

A man's ignorance is sometimes not only useful, but beautiful,—while his knowledge, so called, is ofttimes worse than useless, besides being ugly. Which is the best man to deal with,—he who knows nothing about a subject, and, what is extremely rare, knows that he knows nothing, or he who really knows something about it, but thinks that he knows all? My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant. The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence . . . Live free, child of the mist, and with respect to knowledge we are all children of the mist. The man who takes the liberty to live is superior to all the laws, by virtue of his relation to the law-maker.

Excursions: Walking

The knowledge of an unlearned man is living and luxuriant like a forest, but covered with mosses and lichens and for the most part inaccessible and going to waste; the knowledge of the man of science is like timber collected in yards for public works, which still supports a green sprout here and there, but even this is liable to dry rot.

Journal, January 7, 1851

I do not know that knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise, or a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we had called knowledge before . . . It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun.

Journal, February 27, 1851

It is only when we forget all our learning that we begin to know.

Journal, October 4, 1859

A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically, or intellectually, or morally . . . We hear and apprehend only what we already half know.

Journal, January 5, 1860

Lecturing

To Providence to lecture . . . After lecturing twice this winter I feel I am in danger of cheapening myself by trying to become a successful lecturer, i.e., to interest my audiences. I am disappointed to find that most that I am and value myself for is lost, or worst than lost, on my audience. I fail to get even the attention of the mass. I should suit them better if I should suit myself less. I feel that the public demand an average man,—average thoughts and manners, not originality, nor even absolute excellence. You cannot interest them except as you are like them and sympathize with them. I would rather that my audience come to me than I should go to them, and so they be sifted; i.e., I would rather write books than lectures. That is fine, this coarse. To read to a promiscuous audience who are at your mercy the fine thoughts you solaced yourself with far away is as

violent as to fatten geese by cramming, and in this case they do not get fatter.

Journal, December 6, 1854

For some years past I have partially offered myself as a lecturer; have been advertised as such for several years. Yet I have had but two or three invitations to lecture in a year, and some years none at all. I congratulate myself on having been permitted to stay at home thus, I am so much richer for it. I do not see what I should have got of much value, but money, by going about, but I do see what I would have lost. It seems to me that I have a longer and more liberal lease of life thus. I cannot afford to be telling my experience, especially to those perhaps who will take no interest in it. I wish to be getting experience . . . You might as well recommend to a bear to leave his hollow tree and run about all winter scratching at all the hollow trees in the woods. As for the lecturer-goers, it is none of their business what I think . . .

Men even think me odd and perverse because I do not prefer their society to this nymph or wood-god rather. But I have tried them. I have sat down with a dozen of them together in a club, and instantly—they did not inspire me. One or another abused our ears with many words and a few thoughts which were not theirs. There was very little genuine goodness apparent. We are such hollow pretenders. I lost my time.

But out there! Who shall criticise that companion? It is like the hone to the knife. I bathe in that climate and am cleansed of all social impurities. I become a witness with unprejudiced senses to the order of the universe.

Journal, January 11, 1857

[Just after the publication of "Walden," August 9, 1854] Thinking this afternoon of the prospect of my writing lectures and going abroad to read them the next winter, I

realized how incomparably great the advantage of obscurity and poverty which I have enjoyed so long (and may still perhaps enjoy). I thought with what more than princely, what poetical leisure I had spent my years hitherto, without core or engagement, fancy-free. I have given myself up to nature; I have lived so many springs and summers and autumns and winters as if I had nothing else to do but *live* them, and imbibe whatever nutriment they had for me; I have spent a couple of years, for instance, with the flowers chiefly, having none other so binding engagement as to observe when they opened; I could have afforded to spend a whole fall observing the changing tints of the foliage. Ah, how I have thriven on solitude and poverty! I cannot overstate this advantage. I do not see how I could have enjoyed it if the public had been expecting as much of me as there is danger now that they will. If I go abroad lecturing, how shall I ever recover the lost winter? It has been my vacation, my season of growth and expansion, a prolonged youth.

Journal, September 19, 1854

. . . 12 M. Start for Amherst, N. H. A very cold day. Thermometer at 8 a.m.—8 o . . . At my lecture, the audience attended me closely, and I was satisfied; that is all I ask or expect generally. Not one spoke to me afterward, nor needed they. I have no doubt that they liked it, in the main, though few of them would have dared say so, provided they were conscious of it. Generally, if I can only get the ears of an audience, I do not care whether they say they like my lecture or not. I think I know as well as they can tell. At any rate, it is none of my business, and it would be impertinent for me to inquire. The stupidity of most of these country towns, not to include the cities, is in its innocence infantile. Lectured in basement (vestry) of the orthodox church, and I trust helped to undermine it.

I was told to stop at the United States Hotel; an old inhabitant had never heard of it, but I found the letters on

a sign without help. It was the ordinary, unpretending (?), desolate-looking country tavern. The landlord apologized because there was to be a ball there that night, which would keep me awake, and it did.

Journal, December 18, 1856

To-night I heard Mrs. S.*—lecture on womanhood. The most important fact about the lecture was that a woman gave it, and in that respect it was suggestive. Went to see her afterward. But the interview added nothing to the impression, rather subtracted from it. She was a woman in the too common sense, after all. You had to fire small charges. I did not have a finger in once, for fear of blowing away all her works, and so ending the game. You had to substitute courtesy for sense and argument. It requires nothing less than a chivalric feeling to sustain a conversation with a lady. I carried her lecture for her in my pocket wrapped in her handkerchief. My pocket exhales cologne to this moment. The championess of woman's rights still asks you to be a ladies' man . . . I fear that to the last women's lectures will demand mainly courtesy from men.

Journal, December 31, 1851

Many will complain of my lectures that they are transcendental. "Can't understand them." "Would you have us return to the savage state?" etc., etc. A criticism true, enough, it may be, from their point of view. But the fact is, the earnest lecturer can speak only to his like, and the adapting of himself to his audience is a mere compliment, which he pays them. If you wish to know how I think, you must endeavor to put yourself in my place. If you wish me to speak as if I were you, that is another affair.

Journal, February 19, 1855

* This lecturer was Mrs. Elizabeth Oaks Smith who gave a discourse on "Womanhood." She was a novelist (1806-1893).

All the criticism which I got on my lecture on Autumnal Tints at Worcester on the 22nd was that I assumed that my audience had not seen so much of them as they had. But after reading it I am more than ever convinced that they have not seen much of them,—that there are very few persons who do see much of nature.

Journal, February 25, 1859

Men's minds run so much on work and money that the mass instantly associate all literary labor with a pecuniary reward. They are mainly curious to know how much money the lecturer or author gets for his work. They think that the naturalist takes so much pains to collect plants or animals because he is paid for it. An Irishman who saw me in the fields making a minute in my note-book took it for granted that I was casting up my wages and actually inquired what they came to, as if he had never dreamed of any other use for writing. I might have quoted to him that the wages of sin is death, as the most pertinent answer. "What do you get for lecturing now?" I am occasionally asked. It is the more amusing since I only lecture about once a year out of my native town, often not at all; so that I might as well, if my objects were merely pecuniary, give up the business.

Journal, April 3, 1859

Curators of Lyceums write to me, Dear Sir,—I hear that you have a lecture of some humor. Will you do us the favor to read it before the Bungtown Institute?

Journal, December 21, 1853

Lecturing

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 31, 1856.

. . . Perhaps it always costs me more than it comes to to lecture before a promiscuous audience. It is an irreparable injury done to my modesty even,—I become so indurated.

O solitude! obscurity! meanness! I never triumph so as when I have the least success in my neighbor's eyes. The lecturer gets fifty dollars a night; but what becomes of the winter? What consolation will it be hereafter to have fifty thousand dollars for living in the world? I should not like to change *any* of my life for money . . .

I could lecture on dry oak leaves; I could, but who could hear me? If I were to try it on any large audience, I fear it would be no gain to them, and a positive loss to me. I should have behaved rudely to my rustling friends.

I am surveying, instead of lecturing, at present. Let me have a skimming from your "pan of unwrinkled cream."

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Life

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perchance have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's house. The snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly

there, and have as cheering thoughts as anywhere, and, indeed, the town's poor seem to live the most independent lives of any. They are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Cultivate poverty like sage, like a garden herb. Do not trouble yourself to get new things, whether clothes or friends. That is dissipation. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. If I were confined to a corner in a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts.

In all my travels I never came to the abode of the present.

Walden: Ch. 18, Conclusion

We are constantly invited to be what we are; as to something worthy and noble . . . My life must seem as if it were passing at a higher level than that which I occupy. It must possess a dignity which will not allow me to be familiar.

Journal, February 3, 1841

The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

Let us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds which hang over our own brows, and take up a little life into our pores.

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

I love a broad margin to my life.

Walden: Ch. 4, Sounds

How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely, and *enjoy it?*

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

We are receiving our portion of the infinite. The art of life! Was there ever anything memorable written upon it? By what disciplines to secure the most life, with what care to watch our thoughts. To observe what transpires, not in the street, but in the mind and heart of me! I do not remember any page which will tell me how to spend this afternoon. I do not so much wish to know how to economize time as how to spend it, by what means to grow rich, that the day may not have been in vain . . .

How to live. How to get the most life . . . How to attract its honey from the flower of the world. That is my every-day business. I am as busy as a bee about it. I ramble over all fields on that errand, and am never so happy as when I feel myself heavy with honey and wax. I am like a bee searching the livelong day for the sweets of nature . . . The art of spending a day . . . If by watching all day and all night I may detect some trace of the Ineffable, then will it not be worth while to watch? . . . We are surrounded by a rich and fertile mystery. May we not probe it, pry into it, employ ourselves about it, a little? To devote your life to the discovery of divinity in nature or to the eating of oysters, would they not be attended with very different results? . . .

Journal, September 7, 1851

How protean is life! I raised last summer a squash which weighed 123½ pounds. If it had fallen on me it would have made as deep and lasting an impression as most men do. I

would just as lief know what it thinks about God as what most men think, or are said to think. In such a squash you have already got the bulk of a man. My man, perchance, when I put such a question to him, opens his eyes for a moment, essays in vain to think, like a rusty forelock out of order, then calls for a plate of that same squash to eat and goes to sleep, as it is called,—and that is no great distance to go, surely.

Journal, January 26, 1858

Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another. The oak dies down to the ground, leaving within its rind a virgin mould, which will impart a vigorous life to an infant forest . . . So this constant abrasion and decay makes the soil of my future growth. As I live now so shall I reap. If I grow pines and birches, my virgin mould will not sustain the oak; but pines and birches, or perchance, weeds and brambles will constitute my second growth.

Journal, October 24, 1837

We must not be governed by rigid rules, as by the almanac, but let the seasons rule us. The moods and thoughts of man are revolving just as steadily and incessantly as nature's. Nothing must be postponed. Take time by the forelock. Now or never. You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this, or the like of this. Where the good husbandman is, there is the good soil. Take any other course, and life will be a succession of regrets. Let us see vessels sailing prosperously before the wind, not simply stranded barks. There is no world for the penitent and regretful.

Journal, April 24, 1859

To Fair Haven Hill. A cold and dark afternoon, the sun being behind clouds in the west . . . The landscape is barren of objects, the trees being leafless, and so little light in the sky for variety. Such a day as will almost oblige a man to eat his own heart. A day in which you must hold on to life by your teeth. You can hardly ruck up any skin on Nature's bones. The sap is down; she won't peel. Not a mosquito left. Not an insect to hum. Crickets gone into winter quarters. Friends long since gone there, and you left to walk on frozen ground, with your hands in your pockets. Ah, but is not this a glorious time for your deep inward fires? . . . Now is not your manhood taxed by the great Assessor? Taxed for having a soul, a ratable soul. A day when you cannot pluck a flower, cannot dig a parsnip, nor pull a turnip, for frozen ground! What do the thoughts find to live on? What avails you now the fire you stole from heaven?

Journal, November 13, 1851

How few ever get beyond feeding, clothing, sheltering, and warming themselves in this world, and begin to treat themselves as human beings,—as intellectual and moral beings! Most seem not to see any further,—not to see over the ridge-pole of their barns,—or to be exhausted and accomplish nothing more than a full barn, though it may be accompanied by an empty head. It is safest to invest in knowledge, for the probability is that you can carry that with you wherever you go.

But most men, it seems to me, do not care for Nature and would sell their share in all her beauty, as long as they may live, for a stated sum—many for a glass of rum. Thank God, men cannot as yet fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth! We are safe on that side for the present.

Journal, January 3, 1861

There is always some accident in the best things, whether thoughts or expressions or deeds. The memorable thought,

the happy expression, the admirable deed are only partly ours. The thought came to us because we were in a fit mood; also we were unconscious and did not know that we had said or done a good thing. We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success. What we do best or most perfectly is what we have most thoroughly learned by the longest practice, and at length it falls from us without our notice, like a leaf from a tree. It is the *last* time we shall do it, our unconscious leavings.

Journal, March 11, 1859

How meanly and miserably we live for the most part! We escape fate continually by the skin of our teeth as the saying is. We are practically desperate. But as every man, in respect to material wealth, so, in respect to our spirits and imagination, we should have some spare capital and superfluous vigor, have some margin and leeway in which to move. What kind of gift is life unless we have spirits to enjoy it and taste its true flavor? If, in respect to spirits, we are to be forever cramped and in debt? In our ordinary estate we have not, so to speak, quite enough air to breathe, and this poverty qualifies our piety; but we should have more than enough and breathe it carelessly. Poverty is the rule. We should first of all be full of vigor like a strong horse, and beside have the free and adventurous spirit of his driver; *i.e.* we should have such a reserve of elasticity and strength that we may at any time be able to put ourselves at the top of our speed and go beyond our ordinary limits, just as the invalid hires a horse. Have the gods sent us into this world, —to this *muster*,—to do chores, hold horses, and the like, and not given us any spending money? . . .

I heard some ladies the other day laughing about some one of their *help* who had *helped* herself to a real hoop from off a hogshead for her gown. I laughed too, but which party

do you think I laughed at? Isn't a hogshead as good a word as crinoline?

Journal, August 10, 1857

I do not know how to distinguish between our waking life and a dream. Are we not always living the life that we imagine we are? Fear creates danger, and courage dispells it.

Journal, November 12, 1859

As the afternoons grow shorter, and the early evening drives us home to complete our chores, we are reminded of the shortness of life, and become more pensive, at least in this twilight of the year. We are prompted to make haste and finish our work before the night comes. I leaned over a rail on the Walden road, waiting for the evening mail to be distributed, when such thoughts visited me. I seemed to recognize the November evening as a familiar thing come round again, and yet I could hardly tell whether I had ever known it or only divined it. The November twilight's just begun!

And yet there is no more tempting novelty than this new November. No going to Europe or another world is to be named with it. Give me the old familiar walk, post-office and all, with this ever new self, with this infinite expectation and faith, which does not know when it is beaten. We'll go nutting once more. We'll pluck the nut of the world, and crack it in the winter evenings . . .

I want nothing new, if I can have but a tithe of the old secured to me. I will spurn all wealth beside. Think of the consummate folly of attempting to go away from *here.* Here are all the friends I ever had or shall have, and as friendly as ever. Why, I never had any quarrel with a friend but it was just as sweet as unanimity could be. *Here,* of course, is all that you love, all that you expect, all that you are. Here is your bride elect, as close to you as she can be

got. Here is all the best and all the worst you can imagine. What more do you want? Bear here away then! Foolish people imagine that what they imagine is somewhere else. That stuff is not made in any factory but their own.

Journal, November 1, 1858

How often must one feel, as he looks back on his past life, that he has gained a talent but lost a character! My life has got down into my fingers . . .

Society affects to estimate men by their talents, but really feels and knows them by their characters. What a man does, compared with what he is, is but a small part . . .

If I cannot chop wood in the yard, can I not chop wood in my journal? Can I not give vent to that appetite so? I wish to relieve myself of superfluous energy. How poor is the life of the best and wisest! The petty side will appear at last. Understand once how the best in society live,—with what routine, with what tedium and insipidity, with what grimness and defiance, with what chuckling over an exaggeration of the sunshine. Altogether, are not the actions of your great man poor, even pitiful and ludicrous?

I am astonished, I must confess, that man looks so respectable in nature.

Journal, March 28, 1842

All enterprises must be self-supporting, must pay for themselves. The great art of life is how to turn the surplus life of the soul into life for the body,—that so the life be not a failure . . . For instance, a poet must sustain his body with his poetry. You must get your living by loving. To inherit property is not to be born,—is to be still-born rather . . . As is the sun to the vegetable, so is virtue to the bodily health.

Cape Cod.

Life is grand, and so are its environments of Past and Future. Would the face of nature be so serene and beautiful

if man's destiny were not equally so? What am I good for now, who am still marching after high things, but to hear and tell the news, to bring wood and water, and count how many eggs the hens lay? In the meanwhile, I expect my life will begin. I will not aspire longer. I will see what it is I would be after. I will be unanimous.

Journal, March 14, 1842

The really efficient laborer will be found not to crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure. There will be a wide margin for relaxation to his day. He is only earnest to secure the kernels of time, and does not exaggerate the value of the husk. Why should the hen set all day? She can lay but one egg, and besides she will not have picked up materials for a new one. Those who work much do not work hard.

Nothing is so rare as sense. Very uncommon sense is poetry, and has a heroic or sweet music.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

May my life be not destitute of its Indian Summer!

Excursions: Days and Nights in Concord

How alone must our life be lived! We dwell on the seashore, and none between us and the sea. Men are my merry companions, my fellow-pilgrims, who beguile the way but leave me at the first turn in the road, for none are travelling *one* road so far as myself.

Journal, March 13, 1841

I must confess I have felt mean enough when asked how I was to act on society, what errand I had to mankind. Undoubtedly I did not feel mean without a reason, and yet my loitering is not without defense. I would fain communicate the wealth of my life to men, would really give them what is

most precious in my gift. I will sift the sunbeams for the public good. I know of no riches I would keep back. I have no private good, unless it be my peculiar ability to serve the public . . .

It is hard to be a good citizen of the world in any great sense; but if we do render no interest or increase to mankind out of that talent God gave us, we can at least preserve the principle unimpaired. One would like to be making large dividends to society out of that deposited capital in us, but he does well for the most part if he proves a secure investment only, without adding to the stock.

Journal, March 26, 1842

A mild spring day. I must hie to the Great Meadows. The air is full of bluebirds. The ground almost entirely bare. The villagers are out in the sun, and every man is happy whose work takes him outdoors. I go by Sleepy Hollow toward the Great Fields. I lean over a rail to hear what is in the air, liquid with the bluebirds' warble. My life partakes of infinity. I go forth to make new demands on life. I wish to begin this summer well; to do something in it worthy of it and me; to transcend my daily routine and that of my townsmen; to have my immortality now, that it be in the *quality* of my daily life; to pay the greatest price, the greatest tax, of any man in Concord, and enjoy the most!! I will give all I am for *my* nobility. I will pay all my days for *my* success. I pray that the life of this spring and summer may ever lie fair in my memory. May I dare as I have never done! May I purify myself anew as with fire and water, soul and body! May my melody not be wanting to the season! May I gird myself to be a hunter of the beautiful, that naught escape me! May I attain to a youth never attained! I am eager to report the glory of the universe; may I be worthy to do it; to have got through with regarding human values, so as not to be distracted from regarding divine values. It is

reasonable that a man should be something worthier at the end of the year than he was at the beginning.

Journal, March 15, 1852

In youth, before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive, and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction; both its weariness and its refreshment were sweet to me. This earth was the most glorious musical instrument, and I was audience to its strains. To have such sweet impressions made on us, such ecstacies begotten of the breeze! I can remember how I was astonished. I said to myself,—I said to others,—"There comes into my mind such an indescribable, infinite, all-absorbing, divine, heavenly pleasure, a sense of elevation and expansion, and I have had nought to do with it. I perceive that I am dealt with by superior powers. This is a pleasure, a joy, an existence which I have not procured myself. I speak as a witness on the stand, and tell what I have perceived." The morning and evening were sweet to me, and I led a life aloof from society of men . . . The maker of me was improving me . . . I was daily intoxicated, and yet no man could call me intemperate. With all your science can you tell how it is, and whence it is, that light comes into the soul?

Journal, July 16, 1851

When, after feeling dissatisfied with my life, I aspire to something better, am more scrupulous, more reserved and continent, as if expecting somewhat, suddenly I find myself full of life as a nut of meat,—am overflowing with a quiet, genial mirthfulness. I think to myself, I must attend to my diet; I must get up earlier and take a morning walk; I must have done with luxuries and devote myself to my muse. So I dam up my stream, and my waters gather to a head. I am freighted with thought.

Journal, October 26, 1853

I have lived some thirty-odd years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. They have told me nothing and probably can tell me nothing to the purpose. There is life, an experiment untried by me, and it does not avail me that you have tried it. If I have any valuable experience, I am sure to reflect that this my mentors said nothing about. What were mysteries to the child remain mysteries to the old man.

Journal, February 11, 1852

We can only live healthily the life the gods assign us. I must receive my life as passively as the willow leaf that flutters over the brook. I must not be for myself, but God's work, and that is always good. I will wait the breezes patiently, and grow as Nature shall determine. My fate cannot but be grand so . . .

Can God afford that I should forget him? Is he so indifferent to my career? Why, God, did you include me in your great scheme? Will you not make me a partner at last? Did it need there should be a conscious material?

Journal, March 11, 1842

Ah, give me pure mind, pure thought! Let me not be in haste to detect the *universal law;* let me see more clearly a particular instance of it! . . . Do not seek expressions, seek thoughts to be expressed. By perseverance you get two views of the same rare truth . . . Do not speak for other men; speak for yourself . . . Though you should only speak to one kindred mind in all time, though you should not speak to one, but only utter aloud, that you may the more completely realize and live in the idea which contains the reason of your life, that you may build yourself up to the heights of your conceptions, that you may remember your Creator in the days of your youth and justify His ways to man, that the

end of life may not be its amusement,—speak—though your thought presupposes the non-existence of your hearers—thoughts that transcend life and death . . . We look upward for inspiration.

Journal, December 25, 1851

It is never enough that our life is an easy one. We must live on the stretch; and not be satisfied with a tame and undisturbed round of weeks and days, but retire to our rest like soldiers on the eve of battle, looking forward with ardor to the strenuous sortie of the morrow.

Cape Cod

Whatever your sex or position, life is a battle in which you are to show your pluck, and woe be to the coward . . . Despair and postponement are cowardice and defeat. Men were born to succeed, not to fail.

Journal, March 21, 1853

It is a record of the mellow and ripe moments that I would keep. I would not preserve the husk of life, but the kernel.

When the cup of life is full and flowing over, preserve some drops as a specimen. When the intellect enlightens the heart and the heart warms the intellect.

Journal, December 23, 1851

I don't want to feel as if my life were a sojourn any longer. That philosophy cannot be true which so paints it. It is time now that I begin to live.

Journal, December 25, 1841

To-day it has been finger-cold . . . Prudent people get in their barrels of apples to-day. I find it is the height of wis-

dom not to endeavor to oversee myself and live a life of prudence and common sense, but to see over and above myself, entertain sublime conjectures, to make myself the thoroughfare of thrilling thoughts, live all that can be lived. The man who is dissatisfied with himself, what can he not do?

Journal, November 23, 1850

One's *life*, the enterprise he is here upon, should certainly be a grand fact to consider, not a mean or insignificant one. A man should not live without a purpose, and that purpose must surely be a grand one.

Journal, December 15, 1852

Both for bodily and mental health, court the present. Embrace health wherever you find her . . .

It is worth while to apply what wisdom one has to the conduct of his life, surely. I find myself oftenest wise in little things and foolish in great ones. A broad margin of leisure is as beautiful in a man's life as in a book. Haste makes waste, no less in life than in housekeeping . . . Keep the time, observe the hours of the universe, not of the cars. What are threescore years and ten hurriedly and coarsely lived to moments of divine leisure in which your life is coincident with the life of the universe? We live too fast and too coarsely, just as we eat too fast, and do not know the true savor of our food . . .

That aim in life is highest which requires the highest and finest discipline. How much, what infinite, leisure it requires, as of a lifetime, to appreciate a single phenomenon! You must camp down beside it as for life, having reached your land of promise, and give yourself wholly to it. It must stand for the whole world to you, symbolical of all things. Unless the humming of a gnat is as the music of the spheres, and the music of the spheres is as the humming of a gnat,

they are naught to me. It is not communications to serve for a history,—which are science,—but the great story itself, that cheers and satisfies us.

Journal, December 28, 1852

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Milton, Mass.
Concord, Mass., August 10, 1849.

. . . What a pity if we do not live this short time according to the laws of the long time,—the eternal laws! Let us see that we stand erect here, and do not lie along by our *whole length* in the dirt. Let our meanness be our footstool, not our cushion. In the midst of this labyrinth let us live a *thread* of life. We must act with so rapid and resistless a purpose in *one* direction, that our vices will necessarily trail behind . . . The laws of earth are for the feet, or inferior man; the laws of heaven are for the head, or superior man; the latter are the former sublimed and expanded, even as radii from the earth's centre go on diverging into space. Happy is the man who observes the heavenly and the terrestial law in just proportion; whose every faculty, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, obeys the law of its level; who neither stoops nor goes on tiptoe, but lives a balanced life, acceptable to nature and to God.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Milton, Mass.
Concord, August 9, 1850

. . . As for conforming outwardly, and living your own life inwardly, I do not think much of that. Let not your right hand know what your left hand does in that line of business. It will prove a failure.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 19, 1854.

. . . I have not yet learned to live, that I can see, and I fear that I shall not very soon. I find, however, that in the long run things correspond to my original idea,—that they correspond to nothing else so much; and that a man may really be a true prophet without any great exertion. The day is never so dark, nor the night even, but that the laws at least of light still prevail, and so may make it light in our minds if they are open to the truth . . . Let us be learning our a-b-c's as soon as possible. I never yet knew the sun to be knocked down and rolled through a mud-puddle; he comes out honor-bright from behind every storm. Let us then take sides with the sun, seeing we have so much leisure.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, September 26, 1855.

. . . To what end do I lead a simple life at all, pray? That I may teach others to simplify their lives?—and so all our lives be *simplified* merely, like an algebraic formula? Or not, rather, that I may make use of the ground I have cleared, to live more worthily and profitably? I would fain lay the most stress on that which is the most important,—imports the most to me,—though it were only (what it is likely to be) a vibration in the air.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester
Concord, April 10, 1853

. . . It is better to have your head in the clouds, and know where you are, if indeed you can get it above them, than to

breathe the clearer atmosphere below them and think that you are in paradise . . .

Of what use were it, pray, to get a little wood to burn, to warm your body this cold weather, if there were not a divine fire kindled at the same time to warm your spirit? I cuddle up by my stove, and there I get up another fire which warms fire itself. Life is so short that it is not wise to take roundabout ways, nor can we spend much time in waiting . . . Though it is late to leave off this wrong way, it will seem early the moment we begin in the right way; instead of midafternoon, it will be early morning with us. We have not got half way to dawn yet.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

The necessaries of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

To stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Love

How insufficient is all wisdom without love! There may be courtesy, there may be good will, there may be even temper, there may be wit, and talent, and sparkling conversation,

and yet the soul pine for life. Just so sacred and rich as my life is to myself will it be to another. Our life without love is like coke and ashes, like the cocoanut in which the milk is dried up. I want to see the sweet sap of living wood in it . . .

What can I give or deny to another but myself?

The stars are God's dreams, thoughts remembered in the silence of his night.

Journal, March 25, 1842

A kind act or gift lays us under obligation not so much to the giver as to Truth and Love. We must then be truer and kinder ourselves.

Journal, May 14, 1840

How simple is the law of love! One who loves us acts accordingly, and anon we come together and succeed together without let or hindrance.

Journal, September 9, 1852

There is no remedy for love but to love more.

Journal, July 25, 1839

Love, Chastity, Marriage, Sensuality

Sentences on the above subjects sent to Harrison Blake at Worcester.

Concord, September, 1852

I send you the thoughts on Chastity and Sensuality with diffidence and shame, not knowing how far I speak to the

condition of men generally, or how far I betray my peculiar defects. Pray enlighten me on this point if you can. Love. What the essential difference between man and woman is, that they should be thus attracted to one another, no one has satisfactorily answered. Perhaps we must acknowledge the justness of the distinction which assigns to man the sphere of wisdom, and to woman that of love. Man is continually saying to woman, Why will you not be more wise? Woman is continually saying to man, Why will you not be more loving? It is not in their wills to be wise or to be loving; but unless each is both wise and loving, there can be neither wisdom nor love . . .

Considering how few poetical friendships there are, it is remarkable that so many are married. It would seem as if men yielded too easy an obedience to nature without consulting their genius. One may be drunk with love without being any nearer to finding his mate. There is more of good nature than of good sense at the bottom of most marriages. But the good nature must have the counsel of the good spirit or Intelligence. If common sense had been consulted, how many marriages would never have taken place; if uncommon or divine sense, how few marriages such as we witness would ever have taken place!

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Chastity and Sensuality

Sent to Harrison Blake.
Concord, September, 1852.

The subject of sex is a remarkable one, since though its phenomena concern us so much, both directly and indirectly, and, sooner or later, it occupies the thoughts of all, yet all mankind, as it were, agree to be silent about it, at

least the sexes commonly one to another. One of the most interesting of all human facts is veiled more completely than any mystery. It is treated with such secrecy and awe as surely do not go to any religion. I believe that it is unusual even for the most intimate friends to communicate the pleasures and anxieties connected with this fact,—much as the external affair of love, its comings and goings, are bruited. The Shakers do not exaggerate it so much by their manner of speaking of it, as all mankind by their manner of keeping silence about it . . .

Men commonly couple with their idea of marriage a slight degree at least of sensuality; but every lover, the world over, believes in its inconceivable purity.

If it is the result of a pure love, there can be nothing sensual in marriage. Chastity is something positive, not negative. All lusts or base pleasures must give place to loftier delights . . .

The intercourse of the sexes, I have dreamed, is incredibly beautiful, too fair to be remembered. I have had thoughts about it, but they are among the most fleeting and irrecoverable in my experience. It is strange that men will talk of miracles, revelation, inspiration, and the like, as things past, while love remains.

A true marriage will differ in no wise from illumination. In all perception of the truth there is a divine ecstasy, an inexpressible delirium of joy, as when a youth embraces his betrothed virgin. The ultimate delights of a true marriage are one with this.

No wonder that, out of such a union, not as end, but as accompaniment, comes the undying race of men. The womb is a most fertile soil.

Some have asked if the stock of men could not be improved,—if they could not be bred as cattle. Let love be purified, and all the rest will follow. A pure love is thus, indeed, the panacea for all the ills of the world.

The only excuse for reproduction is improvement. Nature abhors repetition. Beasts merely propagate their kind; but

the offspring of noble men and women will be superior to themselves, as their aspirations are. By their fruits ye shall know them.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Luxuries

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Man

I think that we are not commonly aware that man is our contemporary,—that in this strange outlandish world, so barren, so prosaic, fit not to live in but merely to pass through, that even here so divine a creature as man does actually live. Man, the crowning fact, the god we know. While the earth supports so rare an inhabitant, there is somewhat to cheer us. Who shall say that there is no God, if there is a *just* man. It is only within a year that it has occurred to me that there is such a being actually existing on the globe. Now that I perceive that it is so, many questions assume a new aspect. We have not only the idea and vision of the divine ourselves, but we have brothers, it seems, who have this idea also. Methinks my neighbor is better than I, and his thought is better than mine. There is a representative of the divinity on earth, of whom all things fair and noble are to be expected. We have the material of

heaven here. I think that the standing miracle to man is man. Behind the paling yonder, come rain or shine, hope or doubt, there dwells a man, an actual being who can sympathize with our sublimest thoughts.

The revelations of nature are infinitely glorious and cheering, hinting to us of a remote future, of possibilities untold; but startlingly near to us some day we find a fellow-man . . .

I think that the existence of man in nature is the divinest and most startling of all facts. It is a fact which few have realized.

Journal, May 21, 1851

Consider the infinite promise of a man, so that the sight of his roof at a distance suggests an idyll or pastoral, or of his grave an Elegy in a Country Churchyard. How all poets have idealized the farmer's life! What graceful figures and unworldly characters they have assigned to them! Serene as the sky, emulating nature with their calm and peaceful lives.

Journal, October 3, 1859

Always you have to contend with the stupidity of men. It is like a stiff soil, a hard-pan . . . The stupid you have always with you. Men are more obedient at first to words than ideas. The mind names more than things. Read them a lecture on "Education," naming that subject, and they will think they have heard something important, but call it "Transcendentalism," and they will think it moonshine. Or halve your lecture, and put a psalm at the beginning and a prayer at the end of it and read it from a pulpit, and they will pronounce it good without thinking.

Journal, February 13, 1860

What an institution, what a revelation is a man! We are wont foolishly to think that the creed which a man professes is more significant than the fact that he is. It matters

not how hard the conditions seemed, how mean the world, for a man is a prevalent force and a new law himself. He is a system whose law is to be observed.

Journal, December 1, 1856

It appears to me that, to one standing on the heights of philosophy, mankind and the works of man will have sunk out of sight altogether; that man is altogether too much insisted on. The poet says the proper study of mankind is man. I say, study to forget all that; take wider views of the universe. That is the egotism of the race . . . When another poet says the world is too much with us, he means, of course, that man is too much with us . . . To be a good man, that is, a good neighbor in the widest sense, is but little more than to be a good citizen. Mankind is a gigantic institution; it is a community to which most men belong. It is a test I would apply to my companion,—can he forget man? . . .

I do not value any view of the universe into which man and the institutions of man enter very largely and absorb much of the attention. Man is but the place where I stand, and the prospect hence is infinite. It is not a chamber of mirrors which reflect me. When I reflect, I find that there is other than me. Man is a past phenomenon to philosophy. The universe is larger than enough for man's abode. Some rarely go outdoors, most are always at home at night, very few indeed have stayed out all night once in their lives, fewer still have gone behind the world of humanity, seen its institutions like toadstools by the wayside.

Journal, April 2, 1852

Most men can be easily transplanted from here there, for they have so little root,—no tap-root,—or their roots penetrate so little way, that you can thrust a shovel quite under them and take them up, roots and all.

Journal, May 14, 1852

Some ponds have outlets; some have not. So some men.

Journal, May 23, 1852

When were the good and the brave ever in a majority?

Miscellanies: A Plea for Captain John Brown

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.

Walden: Ch. 1, Economy

We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little interesting to me.

Walden: Ch. 5, Solitude

Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men?

Walden: Ch. 7, The Bean-Field

It is for want of a man that there are so many men.

Miscellanies: Life Without Principle

The coward wants resolution, which the brave man can do without.

Miscellanies: The Service

It takes a man to make a room silent.

Journal, February 9, 1839

Man is as singular as God.

Journal, May 1, 1851

Manners

When I meet one of my neighbors these days who is ridiculously stately, being offended, I say in my mind: "Farewell! I will wait till you get your manners off. Why make politeness of so much consequence, when you are ready to assassinate with a word? . . . You are so grand that I cannot get within ten feet of you." Why will men so try to impose on one another? Why not be simple and pass for what they are worth only? O such thin skins, such crockery, as I have to deal with! Do they not know that I can laugh? Some who have such dignity that they cannot be contradicted! . . . I meet with several who cannot afford to be simple and true men, but personate, so to speak, their own ideal of themselves, trying to make the manners supply the place of the man. They are puff balls filled with dust and ashes.

Journal, April 16, 1854

When I have made a visit where my expectations are not met, I feel as if I owed my hosts an apology for troubling them so. If I am disappointed, I find that I have no right to visit them.

I have always found that what are called the best of manners are the worst, for they are simply the shell without the meat. They cover no life at all. They are the universal slave-holders who treat men as things. Nobody holds you more cheap than the man of manners.

Journal, October 4, 1859

One man lies in his words, and gets a bad reputation; another in his manners, and enjoys a good one.

Journal, June 25, 1852

Moods

The worst kind of tick to get under your skin is yourself in an irritable mood . . .

I have so much faith in the power of truth to communicate itself that I should not believe a friend, if he should tell me that he had given credit to an unjust rumor concerning me.

Journal, January 1, 1852

As soon as those spring mornings arrive in which the birds sing, I am sure to be an early riser. I am waked by my genius. I wake to inaudible melodies and am surprised to find myself expecting the dawn in so serene and joyful and expectant a mood. I have an appointment with spring. She comes to the window to wake me, and I go forth an hour or two earlier than usual. It is by especial favor that I am waked, — not rudely but gently, as infants should be waked . . .

It affects one's philosophy, after so long living in winter quarters, to see the day dawn from some hill.

Journal, March 22, 1853

The Moon

At 7.15 P.M. with W. E. C. [Channing] go forth to see the moon, the glimpses of the moon. We think she is not quite full; we can detect a little flatness on the eastern side . . . We go toward Bear Garden Hill. The sun is setting . . . My thoughts expand and flourish most on this barren hill . . . When we sit, we hear the mosquitoes hum . . .

Now we are getting into moonlight. We see it reflected

from particular stumps in the depths of the darkest woods, and from the stems of trees, as if it selected what to shine on,—a silvery light. It is a light, of course, which we have had all day, but which we have not appreciated, and proves how remarkable a lesser light can be when a greater light has departed. How simply and naturally the moon presides! 'Tis true she was eclipsed by the sun, but now she acquires an almost equal respect and worship by reflecting and representing him, with some new quality, perchance added to his light, showing how original the disciple may be who still in midday is seen, though pale and cloud-like, beside his master. Such is a worthy disciple. In his master's presence he is still seen and preserves a distinct existence; and his absence reflects and represents him, not without adding some new quality to his light, not servile and never rival . . . And now, at half-past ten o'clock, I hear the cockerels crow in Hubbard's barns, and morning is already anticipated . . . This sound is wonderfully exhilarating at all times. These birds are worth far more to me for their crowing and cackling than for their drumsticks and eggs. How singular the connection of the hen with man,—that she leaves eggs in his barn always! . . . They will put their eggs in your barn by a tacit agreement. They will not wander far from your yard.

Excursions: Night and Moonlight

When I am outside, on the outskirts of the town, enjoying the still majesty of the moon, I am wont to think that all men are aware of this miracle, that they too are silently worshipping this manifestation of divinity elsewhere. But when I go into the house I am undeceived; they are absorbed in checkers or chess or novel, though they may have been advertised of the brightness through the shutters.

In the moonlight night what intervals are created! . . .

Talk of demonstrating the rotation of the earth on its axis,—see the moon rise, or the sun!

Journal, May 16, 1851

I have camped out all night on the tops of four mountains,—Wachusett, Saddle-back, Katahdin, and Monadnock,—and I usually took a ramble over the summit at midnight by moonlight. I remember the moaning of the wind on the rocks, and that you seemed much nearer to the moon than on the plains. The light is then in harmony with the scenery. Of what use the sunlight to the mountain-summits?

Journal, June 28, 1852

Consider the moonlight, so civil, yet so savage!

Excursions: Night and Moonlight

It does not concern men who are asleep in their beds, but it is very important to the traveler, whether the moon shines brightly or is obscured. It is not easy to realize the serene joy of all the earth, when she commences to shine unobstructedly, unless you have often been abroad alone in moonlight nights. She seems to be waging continual war with the clouds in your behalf . . . Sailors speak of it as the moon eating up the clouds. The traveler all alone, the moon all alone, except for his sympathy, overcoming with incessant victory whole squadrons of clouds above the forests and lakes and hills . . .

There are nights in this climate of such serene and majestic beauty, so medicinal and fertilizing to the spirit, that methinks a sensitive nature would not devote them to oblivion, and perhaps there is no man but would be better and wiser for spending them out-of-doors, though he should sleep all the next day to pay for it; should sleep an Endymion sleep, as the ancients expressed it.

Excursions: Night and Moonlight

Moral

Why always insist that men incline to the moral side of their being? Our life is not all moral. Surely, its actual phenomena deserve to be studied impartially. The science of Human Nature has never been attempted, as the science of Nature has. The dry light has never shone on it. Neither physics nor metaphysics have touched it.

Journal, June 15, 1840

The best thought is not only without sombreness, but even without morality . . . The moral aspect of nature is a jaundice reflected from man . . . Occasionally we raise above the necessity of virtue into an unchangeable morning light, in which we have not to choose between right and wrong, but simply to live right on and breathe the circumambient air. There is no name for this life unless it be the very vitality of *vita*. Silent is the preacher about this, and silent must ever be, for he who knows it will not preach.

Journal, August 1, 1841

How wonderfully moral our whole life! There is never an instance's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails.

Journal, June 22, 1853

There is no such thing as sliding up a hill. In morals the only sliders are backsliders.

Miscellanies: Slavery in Massachusetts

Morning

Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, to tell our bad dreams, but sometimes, as *eu*peptics, to congratulate each other on the ever glorious morning?

Miscellanies: Life Without Principle

The morning hope is soon lost in what becomes the routine of the day, and we do not recover ourselves again until we land on the pensive shores of evening, shores which skirt the great western continent of the night.

Journal, January 8, 1854

All things in this world must be seen with the morning dew on them, must be seen with youthful, early opened, hopeful eyes.

Journal, June 13, 1852

Of what significance the light of day, if it is not the reflection of an inward dawn?—to what purpose is the veil of night withdrawn, if the morning reveals nothing to the soul?

Excursions: Night and Moonlight

It is a test question affecting the youth of a person,—Have you knowledge of the morning? Do you sympathize with that season of nature? Are you abroad early, brushing the dews aside? If the sun rises on you slumbering, if you do not hear the morning cock crow, if you do not witness the blushes of Aurora, if you are not acquainted with Venus as the morning star, what relation have you to wisdom and purity? You have then forgotten your Creator in the days

of your youth! Your shutters were darkened till noon! You rose with a sick headache! In the morning sing, as do the birds.

Journal, July 18, 1851

My most sacred and memorable life is commonly on awaking in the morning. I frequently awake with an atmosphere about me as if my unremembered dreams had been divine, as if my spirit had journeyed to its native place, and, in the act of reëntering its native body, had diffused an elysian fragrance around.

The Genius says: "Ah! That is what you were! That is what you may yet be!" . . . A sane and growing man revolutionizes every day. What institutions of man can survive a morning experience?

Journal, May 24, 1851

Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me . . . To be awake is to be alive.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

Let me have a draught of undiluted morning air. Morning air! If men will not drink of this at the fountain-head of the day, why, then, we must even bottle up some and sell it in the shops.

Walden: Ch. 5, Solitude

The atmosphere of morning gives a healthy hue to our prospects . . . The morning dew breeds no cold. We enjoy

a diurnal reprieve in the beginning of each day's creation. In the morning we do not believe in expediency; we will start fresh, and have no patching, no temporary fixtures. The afternoon man has an interest in the past; his eye is divided, and he sees indifferently well either way.

Journal, April 4, 1839

4 A.M. I go to the river in a fog through which I cannot see more than a dozen rods . . . As I row down the stream, the dark, dim outlines of the trees on the banks appear, coming to meet me out of the mist on the one hand, while they retreat and are soon concealed in it on the other. My strokes soon bury them behind me. The birds are wide awake, as if knowing that this fog presages a fair day . . . I am aware that I yield to the same influence which inspires the birds and the cockerels, whose hoarse courage I hear now vaunted. So men should crow in the morning. I would crow like chanticleer in the morning, with all the lustiness that the new day imparts, without thinking of the evening, when I and all of us shall go to roost,—with all the humility of the cock, that takes his perch upon the highest rail and wakes the country with his clarion. Shall not men be inspired as much as cockerels?

Journal, June 2, 1853

Mountain Climbing

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, November 16, 1857.

. . . You must have been enriched by your solitary walk over the mountains. I suppose that I feel the same awe

when on their summits that many do on entering a church. To see what kind of earth that is on which you have a house and garden somewhere, perchance! It is equal to the lapse of many years. You must ascend a mountain to learn your relation to matter, and so to your own body, for *it* is at home there, though *you* are not. It might have been composed there, and will have no farther to go to return to dust there, than in your garden; but your spirit inevitably comes away, and brings your body with it, if it lives. Just as awful really, and as glorious, is your garden.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

One must needs climb a hill to know what a world he inhabits. In the midst of this Indian summer I am perched on the topmost rock of Nawshawtuct, a velvet wind blowing from the southwest. I seem to feel the atoms as they strike my cheek . . . The atmosphere is such that, as I look abroad on the length and breadth of the land, it recedes from my eyes, and I seem to be looking for the threads of the velvet.

Thus I admire the grandeur of my emerald carriage, with its border of blue, in which I am rolling through space.

Journal, November 21, 1837

Music

. . . What a fine and beautiful communication is Music, from age to age, of the fairest and noblest thoughts,—the aspirations of ancient men preserved,—even such as were never communicated by speech! It is the flower of language,

—thought colored and curved, tinged and wreathed,—fluent and flexible: its crystal fountain tinged with the sun's rays, and its purling ripples reflecting the green grass and the red clouds. It teaches us again and again to trust the remotest and finest as the divinest instinct; and it makes a dream our only real experience . . .

There is as much music in the world as virtue. In a world of peace and love music would be the universal language; and men would greet each other in the fields in such accents as a Beethoven now utters at rare intervals. All things obey music as they obey virtue; it is the herald of virtue; it is God's voice.

Journal, September 2, 1839

Heard this forenoon what I thought at first to be children playing on pumpkin stems in the next yard, but it turned out to be the new steamwhistle music, what they call the Calliope (!) in the next town. It sounded still more like the pumpkin stem near at hand, only a good deal louder. Again I mistook it for an instrument in the house or at the door, when it was a quarter of a mile off, from habit locating it by its loudness. At Acton, six miles off, it sounded like some new seraphim in the next house with the blinds closed. All the milkmen and their horses stood still to hear it. The horses stood it remarkably well. It was not so musical as the ordinary whistle.

Journal, August 7, 1856

For all Nature is a musical instrument on which her creatures play, celebrating their joy or grief unconsciously often.

Journal, December 19, 1856

I sailed on the North River last night with my flute, and my music was a tinkling stream which meandered with the

river, and fell from note to note as a brook from rock to rock. I did not hear the strains after they had issued from the flute, but before they were breathed into it, for the original strain precedes the sound by as much as the echo follows after, and the rest is the perquisite of the rocks and trees and beasts. Unpremeditated music is the true gauge which measures the current of our thoughts, the very undertow of our life's stream.

Journal, August 18, 1841

I hear one thumbing a guitar below stairs. It reminds me of moments that I have lived. What a comment on our life is the least strain of music! It lifts me up above all the dust and mire of the universe. I soar or hover with clean skirts over the field of my life. It is ever life within life, in concentric spheres . . . The identical field where I am leading my humdrum life, let but a strain of music be heard there, is seen to be the field of some unrecorded crusade or tournament the thought of which excites in us the ecstasy of joy. The way in which I am affected by this faint strumming advertises me that there is still some health and immortality in the springs of me. What an elixir is this sound! I, who but lately came and went and lived under a *dish-cover*, live now under the heavens. It releases me; it bursts my bonds. Almost, perhaps all, our life is, speaking comparatively, a stereotyped despair; *i.e.*, we never at any time realize the full grandeur of our destiny. We forever and ever and habitually underrate our fate . . . When I *hear* music I fear no danger, I am invulnerable, I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times and to the latest.

Journal, January 13, 1857

7.30 P.M.—To Conantum . . . One will lose no music by not attending the oratorios and operas. The really inspiring melodies are cheap and universal, and are as audible to the

poor man's son as to the rich man's. Listening to the harmonies of the universe is not allied to dissipation. My neighbors have gone to the vestry to hear "Ned Kendal," to-night, but I am come forth to the hills to hear my bugler in the horizon. I can forego the seeming advantages of cities without misgiving. No heavenly strain is lost to the ear that is fitted to hear it, for want of money or opportunity. I am convinced that for instrumental music all Vienna cannot serve me more than the Italian boy who seeks my door with his organ.

Journal, August 8, 1851

I hear a man playing a clarinet afar off. Apollo tending the flocks of King Admetus. How cultivated, how sweet and glorious, is music! Men have brought this art to great perfection, the art of modulating sound, by long practice since the world began. What superiority over the rude harmony of savages! There is something glorious and flower-like in it. What a contrast this evening melody with the occupations of the day! It is perhaps the most admirable accomplishment of man.

Journal, June 18, 1852

10 P.M.—Hear music below. It washes the dust off my life and everything I look at.

Journal, January 27, 1857

Kossuth here. The hand-organ, when I am far enough off not to hear the friction of the machinery, not to see or be reminded of the performer, serves the grandest use for me, deepens my existence. Heard best through walls and obstructions. These performers, too, have come with the pleasant weather and the birds.

Journal, May 11, 1852

I saw an organ-grinder this morning before a rich man's house, thrilling the streets with harmony, loosening the very paving-stones and tearing the routine of life to rags and tatters, when the lady of the house shoved up a window and in a semiphilanthropic tone inquired if he wanted anything to eat. But he, very properly, it seemed to me, kept on grinding and paid no attention to her question, feeding her ears with melody unasked for. So the world shoves up its window and interrogates the poet, sets him to gauging ale casks in return. It seemed to me that the music suggested that the recompense should be as fine as the gift. It would be much nobler to enjoy the music, though you paid no money for it, than to presume always a beggarly relation. It is, after all, perhaps the best instrumental music that we have.

Journal, May 27, 1851

Ah, if I could put into words that music that I hear; that music which can bring tears to the eyes of marble statues!—to which the very muscles of men are obedient!

Journal, September 28, 1852

Myself

There is some advantage in being the humblest, cheapest, least dignified man in the village, so that the very stable boys shall damn you. Methinks I enjoy that advantage to an unusual extent. There is many a coarsely well-meaning fellow, who knows only the skin of me, who addresses me familiarly by my Christian name. I get the whole good of him and lose nothing myself. There is "Sam," the jailer,—whom I never call Sam, however, who exclaimed last eve-

ning: "Thoreau, are you going up the street pretty soon? Well, just take a couple of these handbills along and drop one in at Hoar's piazza and one at Holbrook's, and I'll do as much for you another time." I am not above being used, aye abused, sometimes.

Journal, July 6, 1851

I spend the forenoon in my chamber, writing or arranging my papers, and in the afternoon I walk forth into the fields and woods. I turn aside, perchance, into some withdrawn, untrodden swamp, and find these bilberries, large and fair, awaiting me in inexhaustible abundance . . . They embody for me the essence and flavor of the swamp,—cool and refreshing, of various colors and flavors . . . I taste and am strengthened. This is the season of small fruits. I trust, too, that I am maturing some small fruit as palatable in these months, which will communicate my flavor to my kind.

Journal, August 9, 1853

I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

A man must find his occasions in himself, it is true. The natural day is very calm, and will hardly reprove his indolence.

Walden: Chapter 4, Sounds

Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something; and because he cannot do *everything*, it is not necessary that he should do *something* wrong.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Nature

To anticipate, not the sunrise and dawn merely, but, if possible, Nature herself!

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Unfenced nature reaching up to your very sills.

Walden: Chapter 4, Sounds

The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature,—of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter,—such health, such cheer, they afford forever!

Walden: Chapter 5, Solitude

We can never have enough of nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor, vast and titanic features.

Walden: Chapter 17, Spring

Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She has long ago taken her resolution.

Walden: Chapter 16, The Pond in Winter

If Nature is our mother, then God is our father.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Nature gets thumbed like an old spelling-book.

Journal, November 1, 1858

. . . I am singularly refreshed in winter when I hear of service-berries, poke-weed, juniper . . .

In society you will not find health, but in nature. Unless our feet at least stood in the midst of nature, all our faces would be pale and livid. Society is always diseased, and the best the most so . . . Surely joy is the condition of life . . .

Nature has taken more care than the fondest parent for the education and refinement of her children. Consider the silent influence which flowers exert, no less upon the ditcher in the meadow than the lady in the bower. When I walk in the woods, I am reminded that a wise purveyor has been

there before me; my most delicate experience is typified there. I am struck with the pleasing friendships and unanimities of nature, as when the lichen on the trees takes the form of their leaves . . .

Nature is mythical and mystical always, and works with the license and extravagance of genius. She has her luxurious and florid style as well as art.

Excursions: Natural History of Massachusetts

How fortunate and glorious that our world is not roofed in, but open like a Roman house, our skylight so broad and open! We do not climb the hills in vain. It is no crystal palace we dwell in. The windows of the sky are always open . . . How much more swiftly the sun seems to perform the morning and evening portions of his journey, when he is nearest his starting-place or goal!

Journal, July 24, 1853

. . . Listening to the evening song of the robin, we could not help contrasting the equanimity of nature with the bustle and impatience of man. His words and action presume always a crisis near at hand, but she is forever silent and unpretending.

Excursions: A Walk to Wachusett

Probably if our lives were more conformed to nature, we should not need to defend ourselves against her heats and colds, but find her our constant nurse and friend, as do plants and quadrupeds.

Excursions: A Winter Walk

While almost all men feel an attraction drawing them to society, few are attracted strongly to Nature. In their reaction to Nature men appear to me for the most part, not-

withstanding their arts, lower than the animals. It is not often a beautiful relation, as in the case of animals . . . For my part, I feel that with regard to Nature I live a sort of border life, on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only.

Excursions: Walking

. . . Nature has from the first expanded the minute blossoms of the forest only toward the heavens, above men's heads and unobserved by them. We see only the flowers that are under our feet in the meadows.

Excursions: Walking

Nature is slow but sure; she works no faster than need; she is the tortoise that wins the race by her perseverance; she knows that seeds have many other uses than to reproduce their kind. In raising oaks and pines, she works with a leisureliness and security answering to the age and strength of the trees. If every acorn of this year's crop is destroyed, never fear! she has more years to come. It is not necessary that a pine or an oak should bear fruit every year, as it is that a peavine should . . . If Nature has a pine or an oak wood to produce, she manifests no haste about it.

Thus we should say that oak forests are produced by a kind of accident, *i.e.* by the failure of animals to reap the fruit of their labors. Yet who shall say that they have not a fair knowledge of the value of their labors—that the squirrel when it plants an acorn, or the jay when it lets one slip from under its foot, has not a transient thought for its posterity?

Journal, January 14, 1861

I cannot lightly dismiss the subject of fallen leaves . . .

Consider what a vast crop is thus annually shed upon the earth. This, more than any mere grain or seed, is the greatest

harvest of the year . . . I am more interested in it than in the English grass alone or in the corn. It prepares the virgin mould for future cornfields on which the earth fattens. They teach us how to die. How many flutterings before they rest quietly in their graves! A myriad wrappers for germinating seeds. By what subtle chemistry they will mount up again, climbing by the sap in the trees.

Journal, October 22, 1853

It is a glorious and ever-memorable day. It is a day affecting the spirits of men, but there is nobody to enjoy it but ourselves. What do the laborer ox and the laborer man care for the beautiful days? Will the haymaker when he comes home to-night know that this has been such a beautiful day? This day itself has been the great phenomenon, but will it be reported in any journal, as the storm is, and the heat? It is like a great and beautiful flower unnamed. The mass of mankind, who live in houses or shops, or are *bent* upon their labor out of doors, know nothing of the beautiful days which are passing about and around them. Is not such a day worthy of a hymn? It is such a day as mankind might spend in praising and glorifying nature. It might be spent as a natural sabbath, if only all men would accept the hint, devoted to unworldly thoughts.

Journal, August 19, 1853

I am struck by the perfect confidence and success of Nature. The winter with its snow and ice is not an evil to be corrected. It is as it was designed and made to be, for the artist has had leisure to add beauty to use. To perceive freshly, with fresh senses, is to be inspired. Great winter itself looked like a precious gem reflecting rainbow colors from one angle. My body is all sentient. As I go here or there, I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery. What if we could daguerreo-

type our thoughts and feelings!—for I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribute of another world and condition of things.

Journal, December 11, 1855

After spending four or five days surveying and drawing a plan, incessantly, I especially feel the need of putting myself in communication with nature again to recover my tone, to withdraw out of the wearying and unprofitable world of affairs. The things I have been doing have but a fleeting and accidental importance, however much men are immersed in them, and yield very little valuable fruit. I wish again to participate in the serenity of nature, to share the happiness of the river and the woods. I thus from time to time break off my connection with eternal truths, and go with the shallow stream of human affairs, grinding at the mill of the Philistines. But when my task is done, with never-failing confidence, I devote myself to the infinite again. It would be sweet to deal with men more, I can imagine, but where dwell they? Not in the fields which I traverse.

Journal, January 4, 1857

This on my way to Conantum, 2.30 P.M. It is a bright, clear, warm November day. I feel blessed. I love my life. I warm toward all nature.

Journal, November 12, 1851

Nature never makes haste; her systems revolve at an even pace. The bud swells imperceptibly, without hurry or confusion, as though the short spring days were an eternity. All her operations seem separately, for the time, the single object for which all things tarry. Why, then, should man

hasten as if anything less than eternity were alloted for the last deed? If the setting sun seems to hurry him to improve while the day lasts, the chant of the crickets fails not to reassure him, even-measured as of old, teaching him to take his own time henceforth forever. The wise man is restful, never restless or impatient.

Journal, September 17, 1839

I have come to this hill to see the sun go down, to recover sanity and put myself again in relation with Nature. I would fain drink a draft of Nature's serenity. Let deep answer to deep. The sun goes down red and shorn of its beams, a sign of hot weather, as if the western horizon or the lower stratum of the air were filled with the hot dust of the day. The dust of his chariot eclipses his beams. I love to sit here and look off into the broad deep vale in which the shades of night are beginning to prevail. I return by moonlight.

Journal, June 5, 1854

I sit in my boat on Walden, playing my flute this evening, and see the perch, which I seemed to have charmed, hovering around me, and the moon travelling over the bottom, which is strewn with the wrecks of the forest, and feel that nothing but the wildest imagination can conceive of the manner of life we are living. Nature is a wizard. The Concord nights are stranger than the Arabian nights.

Journal, May 27, 1841

It is a luxury to muse by a wall-side in the sunshine of a September afternoon,—to cuddle down under a gray stone, and harken to the siren of the cricket. Day and night seem henceforth but accidents, and the time is always a still eventide, and as the close of a happy day. Parched fields

and mulleins gilded with the slanting rays are my diet. I know of no word so fit to express this disposition of Nature as *Alma Natura.*

Journal, September 20, 1838

Nature must be viewed humanly to be viewed at all; that is, her scenes must be associated with human affections, such as are associated with one's native place, for instance. She is most significant to a lover. A lover of nature is preëminently a lover of man.

Journal, June 30, 1852

To Walden. I go looking for *Cicindela,* [glowworm]—to see it run or fly amid the sere blackberry vines,—some life which the warmth of the dry sand under the spring sun has called forth; but I see none. I am reassured and reminded that I am the heir of eternal inheritances which are inalienable, when I feel the warmth reflected from this sunny bank. The eternity which I detect in Nature I predicate of myself also. How many springs have I had this same experience! I am encouraged for I recognize this steady persistency and recovery of Nature as a quality of myself.

Journal, March 23, 1856

Take long walks in stormy weather or through deep snows in the fields and woods, if you would keep your spirits up. Deal with brute nature. Be cold and hungry and weary.

Journal, December 25, 1856

We are related to all nature, animate and inanimate, and accordingly we share to some extent the nature of the dormant creatures. We all feel somewhat confined by the winter; the nights are longer and we sleep more. We also wear more clothes. Yet the thought is not less active; perhaps it is more so.

Journal, January 14, 1852

I love Nature partly because she is not a man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. Here a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all men I could not stretch myself. I should lose all hope. He is constraint; she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world; she makes me content with this. None of the joys she supplies is subject to his rules and definitions. What he touches he taints. In thought he moralizes. One would think that no free, joyful labor was possible to him. How infinite and pure the least pleasure of which nature is basis compared with the congratulation of mankind!

I have a room all to myself. It is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments. Pile up your books, the records of sadness, your saws and your laws, Nature is glad outside, and her many worms within will erelong topple them down. There are two worlds,—the post office and nature. I know them both. I continually forget mankind and their institutions, as I do a bank.

Journal, January 3, 1853

I make it my business to extract from Nature whatever nutriment she can furnish me, though at the risk of endless iteration. I milk the sky and the earth. Our woods and fields are the perfection of parks and groves, and gardens and grottoes and arbors, and paths and parterres, and vistas and landscapes. They are the natural consequence of what art and refinement we as a people have. They are the common which each village possesses, the true paradise, in comparison with which all elaborately and wilfully wealth-constructed parks and gardens are paltry imitations. No other creature effects such changes in nature as man.

Journal, November 3, 1853

Objects are concealed from our view not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray as because there

is no intention of the mind and eye toward them. We do not realize how far and widely, or how near and narrowly, we are to look. The greater part of the phenomena of nature are for this reason concealed to us all our lives. Here, too, as in political economy, the supply answers to the demand. Nature does not cast pearls before swine. There is just as much beauty visible to us in the landscape as we are prepared to appreciate,—not a grain more. The actual objects which one person will see from a particular hilltop are just as different from those which another will see as the persons are different. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, and then we can hardly see anything else.

Journal, November 4, 1858

Nature has so many shows for us she cannot afford to give much time for this. In a few days, perchance, these lakes will all have run away to the sea. Such are the pictures which she paints. We know too well what we shall have for our Saturday's dinner, but each day's feast in Nature's year is a surprise to us and adapted to our appetite and spirits. She has arranged such an order of feasts as never tires. Her motive is not economy but satisfaction.

Journal, March 28, 1859

How persevering Nature is, and how much time she has to work in, though she works slowly.

Journal, November 8, 1860

Does he chiefly own the land who coldly uses it and gets corn and potatoes out of it, or he who loves it and gets inspiration from it? How rarely a man's love for nature becomes a ruling principle with him, like a youth's affection for a maiden, but more enduring! All nature is my bride.

Journal, April 23, 1857

I have just read Ruskin's "Moderate Painters." I am disappointed in not finding it a more out-of-door book, for I have heard that such was its character, but its title might have warned me. He does not describe Nature as Nature, but as Turner painted her, and though the work betrays that he has given a close attention to Nature, it appears to have been with an artist's and critic's design. How much is written about Nature as somebody has portrayed her, how little about Nature as she is, and chiefly concerns us, *i.e.* how much prose, how little poetry!

Journal, October 6, 1857

How plainly we are a part of nature! For we live like the animals around us. All day the cow is cropping the grass of yonder meadow, appropriating, as it were, a part of the solid earth into herself, except when she rests and chews the cud; from time to time she wends her way to the river and fills her belly with that. Her food and drink are not scarce and precious, but the commonest elements of which nature is composed.

Journal, May 17, 1856

I seek acquaintance with Nature,—to know her moods and manners. Primitive Nature is the most interesting to me. I take infinite pains to know all the phenomena of the spring, for instance, thinking that I have here the entire poem, and then, to my chagrin, I hear that it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and have read, and that my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and grandest passages, and mutilated it in many places. I should not like to think that some demigod had come before me and picked out some of the best stars. I wish to know an entire heaven and an entire earth. All the great trees and beasts, fishes and fowl are gone. The streams, perchance, are somewhat shrunk.

I see that a shopkeeper advertises among his perfumes for handkerchiefs "meadow flowers" and "new-mown hay."

Journal, March 23, 1856

If I would preserve my relation to nature, I must make my life more moral, more pure and innocent. The problem is as precise and simple as a mathematical one. I must not live loosely, but more and more continently.

The Indian summer itself, said to be more remarkable in this country than elsewhere, no less than the reblossoming of flowers, the peep of the hylodes, and sometimes the faint warble of some birds, is the reminiscence, or rather the return, of spring,—the year renewing its youth.

Journal, November 23, 1853

From a letter to Mrs. Lucy Brown at Plymouth.
Concord, July 1, 1841

. . . I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness. I dream of looking abroad summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountain-side . . . I to be nature looking into nature with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks in the face of the sky. From some such recess I would put forth sublime thoughts daily, as the plant puts forth leaves. Now-a-nights I go on the hill to see the sun set, as one would go home at evening; the bustle of the village has run on all day, and left me quite in the rear; but I see the sunset, and find that it can wait for my slow virtue.

But I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this nature I praise. Why won't you believe that mine is more human than any single man or woman can be? that in it, in the sunset there, are all the qualities that can adorn a household, and that sometimes, in a fluttering leaf, one may hear all your Christianity preached.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.
Concord, May 2, 1848.

. . . What Nature is to the mind she is also to the body. As she feeds my imagination, she will feed my body; for what she says she means, and is ready to do. She is not simply beautiful to the poet's eye. Not only the rainbow and sunset are beautiful and inspiring . . . The heavens are as deep as our aspirations are high. So high as a tree aspires to grow, so high it will find an atmosphere suited to it. Every man should stand for a force which is perfectly irresistible. How can a man be weak who dares *to be* at all? Even the tenderest plants force their way up through the hardest earth, and the crevices of rocks; but a man no material power can resist. What a wedge, what a beetle, what a catapult, is an *earnest* man! What can resist him?

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 9, 1855.

. . . And to be admitted to Nature's hearth costs nothing. None is excluded, but excludes himself. You have only to push aside the curtains.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Negroes and Slavery

About three weeks ago my indignation was roused by hearing that one of my townsmen, notorious for meanness, was endeavoring to get and keep a premium of four dollars which a poor Irish laborer whom he had hired had gained by fifteen minutes' spading at our Agricultural Fair. To-

night a free colored-woman is lodging at our house, whose errand to the North is to get money to buy her husband, who is a slave to one Moore in Norfolk, Virginia. She persuaded Moore, though not a kind master, to buy him that he might not be sold further South. Moore paid six hundred dollars for him, but asks her eight hundred. My most natural reflection was that he was even meaner than my townsman. As mean as a slaveholder!

Journal, November 1, 1853

Newspapers

The last two *Tribunes* I have not looked at. I have no time to read newspapers. If you chance to live and move and have your being in that thin stratum in which the events which make the news transpire,—thinner than the paper on which it is printed,—then these things will fill the world for you; but if you soar above or dive below that plane, you cannot remember nor be reminded of them.

Journal, April 2, 1853

I do not know but it is too much to read one newspaper a week. I have tried it recently, and for so long it seems to me that I have not dwelt in my native region . . . You cannot serve two masters. It requires more than a day's devotion to know and to possess the wealth of a day.

Read not the Times. Read the Eternities. Conventionalities are at length as bad as impurities . . . Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven.

Excursions: Life Without Principle

The last new journal thinks that it is very liberal, nay, bold, but it dares not publish a child's thought on important subjects, such as life and death and good books. It requires

the sanction of the divines just as surely as the tamest journal does. If it had been published at the time of the famous dispute between Christ and the doctors, it would have published only the opinion of the doctors and suppressed Christ's. There is no need of a law to check the license of the press. It is law enough, and more than enough, to itself. Virtually, the community have come together and agreed what things shall be uttered, have agreed on a platform and to excommunicate him who departs from it, and not one in a thousand dares utter anything else. There are plenty of journals brave enough to say what they think about the government, this being a free one; but I know of none, widely circulated or well conducted, that dares say what it thinks about the Sunday or the Bible. They have been bribed to keep dark. They are in the service of hypocrisy.

Journal, March 2, 1858

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester:
Concord, November 20, 1849

. . . The newspaper gossip with which our hosts abuse our ears is as far from a true hospitality as the viands which they set before us. We did not need them to feed our bodies, and the news can be bought for a penny. . . . If words were invented to conceal thought, I think that newspapers are a great improvement on a bad invention. Do not suffer your life to be taken by newspapers.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Parker Pillsbury at Concord, N. H.:
Concord, April 10, 1861

. . . Blessed are they who never read a newspaper, for they shall see Nature, and, through her, God.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

New York City and Horace Greeley

Left at 7.30 A.M. for New York, by boat . . . Uninteresting, except the boat.

Went to Crystal Palace; admired the houses on Fifth Avenue, the specimens of coal at the Palace, one fifty feet thick as it was cut from the mine, in the form of a square column, iron and copper ore, etc. Saw sculptures and paintings innumerable, and armor from the Tower of London, some of the Eighth Century. Saw Greeley . . . and others. Greeley carried me to the new opera-house, where I heard Grisi and her troupe. First, at Barnum's Museum, I saw the camelopards, said to be one eighteen the other sixteen feet high . . . The body was only about five feet long. Looked through his diorama and found the houses all over the world much alike. Greeley appeared to know and be known by everybody; was admitted free to the opera, and we were led by a page to various parts of the house at different times.

Journal, November 22, 1854

Night

The intimations of the night are divine, methinks. Men might meet in the morning and report the news of the night,—what divine suggestions have been made to them. I find that I carry with me into the day often some such hint derived from the gods,—such impulses to purity, to heroism, to literary effort even, as are never day-born . . .

I rejoice when in a dream I have loved virtue and nobleness.

Journal, July 7, 1851

The great story of the night is the moon's adventures with the clouds. What innumerable encounters she has had with them!

Journal, June 25, 1852

Occupations

While I lived in the woods I did various jobs about the town,—some fence-building, painting, gardening, carpentering, etc., etc. One day a man came from the east edge of the town and said he wanted to get me to brick up a fireplace, etc., etc., for him. I told him I was not a mason, but he knew I had built my own house entirely and would not take no for an answer. So I went.

It was three miles off, and I walked back and forth each day, arriving early and working as late as if I were living there. The man was gone away most of the time, but had left there some sand dug up in his cow-yard for me to make mortar with. I bricked up a fireplace, papered a chamber, but my principal work was whitewashing ceilings. Some were so dirty that many coats would not conceal the dirt. In the kitchen I finally resorted to yellow-wash to cover the dirt. I took my meals there, sitting down with my employer (when he got home) and his hired men. I remember the awful condition of the sink, at which I washed one day, and when I came to look at what was called the towel I passed it by and wiped my hands on the air, and thereafter I resorted to the pump. I worked there hard three days, charging only a dollar a day.

Journal, October 4, 1857

The fruitless enterprise of some persons who rush helter-skelter, carrying out their crazy scheme,—merely "putting

it through," as they phrase it,—reminds me of those thistle-downs which, not being detained or steadied by any seed at the base, are blown away at the first impulse and go rolling over all obstacles.

Journal, November 18, 1858

Out-of-Doors

The wind has fairly blown me outdoors; the elements were so lively and active, and I so sympathized with them, that I could not sit while the wind went by. And I am reminded that we should especially improve the summer to live out-of-doors. When we may so easily, it behooves us to break up this custom of sitting in the house, for it is but a custom, and I am not sure that it has the sanction of common sense . . . Is the literary man to live always or chiefly sitting in a chamber through which nature enters by a window only? What is the use of the summer?

Journal, July 23, 1851

Go out before sunrise or stay out till sunset.

Journal, December 20, 1851

Living much out-of-doors in the air, in the sun and wind, will, no doubt, produce a certain roughness of character, will cause a thicker cuticle to grow over some of the finer sensibilities of a man's nature, as on his face and hands, or those parts of his body which are exposed to the weather; as staying in the house, on the other hand, may produce a softness and smoothness, not to say thinness, of skin, accompanied by an increased sensibility to certain impressions. And no doubt it is a nice matter to proportion rightly

the thick and thin skin. Perhaps we should be more susceptible to some influences important to our intellectual growth, if the sun had shown and the wind had blown on us a little less . . . But then methinks that is a scurf that will fall off fast enough,—that the natural remedy is to be found in the proportion which the night bears to the day, the winter to the summer, etc., thought to experience.

Journal, November 11, 1851

One thing that chiefly distinguishes this season from three weeks ago is that fine serene undertone or earth-song as we go by sunny banks and hillsides, the creak of crickets, which affects our thoughts so favorably, imparting its own serenity. It is time now to bring our philosophy out of doors. Our thoughts pillow themselves unconsciously in the troughs of this serene, rippling sea of sound.

Journal, June 4, 1857

In sunny and sheltered nooks we are in our best estate. There our thoughts flow and we flourish most . . .

A great part of our troubles are literally domestic or originate in the house and from living indoors. I could write an essay to be entitled "Out of Doors," undertake a crusade against houses . . . Let us religiously burn stumps and worship in groves, while Christian vandals lay waste the forest temples to build miles of meeting-houses and horsesheds and feed their box stoves.

Journal, April 26, 1857

Let a man have thought what he will of Nature in the house, she will still be novel outdoors. I keep out of doors for the sake of the mineral, vegetable, and animal in me . . .

My thought is part of the meaning of the world, and

hence I use a part of the world as a symbol to express my thought.

Journal, November 4, 1852

How many of our troubles are house-bred!

Journal, March 28, 1858

Pain

That aching of the breast, the grandest pain that man endures, which no other can assuage . . . If the teeth ache, they can be pulled. If the heart aches, what then? Shall we pluck it out?

Journal, February 23, 1857

The Panic of 1857

It is indeed a golden autumn. All kinds of crudities have a chance to get ripe this year. Was there ever such an autumn? And yet there was never such a panic and hard times in the commercial world. The merchants and banks are failing all the country over, but not the sand banks, solid and warm, and streaked with bloody blackberry vines. You may run on them as much as you please, even as the crickets do, and find their account in it. They are the stockholders in these banks, and I hear them creaking their content. You may see them on change in any warmer hour. In these banks, too, and such as these, are my funds deposited, funds of health and enjoyment. Invest in these

country banks. Let your capital be simplicity and contentment. I do not suspect the solvency of these banks. I know who is the president and cashier.

Journal, October 14, 1857

A Party

In the evening I went to a party. It is a bad place to go, thirty or forty persons, mostly young women, in a small room, warm and noisy. Was introduced to two young women. The first was as lively and loquacious as a chickadee, had been accustomed to the society of watering places, and therefore could get no refreshment from such a dry fellow as I. The other was said to be pretty looking, but I rarely look people in their faces, and, moreover, I could not hear what she said, there was such a clacking; could not see the motion of her lips when I looked that way. I could imagine better places for conversation, where there should be a certain degree of silence surrounding you, and less than forty talking at once. Why, this afternoon even I did better. Old Mr. Joseph Hosmer and I ate luncheon of cracker and cheese together in the woods. I heard all he said, though it was not much, to be sure, and he could hear me; and then he talked out of such a glorious repose, taking a leisurely bite at the cracker and cheese between his words, and so some of him was communicated to me, and some of me to him, I trust.

These parties, I think, are part of the machinery of modern society that young people may be brought together to form marriage connections.

What is the use in going to see people whom yet you never see, and who never see you?

Journal, November 14, 1851

Philanthropy

I confess that I have hitherto indulged very little in philanthropic enterprises. I have made some sacrifices to a sense of duty. While my townsmen and women are devoted in so many ways to the good of their fellows, I trust that one at least may be spared to other and less humane pursuits. You must have a genius for charity as well as for anything else. As for Doing-good, that is one of the professions which are full . . . But I would not stand between any man and his genius; and to him who does this work, which I decline, with his whole heart and soul and life, I would say, Persevere, even if the whole world call it doing evil, as it is most likely they will . . . If I were to preach at all in this strain, I should rather say, Set about being good . . . There is no odor so bad as that which arises from goodness tainted . . . Philanthropy is almost the only virtue which is sufficiently appreciated by mankind. Nay, it is greatly overrated; and it is our selfishness which overrates it . . . I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Pleasures

I am inclined to think bathing almost one of the necessaries of life, but it is surprising how indifferent some are to it. What a coarse, foul, busy life we lead, compared even with the South-Sea-Islanders, in some respects. Truant boys steal away to bathe, but the farmers, who most need it, rarely dip their bodies into the streams or ponds. Better the faith and

practice of the Hindoos who worship the sacred Ganges. We have not faith enough in the Musketaquid to wash in it, even after hoeing. Men stay on shore, keep themselves dry, and drink rum. Pray what were rivers made for? One farmer, who came to bathe in Walden one Sunday while I lived there, told me it was the first bath he had had for fifteen years. Now what kind of religion could his be?

Journal, July 8, 1852

It is remarkable how much power I can exert through the undulations which I produce by rocking my boat in the middle of the river. Some time after I have ceased I am surprised to hear the sound of the undulations which have just reached the shores acting on the thin ice there. I have stirred up the river to do this work, a power which I cannot put to rest. The secret of this power appears to lie in the extreme mobility, or, as I may say, irritability, of this element. It is the principle of the roller, or of an immense weight moved by a child on balls, and the momentum is tremendous.

Journal, December 3, 1853

The season which we seem to *live* in anticipation of is arrived. The water, indeed, reflects heaven because my mind does; such is its own serenity, its transparency and stillness.

With what sober joy I stand to let the water drip from me and feel my fresh vigor, who have been bathing in the same tub which the muskrat uses! Such a medicated bath as only nature furnishes. A fish leaps, and the dimple he makes is observed now. How ample and generous was nature! My inheritance is not narrow. Here is no other this evening. Those resorts which I most love and frequent, numerous and vast as they are, are as it were given up to me, as much as if I were an autocrat or owner of the world, and by my edicts excluded men from my territories. Per-

chance there is some advantage here not enjoyed in other countries. There are said to be two thousand inhabitants in Concord, and yet I find such ample space and verge, even miles of walking every day in which I do not meet nor see a human being, and often not very recent traces of them. So much of man as there is in your mind, there will be in your eye. Methinks that for a great part of the time, as much as it is possible, I walk as one possessing the advantages of human culture, fresh from society of men, but turned loose into the woods, the only man in nature, walking and meditating to a great extent as if man and his customs and institutions were not.

Journal, August 31, 1851

1.30 A.M. Full moon. Arose and went to the river and bathed, stepping very carefully not to disturb the household, and still carefully in the street not to disturb the neighbors. I did not walk naturally and freely till I had got over the wall. Then to Hubbard's Bridge at 2 A.M. There was a whip-poor-will in the road just beyond Goodwin's, which flew up and lighted on the fence and kept alighting on the fence within a rod of me and circling round me with a slight squeak as if inquisitive about me. I do not remember what I observed or thought in coming hither.

Sitting on the sleepers of Hubbard's Bridge, which is being repaired, now, at 3 o'clock A.M. I hear a cock crow. How admirably adapted to the dawn is that sound! as if made by the first rays of light rending the darkness, the creaking of the sun's axle heard already over the eastern hills.

Though man's life is trivial and handselled, Nature is holy and heroic. With what infinite faith and promise and moderation begins each new day! It is only a little after 3 o'clock, and already there is evidence of morning in the sky.

Journal, August 12, 1851

Men commonly exaggerate the theme. Some themes they think are significant and others insignificant. I feel that my life is very homely, my pleasures very cheap. Joy and sorrow, success and failure, grandeur and meanness, and indeed most words in the English language do not mean for me what they do for my neighbors. I see that my neighbors look with compassion on me, that they think it is a mean and unfortunate destiny which makes me walk in these fields and woods so much and sail on this river alone. But as long as I find here the only real elysium, I cannot hesitate in my choice. My work is writing, and I do not hesitate, though I know that no subject is too trivial for me, tried by ordinary standards; for, ye fools, the theme is nothing, the life is everything. All that interests the reader is the depth and intensity of the life excited. We touch our subject but by a point which has no breadth, but the pyramid of our experience, or our interest in it, rests on us by a broader or narrower base. That is, man is all in all, Nature nothing, but as she draws him out and reflects him. Give me simple, cheap, and homely themes.

Journal, October 18, 1856

That man is richest whose pleasures are cheapest.

Journal, March 11, 1856

From a letter to Daniel Ricketson at New Bedford.
Concord, September 27, 1855.

. . . I am so wedded to my way of spending a day,—require such broad margins of leisure, and such a complete wardrobe of old clothes,—that I am ill-fitted for going abroad. Pleasant is it sometimes to sit at home, on a single egg all day, in your own nest, though it may prove at last to be an egg of chalk. The old coat that I wear is Concord; it is my morning-robe and study-gown, my working dress and suit of

ceremony, and my nightgown after all. Cleave to the simplest ever. Home,—home, home.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Plowing

When I witness the first plowing and planting, I acquire a long-lost confidence in the earth,—that it will nourish the seed that is committed to its bosom. I am surprised to be reminded that there is warmth in it. We have not only warmer skies, then, but a warmer earth. The frost is out of it, and we may safely commit these seeds to it in some places. Yesterday I walked with Farmer beside his team and saw one furrow turned quite round his field. What noble work is plowing, with the broad and solid earth for material, the ox for fellow-laborer, and the simple but efficient plow for tool! Work that is not done in any shop, in a cramped position, work that tells, that concerns all men, which the sun shines and the rain falls on, and the birds sing over! . . . It comes pretty near to making a world. Redeeming a swamp does, at any rate. A good plowman is a *terrae filius.* The plowman, as we all know, whistles as he drives his team afield.

Journal, March 28, 1857

The Poet

The poet will maintain serenity in spite of all disappointments. He is expected to preserve an unconcerned and healthy outlook over the world, while he lives.

Miscellanies: Thomas Carlyle and His Works

Few come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires, lifting its evergreen arms to the light, to see its perfect success. Most are content to behold it in the shape of many broad boards brought to market, and deem that its true success. The pine is no more lumber than man is, and to be made into boards and houses is no more its true and highest use than the truest use of man is to be cut down and made into manure . . . Is it the lumberman who is the friend and lover of the pine, stands nearest to it, and understands its nature best? Is it the tanner or turpentine distiller who posterity will fable was changed into a pine at last? No, no, it is the poet who makes the truest use of the pine, who does not fondle it with an axe, or tickle it with a saw, or stroke it with a plane. It is the poet who loves it as his own shadow in the air, and lets it stand. It is as immortal as I am and will go to as high a heaven, there to tower above me still.

Journal, November 1, 1853

As I go through the fields, endeavoring to recover my tone and sanity and to perceive things truly and simply again, after having been perambulating the bounds of the town all week, and dealing with the most commonplace and worldly-minded men, and emphatically *trivial* things, I feel as if I had committed suicide in a sense . . . A fatal coarseness is the result of mixing in the trivial affairs of men. Though I have been associating even with the *select* men of this and the surrounding towns, I feel inexpressibly begrimed. My Pegasus has lost his wings; he has turned reptile and gone on his belly. Such things are compatible only with a cheap and superficial life.

The poet must keep himself unstained and aloof. Let him perambulate the bounds of Imagination's provinces, the realms of faery, and not the insignificant boundaries of towns. The excursions of the imagination are so boundless, the limits of towns are so petty.

Journal, September 20, 1851

But after all, man is the great poet, and not Homer or Shakespeare; and our language itself, and the common arts of life are his work.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

The works of the great poets have never yet been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them.

Walden: Chapter 3, Reading

Poetry

Prayer

Great God! I ask thee for no meaner pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself;
That in my conduct I may soar as high
As I can now discern with this clear eye;
And next in value, which thy kindness lends,
That I may greatly disappoint my friends,
Howe'er they think or hope it that may be,
They may not dream how thou'st distinguished me;
That my weak hand may equal my firm faith,
And my life practice more than my tongue saith;
That my low conduct may not show,
Nor my relenting lines,
That I thy purpose did not know,
Or overrated thy designs.

Miscellanies

From *The Black Knight*

The life that I aspire to live
No man proposeth me;
Only the promise of my heart
Wears its emblazonry.

Miscellanies

From *Inspiration*

If with light head erect I sing,
Though all the Muses lend their force,
From my poor love of anything,
The verse is weak and shallow as its source.

But if with bended neck I grope,
Listening behind me for my wit,
With faith superior to hope,
More anxious to keep back than forward it;

Making my soul accomplice there
Unto the flame my heart hath lit,
Then will the verse forever wear,—
Time cannot bend the line which God hath writ.

I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before;
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who knew but learning's lore.

Now chiefly is my natal hour,
And only now my prime of life;
Of manhood's strength it is the flower,
'Tis peace's end, and war's beginning strife.

It comes in summer's broadest noon,
By a gray wall, or some chance place,
Unseasoning time, insulting June,
And vexing day with its presuming face.

I will not doubt the love untold,
Which not my worth nor want hath bought,
Which wooed me young, and woos me old,
And to this evening hath me brought.

Mission

I've searched my faculties around,
To learn why life to me was lent:
I will attend the faintest sound,
And then declare to man what God hath meant.

Miscellanies

My years are like a stroll upon the beach,
As near the ocean's edge as I can go . . .
I have but few companions on the shore,—
They scorn the strand who sail upon the sea;
Yet oft I think the ocean they've sailed o'er
Is deeper down upon the strand to me.

Journal, January 10, 1840

*Sic Vita**

I am a parcel of vain strivings, tied
  By a chance bond together.
Dangling this way and that, their links
  We made so loose and wide,
    Methinks
  For milder weather.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

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* *This poem was tied to a bunch of violets bound together with a wisp of straw and tossed into the window of Mrs. Lucy Brown of Plymouth, Mass., who was visiting Concord in 1837.*

*Smoke**

Light-winged Smoke, Icarian bird,
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight,
Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
Circling above the hamlets as thy nest;
Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;
By night star-veiling, and by day
Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;
Go thou my incense upward from this hearth,
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

Walden: Chapter 13, House-Warming

Ponds

It [Walden Pond] is a gem of the first water which Concord wears in her coronet.

Walden: Chapter 9, The Ponds

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is the earth's eye . . . and the few motes in it are pure and beautiful like the imperfections in glass.

Walden: Chapter 9, The Ponds

**When the villagers were lighting their fires beyond the horizon, I too gave notice to the various wild inhabitants of Walden vale, by a smoky streamer from my chimney, that I was awake.*

Prejudices

It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Property

Without being the owner of any land, I find that I have a civil right in the river,—that if I am not a land-owner I am a water-owner. It is fitting, therefore, that I should have a boat, a cart, for this my farm . . . In relation to the river, I find my natural rights least infringed on. It is an extensive "common" still left . . .

I am surprised as well as delighted when any one wishes to know what I think . . . Commonly, if men want anything of me, it is only to know how many acres I make of their land, or, at most, what trivial news I have burdened myself with. They will never go to law for my meat. They prefer the shell.

Journal, March 23, 1853

On the 27th, when I made my last voyage for the season, I found a large sound pine log about four feet floating, and brought it home. Off the larger end I sawed two wheels, about a foot in diameter and seven or eight inches thick, and I fitted them to an axle-tree made of a joist, which I also found in the river, and thus I had a convenient pair of wheels on which to get up my boat and roll it about. The assessors called me into their office this year and said they wished to get an inventory of my property; asked if I had any real estate. No. Any notes at interest or railroad shares?

No. Any taxable property? None that I knew of. "I own a boat," I said; and one of them thought that might come under the head of a pleasure carriage, which is taxable. Now that I have wheels to it, it comes nearer to it. I was pleased to get my boat in by this means rather than on a borrowed wheelbarrow. It was fit that the river should furnish the material, and that in my last voyage on it, when the ice reminded me that it was time to put it in winter quarters.

Journal, November 30, 1855

Pursuits

It is essential that a man confine himself to pursuits—a scholar, for instance, to studies—which lie next to and conduce to his life, which do not go against the grain, either of his will or imagination. The scholar finds in his experience some studies to be most fertile and radiant with light, others dry, barren, and dark. If he is wise he will not persevere in the last . . . He will confine the observations of his mind as closely as possible to the experience or life of his senses. His thought must live with and be inspired with the life of the body . . . Dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows.

Journal, March 12, 1853

With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become students and observers, for certainly their nature and destiny are interesting to all alike.

Walden: Chapter 3, Reading

It is only the irresolute and idle who have no leisure for their proper pursuit. Be preoccupied with this, devoted to

it, and no accident can befall you, no idle engagements distract you. No man ever had the opportunity to postpone a high calling to a disagreeable *duty*. Misfortunes occur only when a man is false to his Genius. You cannot hear music and noise at the same time. We avoid all the calamities that may occur in a lower sphere by abiding perpetually in a higher. Most men are engaged in business the greater part of their lives, because the soul abhors a vacuum, and they have not discovered any continuous employment for man's nobler faculties . . . Every human being is the artificer of his own fate in these respects. Events, circumstances, etc., have their origin in ourselves. They spring from seed which we have sown.

Journal, April 27, 1854

I have been making pencils all day, and then at evening walked to see an old school-mate who is going to help make the Welland Canal navigable for ships round Niagara. He cannot see any such motives and modes of living as I; professes not to look beyond the securing of certain "creature comforts." And so we go silently different ways, with all serenity, I still in the moonlight through the village this fair evening to write these thoughts in my journal, and he, forsooth, to mature his schemes to ends as good, maybe, but different. So are we two made, while the same stars shine quietly over us. If I or he be wrong, Nature yet consents placidly. She bites her lips and smiles to see how her children will agree.

Journal, March 17, 1842

Rain and Rainbow

A warm, dripping rain, heard on one's umbrella as on a snug roof, and on the leaves without, suggests comfort. We go

abroad with a slow but sure contentment, like turtles under their shells . . . We are all compact, and our thoughts collected. We walk under the clouds and mists as under a roof . . . Robins still sing, and song sparrows more or less, and blackbirds, and the unfailing jay screams. How the thirsty grass rejoices! It has pushed up so visibly since morning . . .

A rainy day is to the walker in solitude and retirement like the night. Few travellers are about, and they half hidden under their umbrellas and confined to the highways. One's thoughts run in a different channel from usual. It is somewhat like the dark day; it is a light night.

Journal, April 4, 1853

8 P.M. We have had a succession of thunder-showers to-day and at sunset a rainbow. How moral is the world made! The bow is not utilitarian. Methinks men are great in proportion as they are moral. After the rain He sets his bow in the heavens! The world is not destitute of beauty . . . While men cultivate flowers below, God cultivates flowers above; he takes charge of the parterres in the heavens. Is not the rainbow a faint vision of God's face? How glorious should be the life of man passed under this arch! What more remarkable phenomenon than a rainbow, yet how little it is remarked!

Journal, June 22, 1852

Reflections

It is only a reflecting mind that see reflections. I am aware often that I have been occupied with shallow and commonplace thoughts, looking for something superficial, when I did not see the most glorious reflections, though exactly in

the line of my vision. If the fisherman was looking at the reflection, he would not know when he had a nibble! I know from my own experience that he may cast his line right over the most elysian landscape and sky, and not *catch* the slightest notion of them. You must be in an abstract mood to see reflections however distinct.

Journal, November 2, 1857

Reformers

Finally, there were the self-styled reformers, the greatest bores of all.

Walden: Chapter 6, Visitors

Repose

We constantly anticipate repose. Yet it surely can only be the repose that is in entire and healthy activity. It must be repose without rust. What is leisure but opportunity for more complete and entire action? Our energies pine for exercise. That time we spend in our duties is so much leisure, so that there is no man but has sufficient of it.

I make my own time. I make my own terms. I cannot see how God or Nature can ever get the start of me.

Journal, December 13, 1841

Riches

A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

Rivers

For the first time it occurred to me this afternoon what a piece of wonder a river is,—a huge volume of matter ceaselessly rolling through the fields and meadows of this substantial earth, making haste from high places . . . to its restless reservoir.

Journal, September 5, 1838

Satisfaction

There is nowhere any apology for despondency. Always there is life which, rightly lived, implies a divine satisfaction. I am soothed by the rain-drops on the door-sill; every globule that pitches thus confidently from the eaves to the ground is my life insurance. Disease and a rain-drop cannot coexist.

Journal, November 14, 1839

Science

The secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science requests me, as he probably has thousands of others, by a printed circular letter from Washington the other day, to fill the blank against certain questions, among which the most important one was what branch of science I was specially interested in, using the term science in the most comprehensive sense possible. Now, though I could state to a select few that department of human inquiry which engages me, and should be rejoiced at an opportunity to do

so, I felt it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe or attempt to describe to them that branch of science which specially interests me, inasmuch as they do not believe in a science which deals with a higher law. So I was obliged to speak to their condition and describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.

How absurd that, though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, and am by constitution as good an observer as most, yet a true account of my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only! If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly.

Journal, March 5, 1853

I think that the man of science makes this mistake, and the mass of mankind along with him: that you should coolly give your chief attention to the phenomenon which excites you as something independent of you, and not as it is related to you. The important fact is its effect on me. He thinks that I have no business to see anything else but just what he defines the rainbow to be, but I care not whether it is seen in the light or in the dark. It is the subject of the vision, the truth alone, that concerns me. The philosopher for whom rainbows, etc., can be explained away never saw them . . . the point of interest is somewhere *between* me and them (i.e. the objects).

Journal, November 5, 1857

I have just been through the process of killing the cistudo [turtle] for the sake of science; but I cannot excuse myself

for this murder, and see that such actions are inconsistent with the poetic perception, however they may serve science, and will affect the quality of my observations. I pray that I may walk more innocently and serenely through nature. No reasoning whatever reconciles me to this act. It affects my day injuriously. I have lost some self-respect. I have a murderer's experience in a degree.

Journal, August 18, 1854

Science is always brave; for to know is to know good; doubt and danger quail before her eye . . .

It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method . . .

Wisdom does not inspect, but behold. We must look a long time before we can see. Slow are the beginnings of philosophy.

Excursions: Natural History of Massachusetts

Seasons

The scent of the earliest spring flowers! I smelt the willow catkins to-day, tender and innocent after the rude winter . . . full of vernal promise. This odor,—how unlike anything that winter affords, or nature has afforded this six months! . . . The odor of spring, of life developing amid buds, of the earth's epithalamium . . . The beginnings of the year are humble. But though this fragrance is not rich, it contains and prophesies all others in it.

Journal, April 17, 1852

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, November 4, 1860.

. . . How wholesome winter is, seen far or near; how good, above all mere sentimental, warm-blooded, short-lived, soft-

hearted, *moral* goodness, commonly so-called. Give me the goodness which has forgotten its own deeds,—which God has seen to be good, and let be.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

As every season seems best to us in its turn, so the coming in of spring is like the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos and the realization of the Golden Age.

Walden: Chapter 17, Spring

How earnestly and rapidly each creature, each flower, is fulfilling its part while its day lasts! Nature never lost a day, nor a moment. As the planet in its orbit and around its axis, so do the seasons, so does time, revolve, with a rapidity inconceivable. In the moment, in the aeon, well employed, time ever advances with this rapidity. To an idler the man employed is terribly rapid . . . The immortals are swift. Clear the track! The plant that waited a whole year, and then blossomed the instant it was ready and the earth was ready for it, without the conception of delay, was rapid . . .

I must walk more with free senses . . . I have the habit of attention to such excess that my senses get no rest, but suffer from a constant strain. Be not preoccupied with looking. Go not to the object; let it come to you . . . What I need is not to look at all, but a true sauntering of the eye.

Journal, September 13, 1852

While I enjoy the sweet friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me. This rain which is now watering my beans and keeping me in the house waters me too. I needed it as much. And what if most are not hoed! Those who send the rain, whom I chiefly respect, will pardon me.

Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, methinks I am favored by the gods. They seem to whisper joy to me beyond my deserts, and that I do have a solid warrant and surety at their hands, which my fellows do not . . . I am especially guided and guarded.

Journal, July 14, 1845

This is a peculiar season, peculiar for its stillness. The crickets have ceased their song. The few birds are well-nigh silent. The tinted and gay leaves are now sere and dead, and the woods wear a sombre aspect. A carpet of snow under the pines and shrub oaks will make it look more cheerful . . . But thoughts still spring in man's brain. There are no flowers nor berries to speak of. The grass begins to die at the top . . . Ice has been discovered in somebody's tub very early this morning, the thickness of a dollar. The flies are betwixt life and death. The wasps come into the houses and settle on the walls and windows. All insects go into crevices . . . When I lived in the woods the wasps came by thousands to my lodge in November, as to winter quarters, and settled on my windows and on the walls over my head, sometimes deterring visitors from entering. Each morning they were numb with cold, I swept out some of them. But I did not trouble myself to get rid of them. They never molested me, though they bedded with me, and they gradually disappeared into what crevices I do not know, avoiding winter.

Journal, November 8, 1850

I was just thinking it would be fine to get a specimen leaf from each changing tree and shrub and plant in autumn, in September and October, when it had got its brightest characteristic color . . . Outline and copy its color exactly with paint in a book,—a book which should be a memorial of October, be entitled October Hues or Autumnal Tints.

Journal, November 22, 1853

The revolution of the seasons is a great and steady flow, a graceful, peaceful motion, like the swell on lakes and seas. Nowhere does any rigidity grow upon nature, no muscles harden, no bones protrude, but she is supple-jointed now and always. No rubbish accumulates from day to day, but still does freshness predominate on her cheek, and cleanliness in her attire . . . Nature keeps her besom always wagging. She has no lumber-room, no dust-hole, in her house. No man was ever yet too nice to walk in her woods and fields.

Journal, October 6, 1840

If you are afflicted with melancholy at this season, go to the swamp and see the brave spears of skunk-cabbage buds already advanced toward a new year . . . Do they seem to have lain down to die, despairing of skunk-cabbagedom? "Up and at 'em," "Give it to 'em," "Excelsior," "Put it through,"—these are their mottoes. Mortal human creatures must take a little respite in this fall of the year; their spirits do flag a little. There is a little questioning of destiny, and thinking to go like cowards where the "weary shall be at rest." But not so with the skunk-cabbage . . . Winter and death are ignored; the circle of life is complete . . . There is no can't nor cant in them. They see over the brow of winter's hill. They see another summer ahead.

Journal, October 31, 1857

These regular phenomena of the seasons get at last to be—they were *at first*, of course—simply and plainly phenomena or phases of my life. The seasons and all their changes are in me . . . Almost I believe the Concord would not rise and overflow its banks again, were I not here. After a while I learn what my moods and seasons are. I would have nothing subtracted. I can imagine nothing added. My moods are thus periodical, not two days in my year alike. The perfect

correspondence of Nature to man, so that he is at home in her! . . .

Those sparrows, too, are thoughts I have. They come and go . . . My loftiest thought is somewhat like an eagle that suddenly comes into the field of view suggesting great things and thrilling the beholder, as if it were bound hitherward with a message for me; but comes no nearer, but circles and soars away, growing dimmer, disappointing me, till it is lost behind a cliff or a cloud.

Spring is brown; summer, green; autumn, yellow; winter, white; November, gray.

Journal, October 26, 1857

I do not think much of that chemistry that can extract corn and potatoes out of a barren soil, but rather of that chemistry that can extract thoughts out of the life of a man on any soil. It is in vain to write on the seasons unless you have the seasons in you.

Journal, January 23, 1858

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. Be blown on by all the winds. Open all your pores and bathe in all the tides of Nature, in all her streams and oceans, at all seasons . . . Grow green with spring, yellow and ripe with autumn. Drink of each season's influence as a vial, a true panacea of all remedies mixed for your especial use . . . For all Nature is doing her best each moment to make us well. She exists for no other end. Do not resist her . . . Why, "nature" is but another name for health, and the seasons are but different states of health.

Journal, August 23, 1853

October is the month of painted leaves, of ripe leaves, when all the earth, not merely flowers, but fruits and leaves, are

ripe. With respect to its colors and its season, it is the sunset month of the year, when the earth is painted like the sunset sky . . .

October answers to that period in the life of man when he is no longer dependent on his transient moods, when all his experience ripens into wisdom, but every root, branch, leaf of him glows with maturity. What he has been and done in his spring and summer appears. He bears his fruit. . . .

Heard one cricket to-night.

Journal, November 14, 1853

How perfectly each plant has its turn! as if the seasons revolved for it alone.

Journal, September 17, 1857

We thus commonly antedate the spring more than any other season, for we look forward to it with more longing. We talk about spring as at hand before the end of February, yet it will be two good months, one sixth part of the whole year, before we can go a-maying . . . We may not even see the bare ground, and hardly the water, and yet we sit down and warm our spirits annually with this distant prospect of spring. As if a man were to warm his hands by stretching them toward the rising sun and rubbing them. We listen to the February cock-crowing and turkey-gobbling, as to a first course, or prelude.

Journal, March 2, 1859

Perchance as we grow old we cease to spring with the spring, and we are indifferent to the succession of years, and they go by without epoch as months. Woe be to us when we cease to form new resolutions on the opening of a new year!

God did not make this world in jest; no, nor in indiffer-

ence. These migrating sparrows all bear messages that concern my life . . . I love the birds and beasts because they are mythologically in earnest.

Journal, March 31, 1852

How imperceptibly the first springing takes place!

Journal, March 3, 1859

How silent are the footsteps of Spring!

Journal, March 3, 1859

The winter, cold and bound out as it is, is thrown to us like a bone to a famishing dog, and we are expected to get the marrow out of it. While the milkmen in the outskirts are milking so many scores of cows before sunrise these winter mornings, it is our task to milk the winter itself . . . But the winter was not given to us for no purpose, we must thaw its cold with our genialness. We are tasked to find out and appropriate all the nutriment it yields. If it is a cold and hard season, its fruit, no doubt, is the more concentrated and nutty. It took the cold and bleakness of November to ripen the walnut, and the human brain is the kernel which the winter itself matures. Not till then does its shell come off. The seasons were not made in vain. Because the fruits of the earth are already ripe, we are not to suppose that there is no fruit left for winter to ripen. It is for man the seasons and all their fruits exist. The winter was made to concentrate and harden and mature the kernel of his brain, to give tone and firmness and consistency to his thought. Then is the great harvest of the year, the harvest of thought. All previous harvests are stubble to this, mere fodder and green crop. Now we burn with a purer flame like the stars; our oil is winter-strained.

Journal, January 30, 1854

We have such a habit of looking away that we see not what is around us. How few are aware that in winter, when the earth is covered with snow and ice, the phenomenon of the sunset sky is double! The one is on the earth around us, the other in the horizon . . . In winter we are purified and translated. The earth does not absorb our thoughts. It becomes a Valhalla.

Journal, February 12, 1860

Perhaps what moves us most in winter is some reminiscence of far-off summer. How we leap by the side of open brooks! What beauty in the running brooks! What life! What society! . . . I hear faintly the cawing of a crow, far, far, away, echoing from some unseen wood-side, as if deadened by the springlike vapor which the sun is drawing from the ground. It mingles with the slight murmur of the village, the sound of children at play, as one stream empties gently into another, and the wild and tame are one. What a delicious sound! It is not merely crow calling to crow, for it speaks to me too. I am part of one great creature with him; if he has voice, I have ears. I can hear when he calls, and have engaged not to shoot nor stone him, if he will caw to me each spring . . . Ah, bless the Lord, O my soul! bless him for wildness, for crows that will not alight within gunshot! and bless him for hens, too, that croak and cackle in the yard.

Journal, January 12, 1855

I am reminded that we should especially improve the summer to live out-of-doors. When we may so easily, it behooves us to break up this custom of sitting in the house, for it is but a custom, and I am not sure that it has the sanction of common sense. A man no sooner gets up than he sits down again . . . The cockerel does not take up a new perch *in the barn*, and he is the embodiment of health and

common sense. Is the literary man to live always or chiefly sitting in a chamber through which nature enters by a window only? What is the use of summer?

Journal, July 23, 1851

The scream of the jay is a true winter sound. It is wholly without sentiment, and in harmony with winter . . .

Already we begin to anticipate spring, and this is an important difference between this time and a month ago. We begin to say that the day is springlike.

Is not January the hardest month to get through? When you have weathered that, you get into the gulf-stream of winter, nearer the shores of spring.

Journal, February 2, 1854

Nature now, like an athlete, begins to strip herself in earnest for her contest with her great antagonist Winter. In the bare trees and twigs what a display of muscle!

Journal, October 29, 1858

The pleasantest day of all. Started in a boat before 9 A.M., down river to Billerica with W. E. C. [Channing] I do not remember when I have taken a sail or a row on the river in December before . . . It is an anticipation, a looking through winter to spring. There is a certain resonance and elasticity in the air that makes the least sound melodious as in spring. The old unpainted houses under the trees look as if winter had come and gone. A side of one is painted as if with the pumpkin pies left over after Thanksgiving, it is so singular a yellow.

Journal, December 2, 1852

Winter, with its *inwardness*, is upon us. A man is constrained to sit down, and to think.

Journal, October 27, 1851

Sentences

Every sentence is the result of a long probation . . . A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plow instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

The fruit a thinker bears is *sentences*,—statements or opinions. He seeks to affirm something as true. I am surprised that my affirmations or utterances come to me ready-made, not fore-thought,—so that I occasionally awake in the night simply to let fall ripe a statement which I had never consciously considered before, and as surprising and novel and agreeable to me as anything can be. As if we only thought by sympathy with the universal mind, which thought while we were asleep.

Journal, April 1, 1860

Sentences which suggest as many things and are as durable as a Roman aqueduct; to frame these, that is the *art* of writing. Sentences which are expensive, towards which so many volumes, so much life, went; which lie like boulders on the page, up and down or across; which contain the seed of other sentences, not mere repetition, but creation; which a man might sell his grounds and castles to build.

Journal, August 22, 1851

Shiftlessness

None is so poor that he need sit on a pumpkin. That is shiftlessness.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Sickness

I have noticed that notional nervous invalids, who report to the community the exact condition of their heads and stomachs every morning, as if they alone were blessed or cursed with these parts; who are old betties and quiddles, if men; who can't eat their breakfasts when they are ready, but play with their spoons, and hanker after an ice-cream at irregular hours; who go more than half-way to meet any invalidity, and go to bed to be sick on the slightest occasion, in the middle of the brightest forenoon,—improve the least opportunity to be sick;—I observe that such are self-indulgent persons, without any regular and absorbing employment.

Journal, May 26, 1857

Silence

As the truest society approaches always nearer to solitude, so the most excellent speech finally falls into Silence. Silence is audible to all men, at all times, and in all places. She is when we hear inwardly, sound when we hear outwardly . . . Silence is the universal refuge.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

Simplicity

Our life is frittered away by detail. . . . Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count

half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of all this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

What you call bareness and poverty is to me simplicity. God could not be unkind to me if he should try. I love the winter, with its imprisonment and its cold, for it compels the prisoner to try new fields and resources. I love to have the river closed up for a season and a pause put to my boating, to be obliged to get my boat in. I shall launch it again in the spring with so much more pleasure . . . I love best to have each thing in its season only, and enjoy doing without it at all other times. It is the greatest of all advantages to enjoy no advantage at all. What you consider my disadvantage, I consider my advantage . . . I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world, and in the very nick of time, too.

Journal, December 5, 1856

Simplicity is the law of nature for men as well as for flowers.

Journal, February 29, 1852

Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

At present the vast majority of men, whether black or white, require the discipline of labor which enslaves them for their good. If the Irishman did not shovel all day, he would get drunk and quarrel. But the philosopher does not require the same discipline; if he shovelled all day, we should receive no elevating suggestions from him . . .

There are two kinds of simplicity,—one that is akin to foolishness, the other to wisdom. The philosopher's style of living is outwardly simple, but inwardly complex. The savage's style is both outwardly and inwardly simple. A simpleton can perform many mechanical labors, but is not capable of profound thought. It is not the tub that makes Diogenes, the Jove-born, but Diogenes the tub.

Journal, September 1, 1853

Again and again I congratulate myself on my so-called poverty. I was almost disappointed yesterday to find thirty dollars in my desk which I did not know that I possessed, though now I should be sorry to lose it. The week that I go away to lecture, however much I may get for it, is unspeakably cheapened. The preceding and succeeding days are a mere sloping down and up from it . . .

By poverty, *i.e.* simplicity of life and fewness of incidents, I am solidified and crystalized, as a vapor or liquid by cold. It is a singular concentration of strength and energy and flavor . . . By simplicity, commonly called poverty, my life is concentrated and so becomes organized, which before was inorganic and lumpish.

Journal, February 8, 1857

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, March 27, 1848.

. . . I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest man thinks he must attend to in a day; how singular an affair he thinks he

must omit. When the mathematician would solve a difficult problem, he first frees the equation of all incumbrances, and reduces it to its simplest terms. So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. I would stand upon facts. Why not see,—use our eyes? . . .

If a man constantly aspires, is he not elevated? Did ever a man try heroism, magnanimity, truth, sincerity, and find that there was no advantage in them? that it was a vain endeavor? Of course we do not expect that our paradise will be a garden . . .

My actual life is a fact, in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself; but for my faith and aspiration I have respect. It is from these that I speak . . . I have no designs on society, or nature, or God. I am simply what I am, or I begin to be that. I *live* in the *present*. I only remember the past, and anticipate the future. I love to live. . . . I believe something, and there is nothing else but that. I know that I am. I know that another is who knows more than I, who takes interest in me, whose creature, and yet whose kindred, in one sense, am I. I know that the enterprise is worthy. I know that things work well. I have heard no bad news.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau: Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Sincerity

Be resolutely and faithfully what you are; be humbly what you aspire to be. Be sure you give men the best of your wares, though they be poor enough, and the gods will help you lay up a better store for the future. Man's noblest gift to man is his sincerity, for it embraces his integrity also . . . I would be in society as in the landscape; in the presence of nature there is no reserve, nor effrontery.

Journal, January 24, 1841

This further experience also I gained: I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops.

Walden: Chapter 7, The Beanfield

There would be a New Year's gift indeed, if we would bestow on each other our sincerity. We should communicate our wealth, and not purchase that which does not belong to us for a sign. Why give each other a sign to keep? If we gave the thing itself, there would be no need of a sign.

Journal, February 7, 1841

Snow

The snow falls on no two trees alike, but the forms it assumes are as various as those of the twigs and leaves which receive it. They are, as it were, predetermined by the genius of the tree. So one divine spirit descends alike on all, but bears a peculiar fruit in each. The divinity subsides on all men, as the snowflakes settle on the fields and ledges and takes the form of the various clefts on which it lodges.

Journal, January 30, 1841

Very little evidence of God or man did I see just then, and life was not as rich and inviting an enterprise as it should be, when my attention was caught by a snowflake on my coat-sleeve. It was one of those perfect, crystalline, star-shaped ones, six-rayed, like a flat wheel with six spokes, only

the spokes were perfect little pine trees in shape, arranged around a central spangle. This little object, which with many of its fellows, rested unmelting on my coat, so perfect and beautiful reminding me that Nature had not lost all her pristine vigor yet, and why should man lose heart? . . . We are rained and snowed on with gems. I confess that I was a little encouraged, for I was beginning to believe that Nature was poor and mean, and I was now convinced that she turned off as good work as ever. What a world we live in! Where are the jewellers' shops? There is nothing handsomer than a snowflake and a dewdrop. I may say that the maker of the world exhausts his skill with each snowflake and dewdrop that he sends down.

Journal, January 6, 1858

For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms, and did my duty faithfully.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

The snow is the great betrayer. It not only shows the tracks of mice, otters, etc., etc., but the tree sparrows are more plainly seen against its white ground . . . It also drives the crows and other birds out of the woods to the villages for food. We might expect to find in the snow the footprint of a life superior to our own, of which no zoölogy takes cognizance . . . Why do the vast snow plains give us pleasure? . . . Is not all there consonant with virtue, justice, purity, courage, magnanimity? Are we not cheered by the sight? And does not all this amount to the track of a higher life than the otter's, a life which has not gone by and left a footprint merely, but is there with its beauty, its music, its perfume, its sweetness, to exhilarate and recreate us? Where there is a perfect government of the world according to the highest laws, is there no trace of intelligence there, whether in the snow or the earth, or in ourselves? . . . If one could

detect the meaning of the snow, would he not be on the trail of some higher life that has been abroad in the night? Are there not hunters who seek for something higher than foxes, with judgment more discriminating than the senses of fox-hounds, who rally to a nobler music than that of the hunting-horn? . . . Is the great snow of use to the hunter only, and not to the saint, or him who is earnestly building up a life? Do the Indian and hunter only need snow-shoes, while the saint sits indoors in embroidered slippers?

Journal, January 1, 1854

Sobriety

I would fain keep sober always; and there are infinite degrees of drunkenness.

Walden: Chapter 11, Higher Laws

Society and Solitude

It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run "amok" against society; but I preferred that society should run "amok" against me, it being the desperate party.

Walden: Chapter 8, The Village

Here is this vast, savage, howling mother of ours, Nature, lying all around, with such beauty, and such affection for her children, as the leopard; and yet we are so early weaned from her breast to society, to that culture which is exclusively an interaction of man on man,—a sort of breeding

in and in, which produces . . . a civilization destined to have a speedy limit . . . When we should be still growing children, we are already little men.

Excursions: Essay on Walking

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

The man who goes alone can start to-day; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. . . . I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals, not having had time to acquire any new value for each other.

Walden: Chapter 5, Solitude

Our horizon is never quite at our elbows.

Walden: Chapter 5, Solitude

I had three chairs in my house, one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society.

Walden: Chapter 6, Visitors

What an army of non-producers society *produces*,—ladies generally (old and young) and gentlemen *of leisure*, so called! Many think themselves well employed as charitable dispensers of wealth which somebody else earned, and these

who produce nothing; being of the most luxurious habits, are precisely they who want the most, and complain loudest when they do not get what they want . . . Meanwhile they fill the churches, and die and revive from time to time. They have nothing to do but sin, and repent of their sins. How can you expect such bloodsuckers to be happy? . . .

It is important, then, that we should air our lives from time to time by removals, and excursions into the fields and woods,—starve our vices . . . Do not sit so long over any cellar-hole as to tempt your neighbor to bid for the privilege of digging saltpetre there.

So live that only the most beautiful wild-flowers will spring up where you have dwelt,—harebells, violets, and blue-eyed grass.

Journal, September 23, 1859

Society, man, has no prize to offer me that can tempt me; not one. That which interests a town or city or any large number of men is always something trivial, as politics. It is impossible for me to be interested in what interests men generally. Their pursuits and interests seem to me frivolous. . . . These affairs of men are so narrow as to afford no vista, no distance; it is a shallow foreground only, no large extended views to be taken.

Journal, April 24, 1852

In the society of many men, or in the midst of what is called success, I find my life of no account, and my spirits rapidly fall. I would rather be the barrenest pasture lying fallow than cursed with the compliments of kings, than be the sulphurous and accursed desert where Babylon once stood. But when I have only a rustling oak leaf, or the faint metallic cheep of a tree sparrow, for variety in my winter walk, my life becomes continent and sweet as the kernel of a nut. I would rather hear a single shrub oak leaf at the

end of a wintry glade rustle of its own accord at my approach, than receive a shipload of stars and garters from the strange kings and peoples of the earth.

Journal, February 8, 1857

What if we feel a yearning to which no breast answers? I walk alone. My heart is full. Feelings impede the current of my thoughts. I knock on the earth for my friend. I expect to meet him at every turn; but no friend appears, and perhaps none is dreaming of me. I am tired of frivolous society, in which silence is forever the most natural and the best manners. . . . Two yards of politeness do not make society for me. One complains that I do not take his jokes. I took them before he had done uttering them, and went my way. One talks to me of his apples and pears, and I depart with my secret untold. His are not the apples that tempt me.

Journal, June 11, 1855

There is nothing so sanative, so poetic, as a walk in the woods and fields even now, when I meet none abroad for pleasure . . . Nothing so inspires me and excites such serene and profitable thought . . . I suppose that this value, in my case, is equivalent to what others get by churchgoing and prayer. I come to my solitary and woodland walk as the homesick go home. I thus dispose of the superfluous and see things as they are, grand and beautiful. I have told many that I walk every day about half the daylight, but I think they do not believe it . . . Our *skylights* are thus far away from the ordinary resorts of men. I am not satisfied with ordinary windows. I must have a true *skylight*. My true skylight is on the outside of the village. I am not thus expanded, recreated, enlightened, when I meet a company of men. I do not invariably find myself translated under those circumstances. They bore me. The man I meet with is not often so instructive as the silence he breaks . . . I am

aware that most of my neighbors would think it a hardship to be compelled to linger here one hour, especially this bleak day, and yet I receive this sweet and ineffable compensation for it. It is the most agreeable thing I do. Truly, my coins are uncurrent with them.

Journal, January 7, 1857

The conversation of gentlemen after dinner!—no words are so tedious. Never a natural or simple word or yawn . . . My acquaintances sometimes wonder why I will impoverish myself by living aloof from this or that company, but greater would be the impoverishment if I should associate with them.

Journal, December 17, 1851

Ah! I need solitude. I have come forth to this hill at sunset to see the forms of the mountains in the horizon,—to behold and commune with something grander than man. Their mere distance and unprofanedness is an infinite encouragement. It is with infinite yearning and aspiration that I seek solitude, more and more resolved and strong; but with a certain genial weakness that I seek society ever . . . As I go home by Hayden's I smell the burning meadow. I love the scent. It is my pipe. I smoke the earth.

Journal, August 14, 1854

I am invited to take some party of ladies or gentlemen on an excursion,—to walk, or sail, or the like,—but by all kinds of evasion I omit it, and am thought to be rude and unaccommodating therefore. They do not consider that the wood-path and the boat are my studio, where I maintain a sacred solitude and cannot admit promiscuous company. I will see them occasionally in an evening or at the table, however. They do not think of taking a child away from its

school to go a-huckleberrying with them. Why should not I, then, have my school and school hours to be respected? Ask me for a certain number of dollars if you will, but do not ask me for my afternoons.

Journal, September 16, 1859

I thrive best on solitude. If I have had a companion only one day in a week, unless it were one or two I could name, I find that the value of the week to me has been seriously affected. It dissipates my days, and often it takes me another week to get over it . . . I laugh when you tell me of the danger of impoverishing myself by isolation.

Journal, December 28, 1856

Sorrow

[*Thoreau's brother John died January 11, 1842*]
The death of friends should inspire us as much as their lives. If they are great and rich enough, they will leave consolation to the mourners before the expenses of their funerals. It will not be hard to part with any worth, because it is worthy. How can any good depart? It does not go and come, but we. Shall we wait for it? Is it slower than we?

Journal, February 20, 1842

I can remember when I was more enriched by a few cheap rays of light falling on the pond side than by this broad sunny day. Riches have wings indeed. The weight of present woe will express the sweetness of past experience. When sorrow comes, how easy it is to remember pleasure! When, in winter, the bees cannot make new honey, they consume the old . . .

I thank God for sorrow. It is hard to be abused. Is He not

kind still, who lets this south wind blow, this warm sun shine on me?

Journal, April 3, 1842

Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it come to have a separate and integral interest.

Journal, November 13, 1839

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.
Concord, May 2, 1848.

. . . You ask if there is no doctrine of sorrow in my philosophy. Of acute sorrow I suppose that I know comparatively little. My saddest and most genuine sorrows are apt to be but transient regrets. The place of sorrow is supplied, perchance, by a certain hard and proportionably barren indifference. I am kin to the sod, and partake largely of its dull patience,—in winter expecting the sun of spring. In my cheapest moments I am apt to think that it is not my business to be "seeking the spirit," but as much its business to be seeking me. I know very well what Goethe meant when he said that he never had a chagrin but he made a poem out of it. I have altogether too much patience of this kind. I am too easily contented with a slight and almost animal happiness. My happiness is a good deal like that of the woodchucks . . .

I do not write this time at my hut in the woods. I am at present living with Mrs. Emerson, whose house is an old home of mine, for company during Mr. Emerson's absence.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Mrs. Lucy Brown at Plymouth
Concord, March 2, 1842.

. . . Soon after John's death I listened to a music-box, and if, at any time, that event seemed inconsistent with the

beauty and harmony of the universe, it was then gently constrained into the placid course of nature by those steady notes, in mild and unoffended tone echoing far and wide under the heavens. But I find these things more strange than sad to me. What right have I to grieve, who have not ceased to wonder? We feel at first as if some opportunities of kindness and sympathy were lost, but learn afterward that any *pure grief* is ample recompense for all. That is, if we are faithful; for a great grief is but sympathy with the soul that disposes events, and is as natural as the resin on Arabian trees. Only Nature has a right to grieve perpetually, for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful if he is not. *(Note: Thoreau's brother John died January 11, 1842.)*

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau: Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Sound

All these sounds, the crowing of cocks, the baying of dogs, and the hum of insects at noon, are the evidence of nature's health or sound state.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

All sound heard at the greatest possible distance produces one and the same effect, a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by the azure tint it imparts to it.

Walden: Chapter 4, Sounds

It is a rare soundness when cow-bells and horns are heard from over the fields. And now I see the beauty and full meaning of that word "sound." Nature always possesses a certain sonorousness, as in the hum of insects, the booming of ice, the crowing of cocks in the morning, and the barking of dogs in the night, which indicates her sound state. God's voice is but a clear bell sound. I drink in a wonderful health, a cordial, in sound. The effect of the slightest tinkling in the horizon measures my own soundness. I thank God for sound; it always mounts and makes me mount. I think I will not trouble myself for any wealth, when I can be so cheaply enriched.

Journal, February 28, 1841

Stars

After whatever revolutions in my moods and experiences, when I come forth at evening, as if from years of confinement to the house, I see the few stars which make the constellation of the Lesser Bear in the same relative position,—the everlasting geometry of the stars. How incredible to be described are these bright points which appear in the blue sky as the darkness increases, said to be other worlds, like the berries on the hills when the summer is ripe!

Journal, October 28, 1852

What a consolation are the stars to man!—so high and out of his reach, as is his own destiny . . . My fate is in some sense linked with that of the stars, and if they are to persevere to a great end, shall I die who could conjecture it? It surely is some encouragement to know that the stars are my fellow-creatures, for I do not suspect but they are reserved for a high destiny. Has not he who discovers and

names a planet in the heavens as long a year as it? I do not fear that any misadventure will befall *them*. Shall I not be content to disappear with the missing stars? Do I mourn their fate?

Man's moral nature is a riddle which only eternity can solve.

Journal, March 19, 1842

The stars are apexes of what wonderful triangles!

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Truly the stars were given for a consolation to man. We should not know but our life were fated to be always groveling, but it is permitted to behold them, and surely they are deserving of a fair destiny. We see laws which never fail, of whose failure we never conceived; and their lamps burn all the night, too, as well as all day,—so rich and lavish is that nature which can afford this superfluity of light.

Excursions: A Walk to Wachusett

The State

It appears to me that those things which most engage the attention of men, as politics, for instance, are, it is true, vital functions of human society, but should be unconsciously performed like the vital functions of the natural body . . . Politics is, as it were, the gizzard of society, full of grit and gravel, and the two political parties are its two opposite halves which grind each other. Not only individuals, but states, have thus a confirmed dyspepsia, which expresses itself, you can imagine by what sort of eloquence. Our life is not altogether a forgetting, but also, to a great extent, a remembering of that which, perchance, we should never have been conscious, which should not be permitted

to distrust a man's waking hours. Why should we not meet, not always as dyspeptics, but sometimes as *eu*peptics?

Journal, November 10, 1851

I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as desirous of being a good neighbor as I am of being a bad subject; and as for supporting schools, I am doing my part to educate my fellow-countrymen now. It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I do not care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a man or a musket to shoot with,—the dollar is innocent,—but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance. In fact, I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual in such cases.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Success

I sometimes seem to myself to owe all my little success, all for which men commend me, to my vices. I am perhaps more wilful than others and make enormous sacrifices, even of others' happiness, it may be, to gain my ends. It would seem as if nothing good could be accomplished without some vice to aid in it.

Journal, September 21, 1854

If the day and night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs—is more elastic, starry, and immortal—that is your success.

Walden: Chapter 11, Higher Laws

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: 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 a success unexpected in common hours . . . In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

We must first succeed alone, that we may enjoy our success together . . . In this matter of reforming the world, we have little faith in corporations; not thus was it first formed.

Miscellanies: Paradise (To Be) Regained

Sunday

We have only to be reminded of the kind of respect paid to the Sabbath as a *holy* day here in New England, and the fears which haunt those who *break* it, to see that our neighbors are the creatures of an equally gross superstition with the ancients. I am convinced that there is no very important difference between an New-Englander's religion and a Roman's. We both worship in the shadow of our sins; they erect temples for us. Jehovah has no superiority to Jupiter. The New-Englander is a pagan suckled in a creed outworn. Superstition has always reigned. It is absurd to think that these farmers, dressed in their Sunday clothes, proceeding to church, differ essentially in this respect from the Roman peasantry. They have merely changed the

names and number of their gods. Men were as good then as they are now, and loved one another as much—or little.

Journal, June 5, 1853

There was an old gentleman here to-day who lived in Concord when he was young and remembers how Dr. Ripley talked to him and other little boys from the pulpit, as they came into church with their hands full of lilies, saying that these lilies looked so fresh that they must have been gathered that morning! Therefore they must have committed the sin of bathing this morning! Why, this is as sacred a river as the Ganges, sir.

Journal, September 2, 1856

When I was young and compelled to pass my Sunday in the house without the aid of interesting books, I used to spend many an hour till the wished-for sundown, watching the martins soar, from an attic window; and fortunate indeed did I deem myself when a hawk appeared in the heavens, though far toward the horizon against a downy cloud, and I searched for hours till I had found his mate. They, at least, took my thoughts from earthly things.

Journal, April 17, 1852

I wish to meet the facts of life—the vital facts, which are the phenomena or actuality the gods meant to show us—face to face, and so I came down here. Life! who knows what it is, what it does? If I am not quite right here, I am less wrong than before; and now let us see what they will have. The preacher, instead of vexing the ears of drowsy farmers on their day of rest, at the end of the week,—for Sunday always seemed to me like a fit conclusion of an ill-spent week, and not the fresh and brave beginning of a new one, with this other draggletail and postponed affair

of a sermon, from thirdly to fifteenthly, should teach them with a thundering pause and simplicity. "Stop! Avast! Why so fast?"

Journal, July 6, 1845

Sunset

The man is blessed who every day is permitted to behold anything so pure and serene as the western sky at sunset, while revolutions vex the world.

Journal, December 27, 1851

Surveying

Surveying the last three days. They have not yielded much that I am aware of . . . All I find is old boundmarks, and the slowness and dullness of farmers reconfirmed. They even complain that I walk too fast for them. Their legs have become stiff from toil. This coarse and hurried outdoor work compels me to live grossly or be inattentive to my diet; that is the worst of it. Like work, like diet; that, I find, is the rule. Left to my chosen pursuits, I should never drink tea or coffee, nor eat meat . . . It is remarkable how unprofitable it is for the most part to talk with farmers. They commonly stand on their good behavior and attempt to moralize or philosophize in a serious conversation. . . .

I have dined out five times and tea'd once within a week. Four times there was tea on the dinner-table, always meat, but once baked beans, always pie, but no puddings. I suspect that tea has taken the place of cider with farmers . . . This is my portrait-painting—when I would fain be employed on higher subjects. I have offered myself much more

earnestly as a lecturer than a surveyor. Yet I do not get any employment as a lecturer; was not invited to lecture once last winter, and only once (without pay) this winter. But I can get surveying enough, which a hundred others in this country can do as well as I, though it is not boasting much to say that a hundred others in New England cannot lecture as well as I on my themes . . . It is because they make a low demand on themselves . . . Woe be to the generation that lets any higher faculty in its midst go unemployed! That is to deny God and know him not, and he, accordingly, will know not of them.

Journal, December 22, 1853

I have been surveying for twenty or thirty days, living coarsely, even as respects my diet (for I find I will always alter to suit my employment), indeed living quite a trivial life, and to-night, for the first time, made a fire in my chamber and endeavored to return to myself. I wished to ally myself to the powers that rule the universe. I wished to dive into some deep stream of thoughtful and devoted life which meanders through retired and fertile meadows far from towns . . . I wished to live, ah, as far away as a man can think. I wished for leisure and quiet to let my life flow in its proper channels, with its proper currents; when I might not waste the days, might establish daily prayer and thanksgiving with my family, might do my own work, and not the work of Concord and Carlisle, which would yield me better than money. I bethought myself, while my fire was kindling, to open one of Emerson's books, which it happens that I rarely look at, and try what a chance sentence out of that could do for me, thinking at the same time of a conversation I had with him the other night, I finding fault with him for the stress he had laid on some of Margaret Fuller's whims and superstitions, but he declaring gravely that she was one of those persons whose experience warranted her attaching importance to such things as the

Sortes Virgilanae, for instance, of which her numerous friends could give remarkable accounts. At any rate, I saw that he was to regard such things more seriously than I . . .

Nothing is so sure to make itself known as the truth, for what else waits to be known?

Journal, December 12, 1851

Surveying Versus Lecturing

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, February 27, 1853.

I have not answered your letter before, because I have been almost constantly in the fields surveying of late. It is long since I have spent many days so profitably in a pecuniary sense. I have earned just a dollar a day for seventy-six days past . . . This instead of lecturing, which has not offered, to pay for that book which I printed. [*The Week*] I have not only cheap hours, but cheap weeks and months; that is, weeks which are bought at the rate I have named. Not that they are quite lost to me, or make me very melancholy, alas! for I too often take a cheap satisfaction in so spending them,—weeks of pasturing and browsing, like beeves and deer,—which give me animal health, it may be, but create a tough skin over the soul and intellectual part. Yet, if men should offer my body a maintenance for the work of my head alone, I feel that it would be a dangerous temptation.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

The Telegraph Harp

The telegraph harp again. Always the same unremembrable revelation it is to me . . . I never hear it without think-

ing of Greece. How the Greeks *harped* upon the words immortal, ambrosial! They are what it says. It stings my ear with everlasting truth. It allies Concord to Athens, and both to Elysium. It always intoxicates me, makes me sane, reverses my views of things. I am pledged to it . . . This wire is my redeemer. It always brings a special and a general message to me from the Highest. Day before yesterday I looked at the mangled and blackened bodies of men which had been blown up by powder, and felt that the lives of men were not innocent, and that there was an avenging power in nature. To-day I hear this immortal melody, while the west wind is blowing balmily on my cheek, and methinks a roseate sunset is preparing. Are there not two powers?

Journal, January 9, 1853

At the entrance to the Deep Cut, I heard the telegraph-wire vibrating like an aeolian harp . . . I instantly sat down on a stone at the foot of the telegraph pole, and attended to the communication. It merely said: "Bear in mind, Child, and never for an instant forget, that there are higher planes, infinitely higher planes, of life than this thou art now travelling on. Know that the goal is distant, and is upward, and is worthy of all your life's efforts to attain to." And then it ceased, and though I sat some minutes longer I heard nothing more.

Journal, September 12, 1851

The telegraph and the railroad are closely allied, and it is fit and to be expected that at a little distance their music should be the same. There are a few sounds still which never fail to affect me. The notes of a wood thrush and the sound of a vibrating chord, these affect me as many sounds once did often, and as almost all should . . . The contact of sound with a human ear whose hearing is pure and un-

impaired is coincident with an ecstasy. Sugar is not so sweet to the palate as sound to the healthy ear; the hearing of it makes men brave.

Journal, December 31, 1853

The winds of autumn draw a few strains from the telegraph, after all. At this post it is only a musical hum, but at the next it attains to clearness and reminds me of the isles of Greece. I put my ear to the post. Every fiber resounded with the increasing inflatus, but when it rose to a more melodious and tenser tone it seemed to retire and concentrate itself in the pith of the wood.

Journal, November 4, 1852

The telegraph harp has spoken to me more distinctly and effectually than any man ever did.

Journal, March 12, 1852

Temperance

When I have been asked to speak at a temperance meeting, my answer has been, "I am too transcendental to serve you in your way." They would fain confine me to the rum-sellers and rum-drinkers, of whom I am not one, and whom I know little about.

Journal, June 7, 1851

Thoughts

Some men, methinks have found only their hands and feet. At least, I have seen some who appeared never to have

found their heads, but used them only instinctively. What shall we say of those timid folks who carry the principle of thinking nothing, and doing nothing, and being nothing, to such an extreme? . . . They atone for their producing nothing by a brutish respect for something.

Excursions: Days and Nights in Concord

Explore your own higher latitudes . . . Be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade but of thought.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

No man's thoughts are new, but the style of their expression is the never-failing novelty which cheers and refreshes men.

Miscellanies: Thomas Carlyle and His Works

So far as thinking is concerned, surely original thinking is the divinest thing.

Journal, November 16, 1851

Those sparrows, too, are thoughts I have. They come and go; they flit by quickly on their migrations, uttering only a faint *chip,* I know not whither or why exactly. One will not rest upon its twig for me to scrutinize it. The whole copse will be alive with my rambling thoughts, bewildering me by their very multitude, but they will all be gone directly without leaving me a feather. My loftiest thought is somewhat like an eagle that suddenly comes into the field of view, suggesting great things and thrilling the beholder, as

if it were bound hitherward with a message for me; but it comes no nearer, but circles and soars away, growing dimmer, disappointing me, till it is lost behind a cliff or a cloud.

Journal, October 26, 1857

One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house, the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room for thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two before they make their port . . . I have found it a singular luxury to talk across the pond to a companion on the opposite side.

Walden: Chapter 6, Visitors

A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts.

Walden: Chapter 17, Spring

In proportion as I have celestial thoughts, is the necessity for me to be out and behold the western sky before sunset these winter days . . . The lover of contemplation, accordingly, will gaze much into the sky. Fair thoughts and a serene mind make fair days . . . As the skies appear to a man, so is his mind. Some see only clouds there; some prodigies and portents; some rarely look up at all; their heads, like the brutes', are directed toward earth. Some behold there serenity, purity, beauty ineffable.

Journal, January 17, 1852

The entertaining a single thought of a certain elevation makes all men of one religion. It is always some base alloy that creates the distinction of sects. Thought greets thought over the widest gulfs of time with unerring freemasonry.

Journal, August 8, 1852

I love very well this cloudy afternoon, so sober and favorable to reflection after so many bright ones. What if the clouds shut out the heavens, provided they concentrate my thoughts and make a more celestial heaven below! I hear the crickets plainer; I wander less in my thoughts, am less dissipated; am aware how shallow was the current of my thoughts before . . .

I seem to be more constantly merged in nature; my intellectual life is more obedient to nature than formerly, but perchance less obedient to spirit.

Journal, October 12, 1851

I cannot think nor utter my thought unless I have infinite room. The cope of heaven is not too high, the sea is not too deep, for him who would unfold a great thought. It must feed me and warm and clothe me. It must be an entertainment to which my whole nature is invited. I must know that the gods are to be my fellow-guests.

Journal, March 22, 1842

The pleasures of the intellect are permanent, the pleasures of the heart are transitory . . . Associate reverently and as much as you can with your loftiest thoughts. Each thought that is welcomed and recorded is a nest egg, by the side of which more will be laid. Thoughts accidentally thrown together become a frame in which more may be developed and exhibited. Perhaps this is the main value of a habit of writing, of keeping a journal,—that so we remember our best hours and stimulate ourselves. My thoughts are my company. They have a certain individuality and separate existence, aye, personality . . . Thought begat thought.

Journal, January 22, 1852

Thus much *let* a man do: confidently and heartily live up to his thought; for its error, if there be any, will soonest

appear in practice, and if there be none, so much may he reckon as actual progress in the way of living.

Journal, March 4, 1838

Why can we not oftener refresh one another with original thoughts? . . . fresh and fragrant thoughts communicated to us fresh from a man's experience and life!

Why do you flee so soon, sir, to the theatres, lecture-rooms, and museums of the city?

Journal, October 18, 1859

The thinker, he who is serene and self-possessed, is the brave, not the desperate soldier. He who can deal with his thoughts as a material . . . he is the man of the greatest and rarest vigor . . . He is the man of energy, in whom subtle and poetic thoughts are bred. Common men can enjoy partially; they can go a-fishing rainy days; they can read poems perchance, but they have not the vigor to beget poems. They can enjoy feebly, but they cannot create . . . What is all your building, if you do not build with thoughts? No exercise implies more real manhood and vigor than joining thought to thought. How few men can tell what they have thought! I hardly know half a dozen who are not too lazy for this . . . You conquer fate by thought . . . There is no more Herculean task than to think a thought about this life and then get it expressed.

Journal, May 6, 1858

If I am visited by a thought, I chew that cud each successive morning as long as there is any flavor in it. Until my keepers throw down some fresh fodder.

Journal, August 9, 1858

From a letter to his sister Helen at Taunton, Mass.
Concord, October 27, 1837

. . . For a man to act himself, he must be perfectly free; otherwise he is in danger of losing all sense of responsibility or of self-respect . . . Letter-writing too often degenerates into a communication of facts, and not of truths; of other men's deeds and not our thoughts. What are the convulsions of a planet, compared with the emotions of the soul? or the rising of a thousand suns, if that is not enlightened by a ray?

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Mrs. Lucy Brown at Plymouth, Mass.
Concord, July 21, 1841

. . . What quiet thoughts have you nowadays which will float on that east wind to west . . . what progress made from *can't* to *can*, in practise and theory? . . . Do you have any still, startling, well moments, in which you think grandly, and speak with emphasis? Don't take this for sarcasm, for not in a year of the gods, I fear, will such a golden approach to plain speaking revolve again. But away with such fears; by a few miles of travel we have not distanced each other's sincerity . . . If the fates allot you a serene hour, don't fail to communicate some of its serenity to your friend.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Milton, Mass.
Concord, August 9, 1850

. . . Our thoughts are the epochs in our lives: all else is but as a journal of the winds that blew while we were here.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.
Concord, February 27, 1853

. . . As to how to preserve potatoes from rotting, your opinion may change from year to year; but as to how to preserve your soul from rotting, I have nothing to learn, but something to practice . . . How prompt we are to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our bodies; how slow to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our *souls!* . . . An ordinary man will work every day for a year at shoveling dirt to support his body, or a family of bodies; but he is an extraordinary man who will work a whole day in a year for the support of his soul . . . He alone is the truly enterprising and practical man who succeeds in *maintaining* his soul here. Have not we our everlasting life to get? and is not that the only excuse at last for eating, drinking, sleeping, or even carrying an umbrella when it rains? . . . If we made the true distinction we should almost all of us be seen to be in the almshouse for souls.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

In the spaces of thought are the reaches of land and water, where men go and come. The landscape lies far and fair within, and the deepest thinker is the farthest traveled.

Excursions: A Walk to Wachusett

It is foolish for a man to accumulate material wealth chiefly, houses and lands. Our stock in life, our real estate, is that amount of thought which we have had, which we have thought out.

Excursions: May Days. May 1, 1857

Of what significance are the things you can forget?

Excursions: May Days. May 4, 1852

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester, Mass.
Concord, September 20, 1859
. . . Keep up the fires of thought, and all will go well . . . You *fail* in your thoughts, or you *prevail* in your thoughts only.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Time

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in.
Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For.

Travelling

The perfection of travelling is to travel without baggage.
Excursions: A Yankee in Canada

What need to travel? There are no sierras equal to the clouds in the sunset sky. Are not these substantial enough? . . .

The question is not where did the traveller go? what places did he see?—it would be difficult to choose between places—but who was the traveller? how did he travel? how genuine an experience did he get? For travelling is, in the main, like as if you stayed at home, and then the question is how do you live and conduct yourself at home? . . . If I travel in a simple, primitive, original manner, standing in a truer relation to men and nature, travel away from the old and commonplace, get some honest experience of life,

if only out of my feet and homesickness, then it becomes less important whither I go or how far.

Journal, January 11, 1852

It is not the book of him who has travelled farthest over the surface of the globe, but of him who has lived the deepest and been the most at home . . . A man is worth most to himself and to others, whether as an observer, or poet, or neighbor, or friend, where he is most himself, most contented and at home . . . Here I have been these forty years learning the language of these fields that I may the better express myself . . . We only need travel enough to give our intellects an airing. In spite of Malthus and the rest, there will be plenty of room in this world, if every man will mind his own business. I have not heard of any planet running against another yet.

Journal, November 20, 1857

When it was proposed to me to go abroad, rub off some rust, and *better my condition* in a worldly sense, I fear lest my life may lose some of its homeliness. If these fields and streams and woods, the phenomena of nature here, and the simple occupations of the inhabitants should cease to interest and inspire me, no culture nor wealth could atone for the loss. I fear the dissipation that travelling, going into society, even the best, the enjoyment of intellectual luxuries, imply. If Paris is much in your mind, if it is more and more to you, Concord is less and less, and yet it would be a wretched bargain to accept the proudest Paris in exchange for my native village . . . I wish so to live ever as to derive my satisfactions and inspirations from the commonest events, every-day phenomena, so that what my senses hourly perceive, my daily walk, the conversation of my

neighbors, may inspire me, and I may dream of no heaven but that which lies about me. A man may acquire a taste for wine or brandy, and lose his love for water, but should we not pity him? . . .

Only that travelling is good which reveals to me the value of home and enables me to enjoy it better. That man is the richest, whose pleasures are the cheapest.

Journal, March 11, 1856

Trees

Now is the time for chestnuts. A stone cast against the trees shakes them down in showers upon one's head and shoulders. But I cannot excuse myself for using the stone. It is not innocent, it is not just, so to maltreat the tree that feeds us . . . I sympathize with the tree, yet I heaved a big stone against the trunks like a robber,—not too good to commit murder. I trust that I shall never do it again. These gifts should be accepted, not merely with gentleness, but with a certain humble gratitude . . . It is worse than boorish, it is criminal, to inflict an unnecessary injury on the tree that feeds or shades us . . . If you would learn the secrets of Nature, you must practice more humanity than others. The thought that I was robbing myself by injuring the tree did not occur to me, but I was affected as if I had cast a rock at a sentient being,—with a duller sense than my own, it is true, but yet a distant relation. Behold a man cutting down a tree to come at the fruit! What is the moral of such an act?

Journal, October 23, 1855

I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think that the

same is true of human beings. We do not wish to see children precocious, making great strides in their early years like sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber, but better if they expand slowly at first, as if contending with difficulties, and so are solidified and perfected. Such trees continue to expand with nearly equal rapidity to an extreme old age.

Journal, November 5, 1860

Withered leaves! This is our frugal winter diet, instead of the juicy salads of spring and summer. I think I could write a lecture on "Dry Leaves," carrying a specimen of each kind that hangs on in the winter into the lecture-room as the heads of my discourse. They have long hung to some extent in vain, and have not found their poet yet. The pine has been sung, but not, to my knowledge, the shrub oak. Most think it is useless. How glad I am that it serves no vulgar use! It is never seen on the woodman's cart . . . Shrub oak! how true its name! Think first what a family it belongs to. The oak, king of trees, is its own brother, only of ampler dimensions . . . this is the oak of smaller size, the Esquimau of oaks, the shrub oak! The oaken shrub! I value it first for the noble family it belongs to.

Journal, December 19, 1856

Emblem of my winter condition. I could love and embrace the shrub oak with its scanty garment of leaves rising above the snow, lowly whispering to me, akin to winter thoughts, and sunsets, and to all virtue . . . What cousin of mine is the shrub oak? How can any man suffer long? For a sense of want is a prayer, and all prayers are answered . . . In proportion as I know and love it, I am natural and sound as a partridge. I felt a positive yearning toward one bush this afternoon. There was a match found for me at last. I fell in love with a shrub oak.

Journal, December 1, 1856

I try one of the wild apples in my desk. It is remarkable that the wild apples which I praise as so spirited and racy when eaten in the fields and woods, when brought into the house have a harsh and crabbed taste. As shells and pebbles must be beheld on the seashore, so these October fruits must be tasted in a bracing walk amid the somewhat bracing airs of late October. To appreciate their wild and sharp flavors, it seems necessary that you be breathing the sharp October or November air . . . The palate rejects a wild apple eaten in the house . . . They must be eaten in the fields, when your system is all aglow with exercise, and frosty weather nips your fingers . . .

So there is one thought for the field and another for the house. I would have my thoughts, like wild apples, to be food for walkers, and will not warrant them to be palatable if tasted in the house . . .

Some of those apples might be labelled, "To be eaten in the wind."

Journal, October 27, 1855

So far as our noblest hardwood forests are concerned, the animals, especially squirrels and jays, are our greatest and almost only benefactors. It is to them that we owe this gift. It is not in vain that the squirrels live in and about every forest tree, or hollow log, and every wall and heap of stones.

Journal, October 31, 1860

Nothing stands up more free from blame in this world than a pine tree.

Journal, December 20, 1851

Truth

No face which we can give to a matter will stead us so well at last as the truth. This alone wears well.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

Say what you have to say, not what you ought. Any truth is better than make-believe.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

The Turtle

Consider the turtle. A whole summer,—June, July, and August—is not too good or too much to hatch a turtle in. Perchance you have worried yourself, despaired of the world, meditated the end of life, and all things seemed rushing to destruction; but nature has steadily and serenely advanced with a turtle's pace. The young turtle spends its infancy within its shell. It gets experience and learns the ways of the world through that wall. While it rests warily on the edge of its hole, rash schemes are undertaken by men and fail. Has not the tortoise also learned the true value of time? French empires rise or fall, but the turtle is developed only so fast. What's a summer? Time for a turtle's eggs to hatch. So is the turtle developed, fitted to endure, for he outlives twenty French dynasties. One turtle knows several Napoleons. They have seen no berries, had no cares, yet has not the great world existed for them as much as for you?

Journal, August 28, 1856

Universe

The universe will not wait to be explained. Whoever seriously attempts a theory of it is already behind his age. His yea has reserved no nay for the morrow.

The wisest solution is no better than dissolution. Already the seer *whispers* his *convictions* to bare walls; no audience in the land can attend to them.

Journal, April 20, 1840

Men are constantly dinging in my ears their fair theories and plausible solutions of the universe, but ever there is no help, and I return again to my shoreless, islandless ocean, and fathom unceasingly for a bottom that will hold an anchor, that it may not drag.

Journal, August 13, 1838

The universe is wider than our views of it.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

I delight to come to my bearings,—not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

Village of Concord

And this is my home, my native soil; and I am a New Englander. Of thee, O earth, are my bone and sinew made; to thee, O sun, am I brother . . . To this dust my body will gladly return as to its origin. Here I have my habitat. I am of thee.

Journal, November 7, 1851

I wish to say something to-night not of and concerning the Chinese and Sandwich-Islanders, but *to* and concerning you who hear me, who are said to live in New England; something about your condition or circumstances in this

world, in this town; what it is, whether it can't be improved as well as not.

It is generally admitted that some of you are poor, find it hard to get a living, haven't always something in your pockets, haven't paid for all the dinners you've actually eaten, or all your coats and shoes, some of which are already worn out. All this is very well known to all by hearsay and by experience. It is very evident what a mean and sneaking life you live, always in the hampers, always on the limits, trying to get into business and trying to get out of debt . . . Always promising to pay, promising to pay, with interest, to-morrow perhaps, and die to-day, insolvent; seeking to curry favor, to get custom, lying, flattering, voting, contracting yourselves into a nutshell of civility or dilating into a world of thin and vaporous generosity, that you may persuade your neighbor to let you make his shoes, or his hat, or his coat, or his carriage, etc.

Journal, December 23, 1845

Walden. I am glad to remember to-night, as I sit by my door, that I too am at least a remote descendant of that heroic race of men of whom there is tradition. I too sit here on the shore of my Ithaca, a fellow-wanderer and survivor of Ulysses . . .

If we can forget, we have done somewhat; if we can remember, we have done somewhat. Let us remember this. The Great Spirit makes indifferent all times and places. The place where he is seen is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses . . . But nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. Next to us the grandest laws are being enacted and administered. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, but the workman whose work we are. He is at work, not in my backyard, but inconceivably nearer than that. We are the subjects of an experiment how singular! Can we not dispense with the society of our gossips a little while under these circumstances?

My auxiliaries are the dews and the rains,—to water this dry soil,—and genial fatness in the soil itself, which for the most part is lean and effete. My enemies are worms, cool days, and most of all woodchucks. They have nibbled for me an eighth of an acre clean, I plant in faith, and they reap. This is the tax I pay for ousting johnswort and the rest. But soon the surviving beans will be too tough for woodchucks, and then they will go forward to meet new foes.

Journal, July 7, 1845

I cannot but regard it as a kindness in those who have the steering of me that, by the want of pecuniary wealth, I have been nailed down to this my native region so long and steadily, and made to study and love this spot of earth more and more. What would signify in comparison a thin and diffused love and knowledge of the whole earth instead, got by wandering?

Journal, November 12, 1853

I think that I speak impartially when I say that I have never met with a stream so suitable for boating and botanizing as the Concord, and fortunately nobody knows it. I know of some reaches that a single country-seat would spoil beyond remedy, but there has not been any important change here since I can remember . . . Every board and chip cast into the river is soon occupied by one or more turtles of various sizes.

Journal, August 6, 1858

[*Following the publication of "Walden," August 9, 1854*]
I remember only with a pang the past spring and summer thus far. I have not been an early riser. Society seems to have invaded and overrun me. I have drunk tea and coffee and made myself cheap and vulgar. My days have been all noontides, without sacred mornings and evenings. I desire

to rise early henceforth, to associate with those whose influence is elevating, to have such dreams and waking thoughts that my diet may not be indifferent to me.

Journal, August 13, 1854

I have travelled a good deal in Concord; and everywhere, in shops, and offices, and fields, the inhabitants have appeared to me to be doing penance in a thousand remarkable ways.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

Virtue

Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only investment that never fails.

Walden: Chapter 11, Higher Laws

We cannot well do without our sins; they are the highway of our virtue.

Journal, March 22, 1842

There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man. But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Visitors

Men who did not know when their visit had terminated, though I went about my business again, answering them from greater and greater remoteness.

Walden: Chapter 6, Visitors

There too, as everywhere, I sometimes expected the Visitor who never comes. The Vishnu Purana says, "The householder 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."

Walden: Ch. 14, Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors

Walking

An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day. To my neighbors who have risen in mist and rain I tell of a clear sunrise and the singing of birds as some traditionary mythus. I look back to those remote but fresh hours as to the old dawn of time, when a solid and blooming health reigned and every deed was simple and heroic.

Journal, April 20, 1840

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of taking walks daily, not [to] exercise the legs or body merely, nor barely to recruit the spirits, but positively to exercise both body and spirit, and to succeed to the highest and worthiest ends by abandon-

ment of all specific ends,—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering. And this word "saunter," by the way, is happily derived "from idle people who roved about the country [in the Middle Ages] and asked charity under pretence of going *à la Sainte Terre*," to the Holy Land, till, perchance, the children exclaimed, "There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*," a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds.

[The brackets are Thoreau's.]

Journal, January 10, 1851

It is a great art to saunter.

Journal, April 26, 1841

I do not know how to entertain those who cannot take long walks. The first thing that suggests itself is to get a horse to draw them, and that brings us at once into contact with stables and dirty harness, and I do not get over my ride for a long time. I give up my forenoon to them and get along pretty well . . . but they are as heavy as dumplings by mid-afternoon. If they can't walk, why won't they take an honest nap and let me go in the afternoon? But, come two o'clock, they alarm me by an evident disposition to sit. In the midst of the most glorious Indian-summer afternoon, there they sit, with their backs to the light, taking no note of the lapse of time.

Journal, October 7, 1857

I take all these walks to every point of the compass, and it is always harvest-time with me. I am always gathering my crop from these woods and fields and waters, and no man is in my way or interferes with me. My crop is not their crop . . . I am a reaper; I am not a gleaner. I go reaping,

cutting as broad a swath as I can, and bundling and stacking up and carrying it off from field to field, and no man knows or cares . . . I go abroad over the land each day to get the best I can find, and that is never carted off even to the last day of November, and I do not go as a gleaner.

The farmer has always come to the field after some material thing; that is not what a philosopher goes there for.

Journal, October 14, 1857

The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as it is called, as the sick take medicine at stated hours,—as the swinging of dumb-bells or chairs; but is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day. If you would get exercise, go in search of the springs of life. Think of a man's swinging dumb-bells for his health, when those springs are bubbling up in far-off pastures unsought by him!

Excursions: Walking

There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the threescore years and ten of human life. It will never become quite familiar to you.

Excursions: Walking

I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least,—and it is commonly more than that,—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements . . . Man and his affairs, church, state and school, trade and commerce, manufactures and agriculture, even politics, the most alarming of them all,—I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape.

Excursions: Walking

Wars

The papers are talking about the prospect of a war between England and America. Neither side sees how its country can avoid a long and fratricidal war without sacrificing its honor. Both nations are ready to take a desperate step, to forget the interests of civilization and Christianity, and their commercial prosperity and fly at each other's throats. When I see an individual thus beside himself, thus desperate, ready to shoot or be shot, like a blackleg who has little to lose, no serene aims to accomplish, I think he is a candidate for bedlam. What asylum is there for nations to go to? Nations are thus ready to talk of wars and challenge one another, because they are made up to such an extent of poor, low-spirited, despairing men, in whose eyes the chance of shooting somebody else without being shot themselves exceeds their actual good fortune.

Note: Will it not be thought disreputable at length, as duelling between individuals now is?

Journal, February 25, 1856

Water

How dead would the globe seem, especially at this season, if it were not for these water surfaces! We are slow to realize water,—the beauty and magic of it. It is interestingly strange to us forever. Immortal water, alive even in the superficies, restlessly heaving now and tossing me and my boat, and sparkling with life! I look round with a thrill on this bright fluctuating surface on which no man can walk, whereon is no trace of footstep, unstained as glass.

Journal, May 8, 1854

Wealth

Wealth cannot purchase any great private solace or convenience. Riches are only the means of sociality. I will depend on the extravagance of my neighbors for my luxuries, for they will take care to pamper me if I will be overfed.

Journal, January 2, 1842

Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

In my experience I have found nothing so impoverishing as what is called wealth, *i.e.* the command of greater means than you had before possessed . . . Instead of gaining you have lost some independence, and if your income should be suddenly lessened, you would find yourself poor, though possessed of the same means which once made you rich. Within the last five years I have had the command of a little more money than in the previous five years, for I have sold some books and some lectures; yet I have not been a whit better fed or clothed or warmed about my living, but perhaps my life has been the less serious for it, and, to balance it, I feel now that there is a possibility of failure . . . If you wish to give a man a sense of poverty, give him a thousand dollars. The next hundred dollars he gets will not be worth more than ten that he used to get. Have pity on him; withhold your gifts.

Journal, January 20, 1856

It is foolish for a man to accumulate wealth chiefly, houses and land. Our stock in life, our real estate, is that amount of thought which we have had, which we have thought out.

The ground we have thus created is forever pasturage for our thoughts. I fall back on to visions which I have had. What else adds to my possessions and makes me rich in all lands? If you have ever done any work with these finest tools, the imagination, fancy and reason, it is a new creation, independent on the world, and a possession forever. You have laid up something against a rainy day. You have to that extent cleared the wilderness.

Journal, May 1, 1857

Absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him.

Miscellanies: Civil Disobedience

Weather

It is a beautiful clear and mild winter day. Our washwoman says she is proud of it . . . But I do not melt; there is no thaw in me; I am bound out still . . .

We too have our thaws. They come to our January moods, when our ice cracks, and our sluices break loose. Thought that was frozen up under stern experience gushes forth in feeling and expression.

Journal, January 31, 1854

How admirable it is that we can never foresee the weather, —that that is always novel! Yesterday nobody dreamed of to-day; nobody dreams of to-morrow. Hence the weather is ever the news. What a fine and measureless joy the gods grant us thus, letting us know nothing about the day that is to dawn! This day, yesterday, was as incredible as any other miracle.

Journal, December 29, 1851

Would you see your mind, look at the sky. Would you know your own moods, be weather-wise. He whom the weather disappoints, disappoints himself.

Journal, January 26, 1852

Some of our richest days are those in which no sun shines outwardly, but so much the more a sun shines inwardly.

Journal, November 16, 1850

Perhaps the most generally interesting event at present is a perfectly warm and pleasant day. It affects the greatest number, the well out of doors, and the sick in chambers. No wonder the weather is the universal theme of conversation.

Journal, May 4, 1857

It is what I call a *washing* day, such as we sometimes have when buttercups first appear in the spring, an agreeably cool and clear and breezy day, when all things appear as if washed bright and shine, and, at this season, especially, the sound of the wind rustling the leaves is like the rippling of a stream . . .

Journal, June 23, 1852

Wildness

I saw a muskrat come out of a hole in the ice. He is a man wilder than Ray or Melvin. While I am looking at him, I am thinking what he is thinking of me. He is a different sort of man, that is all . . . He would sit on the edge of the ice and busy himself about something, I could not see whether it was a clam or not. What a cold-blooded fellow! thoughts at a low temperature, sitting perfectly still so long

on ice covered with water, mumbling a cold, wet clam in its shell. What safe, low, moderate thoughts it must have! It does not get onto stilts. The generations of muskrats do not fail. They are not preserved by the legislature of Massachusetts.

Journal, November 25, 1850

In literature it is only the wild that attracts us. Dullness is only another name for tameness. It is the untamed, uncivilized, free, and wild thinking in Hamlet, in the Iliad, and in all scriptures and mythologies that delight us,—not learned in the schools, not refined and polished by art. A truly good book is something as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvelous, ambrosial and fertile, as a fungus or a lichen. Suppose the muskrat or beaver were to turn his views to literature, what fresh views of nature would he present! The fault of our books and other deeds is that they are too humane, I want something speaking in some measure to the condition of muskrats and skunk-cabbage as well as of men,—not merely to a pining and complaining coterie of philanthropists.

Journal, November 16, 1850

The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World. Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild . . . I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows . . . Give me a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure . . . Ben Jonson exclaims,—"How near to good is what is fair!" So I would say,—How near to good is what is *wild!*

Essay on Walking in *Excursions*

We need the tonic of wildness.

Walden: Chapter 17, Spring

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that.

Excursions: Walking

I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated.

Excursions: Walking

I have got in my huckleberries. I shall be ready for Thanksgiving. It is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such . . . I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recess in Concord, *i.e.* that I import into it. A little more manhood or virtue will make the surface of the globe anywhere thrillingly novel and wild. That alone will provide and pay the fiddler; it will convert the district road into an untrodden cranberry bog, for it restores all things to their original primitive flourishing and promising state.

Journal, August 30, 1856

Wisdom

The wisest man preaches no doctrines; he has no scheme; he sees no rafter, not even a cobweb, against the heavens. It is a clear sky.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust.

Walden: Chapter 1, Economy

When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality.

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

All wisdom is the reward of a discipline, conscious or unconscious.

Journal, September 5, 1851

Wisdom is not common. To what purpose have I senses, if I am thus absorbed in affairs? My pulse must beat with Nature. After a hard day's work without a thought, turning my very brain into a mere tool, only in the quiet of evening do I recover my senses as to hear the cricket, which in fact has been chirping all day . . .

To be calm, to be serene! There is the calmness of the lake when there is not a breath of wind; there is the calmness of a stagnant ditch. So it is with us. Sometimes we are clarified and calmed healthily, as we never were before in our lives, not by an opiate, but by some unconscious obedience to the all-just laws, so that we become like a still lake of purest crystal and without an effort our depths are revealed to ourselves. All the world goes by us and is reflected in our deeps. Such clarity! obtained by such pure

means! by simple living, by honesty of purpose . . . The luxury of wisdom! The luxury of virtue! Are there any intemperate in these things? I feel my Maker blessing me. The very touch affords an exquisite pleasure.

Journal, June 22, 1851

How can a man be wise, if he doesn't know any better how to live than other men?—if he is only more cunning and intellectually subtle? Does Wisdom work in a treadmill? Does Wisdom fail? or does she teach how to succeed by her example? Is she merely the miller who grinds the finest logic? Did Plato get his *living* in a better way or more successfully than his contemporaries? Did he succumb to the difficulties of life like other men? Did he merely prevail over them by indifference, or by assuming grand airs? or find it easier to live because his aunt remembered him in her will?

Journal, April 21, 1854

Woods

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear! nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were

sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Walden: Ch. 2, Where I Lived and What I Lived For

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves . . . The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!

Walden: Chapter 18, Conclusion

Work

Routine is a ground to stand on, a wall to retreat to; we cannot draw on our boots without bracing ourselves against it. It is the fence over which neighbors lean when they talk . . . Our health requires that we should recline on it from time to time . . . Our weakness wants it, but our strength uses it. Good for the body is the work of the body, good for the soul is the work of the soul, and good for either the work of the other. Let them not call hard names, nor know a divided interest.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers
Journal, January 23, 1841

To have some one thing to do, and do it perfectly.

Excursions: Natural History of Massachusetts

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, August 8, 1854.

. . . Only think, for a moment, of a man about his affairs! How we should respect him! How glorious he would appear! Not working for any corporation, its agent, or president, but fulfilling the end of his being! A man about *his business* would be the cynosure of all eyes.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 19, 1854.

. . . How many men will do enough this cold winter to pay for the fuel that will be required to warm them? I suppose that I have burned up a pretty good-sized tree to-night,—and for what? I settled with Mr. Tarbell for it the other day; but that wasn't the final settlement. I got off cheaply from him. At last, one will say, "Let us see, how much wood did you burn, sir?" And I shall shudder to think that the next question will be, "What did you do while you were warm?" Do we think the ashes will pay for it? that God is an ash-man? It is a fact that we have got to render an account for the deeds done in the body.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Harrison Blake at Worcester.
Concord, December 19, 1853.

. . . Is it not imperative on us that we *do* something, if we only work in a treadmill? And, indeed, some sort of revolving is necessary to produce a centre and nucleus of being. What exercise is to the body, employment is to the mind

and morals. Consider what an amount of drudgery must be performed,—how much humdrum and prosaic labor goes to any work of least value . . . And the work is not merely a police in the gross sense, but in the higher sense a discipline. If it is surely the means to the highest end we know, can any work be humble or disgusting? Will it not rather be elevating as a ladder, the means by which we are translated? . . . In a thousand apparently humble ways men busy themselves to make some right take the place of some wrong,—if it is only to make a better paste-blacking,—and they are themselves *so much* the better morally for it. . . .

It is the art of mankind to polish the world, and every one who works is scrubbing in some part . . . "Work,—work,—work!" . . .

Whether a man spends his day in an ecstasy or despondency, he must do some work to show for it, even as there are flesh and bones to show for him. We are superior to the joys we experience.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

Writing

Have no mean hours, but be grateful for every hour, and accept what it brings. The reality will make any sincere record respectable. No day will have been wholly misspent, if one sincere, thoughtful page has been written.

Let the daily tide leave some deposit on these pages, as it leaves sand and shells on the shore. So much increase of *terra firma.* This may be a calendar of the ebbs and flows of the soul; and on these sheets as a beach, waves may cast up pearls and seaweed.

Journal, July 5, 1840

Men commonly exaggerate the theme. Some themes they think are significant and others insignificant. I feel that my life is very homely, my pleasures very cheap. Joy and sorrow, success and failure, grandeur and meanness, and indeed most words in the English language do not mean for me what they do for my neighbors. I see that my neighbors look with compassion on me, that they think it is a mean and unfortunate destiny which makes me walk in these fields and woods so much and sail on this river alone. But as long as I find here the only real elysium, I cannot hesitate in my choice. My work is writing, and I do not hesitate, though I know that no subject is too trivial for me, tried by ordinary standards; for, ye fools, the theme is nothing, the life is everything. All that interests the reader is the depth and intensity of the life excited. . . . Give me simple, cheap, and homely themes.

Journal, October 18, 1856

I wish that I could buy at the shops some kind of india-rubber that would rub out all at once all that in my writing which it now costs me so many perusals, so many months if not years, and so much reluctance, to erase.

Journal, December 27, 1853

If thou art a writer, write as if thy time were short, for it is indeed short at the longest. Improve each occasion when thy soul is reached. Drain the cup of inspiration to its last dregs. Fear no intemperance in that, for the years will come when otherwise thou wilt regret opportunities unimproved. The spring will not last forever. These fertile and expanding seasons of thy life, when the rain reaches thy root, when thy vigor shoots, when thy flower is budding, shall be fewer and farther between. Again I say, Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Use and commit to life what you cannot commit to memory.

Journal, January 24, 1852

I do not know but thoughts written down thus in a journal might be printed in the same form with greater advantage than if the related ones were brought together into separate essays. They are now allied to life, and are seen by the reader not to be far-fetched. It is more simple, less artful. . . . Mere facts and names and dates communicate more than we suspect. Whether the flower looks better in the nosegay than in the meadow where it grew and we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?

Journal, January 27, 1852

We cannot write well or truly but what we write with gusto. The body, the senses, must conspire with the mind. Expression is the act of the whole man, that our speech may be vascular. The intellect is powerless to express thought without the aid of the heart and liver and of every member. Often I feel that my head stands out too dry, when it should be immersed. A writer, a man writing, is the scribe of all nature; he is the corn and the grass and the atmosphere writing. It is always essential that we love to do what we are doing, do it with a heart.

Journal, September 2, 1851

Say the thing with which you labor. It is a waste of time for the writer to use his talents merely. Be faithful to your genius. Write in the strain that interests you most. Consult not the popular taste.

Journal, December 20, 1851

Many a man runs his plow so deep in heavy or stony soil that it sticks fast in the furrow. It is a great art in the writer to improve from day to day just that soil and fertility which he has, to harvest the crop which his life yields, whatever it may be, not straining as if to reach apples or oranges when he yields only ground-nuts. He should be digging, not

soaring. Just as earnest as your life is, so deep is your soil. If strong and deep, you will sow wheat and raise bread of life in it.

Journal, November 9, 1858

It costs so much to publish, would it not be better for the author to put his manuscript in a safe?

Journal, September 14, 1855

It is wise to write on many subjects, to try many themes, that so you may find the right and inspiring one. Be greedy of occasions to express your thought. Improve the opportunity to draw analogies. There are innumerable avenues to a perception of the truth. Improve the suggestion of each object however humble, however slight and transient the provocation. What else is there to be improved? Who knows what opportunities he may neglect? It is not in vain that the mind turns aside this way or that: follow its leading; apply it whither it inclines to go. Probe the universe in a myriad points. Be avaricious of these impulses. You must try a thousand themes before you find the right one, as nature makes a thousand acorns to get one oak. He is a wise man and experienced who has taken many views; to whom stones and plants and animals and a myriad objects have each suggested something, contributed something.

Journal, September 4, 1851

We are often struck by the force and precision to which hardworking men, unpracticed in writing, easily attain when required to make the effort. As if plainness and vigor and sincerity, the ornaments of style, were better learned on the farm and in the workshop than in the schools. The sentences written by such rude hands are nervous and tough, like hardened thongs, the sinews of the deer, or the roots of the pine. . . . A sentence should read as if its author, had

he held a plow instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers

From a letter to Daniel Ricketson at New Bedford, Mass.
Concord, August 18, 1857.

. . . As for style of writing, if one has anything to say, it drops from him simply and directly, as a stone falls to the ground. There are no two ways about it, but down it comes, and he may stick in the points and stops wherever he can get a chance. New ideas come into this world somewhat like falling meteors, with a flash and an explosion, and perhaps somebody's castle-roof perforated. To try to polish the stone in its descent, to give it a peculiar turn, and make it whistle a tune, perchance, would be of no use, if it were possible. Your polished stuff turns out not to be meteoric, but of this earth. However, there is plenty of time, and Nature is an admirable schoolmistress . . .

Please remember me to your family, and say that I have at length learned to sing Tom Bowlin according to the notes.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

From a letter to Elliot Cabot, secretary of the Boston Society of Natural History.
Concord, March 8, 1848

. . . I have been writing lectures for our own Lyceum this winter, mainly for my own pleasure and advantage. I esteem it a rare happiness to be able to *write* anything, but there (if I ever get there) my concern for it is apt to end. Time & Co. are, after all, the only quite honest and trustworthy publishers that we know. I can sympathize, perhaps, with the barberry bush, whose business it is solely to *ripen* its fruit (though that may not be to sweeten it) and to protect

it with thorns, so that it holds on all winter, even, unless some hungry crows come to pluck it. But I see that I must get a few dollars together presently to manure my roots. Is your journal able to pay anything, provided it likes an article well enough? I do not promise one. At any rate, I mean always to spend only words enough to purchase silence with; and I have found that this, which is so valuable, though many writers do not prize it, does not cost much after all.

Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau:
Edited by F. B. Sanborn

After time has sifted the literature of a people, there is left only their SCRIPTURE, for that is writing, *par excellence.*

Miscellanies: Thomas Carlyle and His Works

"A Yankee in Canada"

The English did not come to America from a mere love of adventure, nor to truck with or convert the savages, nor to hold offices under the crown, as the French to a great extent did, but to live in earnest and with freedom.

Excursions: A Yankee in Canada

The Year

What means this sense of lateness that so comes over one now,—as if the rest of the year were down-hill, and if we had not performed anything before, we should not now? The season of flowers or of promise may be said to be over,

and now is the season of fruits; but where is our fruit? The night of the year is approaching. What have we done with our talent? All nature prompts and reproves us. How early in the year it begins to be late! The sound of the crickets, even in the spring, makes our hearts beat with its awful reproof, while it encourages with its seasonable warning. It matters not how little we have fallen behind; it seems irretrievably late. The year is full of warnings of its shortness, as is life.

Journal, August 18, 1853

I am not ashamed to be the contemporary with the Norway cinquefoil. May I perform my part as well! There is so much done toward closing up the year's accounts. It is as good as if I saw the great globe go round. It is as if I saw the Janus doors of the year closing. The fall of each humblest flower marks the annual period of some phase of human life, experience. I can be said to note the flower's fall only when I see in it the symbol of my own change. When I experience this, then the flower appears to me.

Journal, August 30, 1851

The year is stretching itself, is waking up.

Journal, April 25, 1852

Youth

When a man is young and his constitution and body have not acquired firmness, *i.e.*, before he has arrived at middle age, he is not an assured inhabitant of the earth, and his compensation is that he is not quite earthy, there is some-

thing peculiarly tender and divine about him. His sentiments and his weakness, nay, his very sickness and the greater uncertainty of his fate, seem to ally him to a noble race of beings, to whom he in part belongs, or with whom he is in communication. The young man is a demigod; the grown man, alas! is commonly a mere mortal. He is but half here, he knows not the men of this world, the powers that be. They know him not. Prompted by the reminiscence of that other sphere from which he so lately arrived, his actions are unintelligible to his seniors. He bathes in light. He is interesting as a stranger from another sphere. He really thinks and talks about a larger sphere of existence than this world. It takes him forty years to accommodate himself to the carapax of this world. This is the age of poetry. Afterward he may be the president of a bank and go the way of all flesh. But a man of settled views, whose thoughts are few and hardened like his bones, is truly mortal, and his only resource is to say his prayers.

Journal, December 19, 1859

Zeno, the Stoic

Zeno, the Stoic, stood in precisely the same relation to the world that I do now. He is, forsooth, bred a merchant—as how many still!—and can trade and barter, and perchance higgle, and moreover he can be shipwrecked and cast ashore at Piraeus, like one of your Johns or Thomases.

He strolls into a shop and is charmed by a book by Zenophon—and straightway he becomes a philosopher. The sun of a new life's day rises to him,—serene and unclouded . . . And still the fleshly Zeno sails on, shipwrecked, buffeted, tempest-tossed; but the true Zeno sails over a placid sea. Play high, play low,—rain, sleet, or snow,—it's all the same with the Stoic . . .

When evening comes he sits down unwearied to the review of his day,—what's done that's to be undone,—what not done at all still to be done. Himself Truth's unconcerned helpmate . . .

This was he who said to a certain garrulous young man, "On this account have we two ears and but one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less."

That he had talked concerned not our philosopher, but his audience; and herein we may see how it is more noble to hear than to speak.

Journal, February 7, 1838