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Henry David Thoreau
- poems -

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Henry David Thoreau(12 July 1817 – 6 May 1862)

Henry David Thoreau was an American author, poet, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, historian, and leading transcendentalist. He is best known for his book Walden, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay Civil Disobedience, an argument for individual resistance to civil government in moral opposition to an unjust state.

Thoreau's books, articles, essays, journals, and poetry total over 20 volumes. Among his lasting contributions were his writings on natural history and philosophy, where he anticipated the methods and findings of ecology and environmental history, two sources of modern day environmentalism. His literary style interweaves close natural observation, personal experience, pointed rhetoric, symbolic meanings, and historical lore, while displaying a poetic sensibility, philosophical austerity, and "Yankee" love of practical detail. He was also deeply interested in the idea of survival in the face of hostile elements, historical change, and natural decay; at the same time he advocated abandoning waste and illusion in order to discover life's true essential needs.

He was a lifelong abolitionist, delivering lectures that attacked the Fugitive Slave Law while praising the writings of Wendell Phillips and defending abolitionist John Brown. Thoreau's philosophy of civil disobedience later influenced the political thoughts and actions of such notable figures as Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thoreau is sometimes cited as an anarchist, though Civil Disobedience seems to call for improving rather than abolishing government – "I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government" – the direction of this improvement points toward anarchism: "'That government is best which governs not at all;' and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have." Richard Drinnon partly blames Thoreau for the ambiguity, noting that Thoreau's "sly satire, his liking for wide margins for his writing, and his fondness for paradox provided ammunition for widely divergent interpretations of 'Civil Disobedience.'"

Early Life and Education

He was born David Henry Thoreau in Concord, Massachusetts, into the "modest New England family" of John Thoreau (a pencil maker) and Cynthia Dunbar. His paternal grandfather was of French origin and was born in maternal grandfather,

Asa Dunbar, led Harvard's 1766 student "Butter Rebellion", the first recorded student protest in the Colonies. David Henry was named after a recently deceased paternal uncle, David Thoreau. He did not become "Henry David" until after college, although he never petitioned to make a legal name change. He had two older siblings, Helen and John Jr., and a younger sister, Sophia. Thoreau's birthplace still exists on Virginia Road in Concord and is currently the focus of preservation efforts. The house is original, but it now stands about 100 yards away from its first site.

Thoreau studied at Harvard University between 1833 and 1837. He lived in Hollis Hall and took courses in rhetoric, classics, philosophy, mathematics, and science. A legend proposes that Thoreau refused to pay the five-dollar fee for a Harvard diploma. In fact, the master's degree he declined to purchase had no academic merit: Harvard College offered it to graduates "who proved their physical worth by being alive three years after graduating, and their saving, earning, or inheriting quality or condition by having Five Dollars to give the college." His comment was: "Let every sheep keep its own skin", a reference to the tradition of diplomas being written on sheepskin vellum.

Name Pronunciation and Appearance

Amos Bronson Alcott and Thoreau's aunt each wrote that "Thoreau" is pronounced like the word "thorough". Although in current media (standard American English) this word rhymes with "furrow",Edward Emerson wrote that the name should be pronounced "Thó-row, the h sounded, and accent on the first syllable."This would in fact rhyme with "thorough" as pronounced in 19th century New England.

In appearance he was homely, with a nose that he called "my most prominent feature." Of his face, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote: "[Thoreau] is as ugly as sin, long-nosed, queer-mouthed, and with uncouth and rustic, though courteous manners, corresponding very well with such an exterior. But his ugliness is of an honest and agreeable fashion, and becomes him much better than beauty."Thoreau also wore a neck-beard for many years, which he insisted many women found attractive. However, Louisa May Alcott mentioned to Ralph Waldo Emerson that Thoreau's facial hair "will most assuredly deflect amorous advances and preserve the man's virtue in perpetuity."

Return to Concord: 1837–1841

The traditional professions open to college graduates—law, the church, business, medicine—failed to interest Thoreau, so in 1835 he took a leave of absence from Harvard, during which he taught school in Canton, Massachusetts. After he graduated in 1837, he joined the faculty of the Concord public school, but resigned after a few weeks rather than administer corporal punishment. He and his brother John then opened a grammar school in Concord in 1838 called Concord Academy. They introduced several progressive concepts, including nature walks and visits to local shops and businesses. The school ended when John became fatally ill from tetanus in 1842 after cutting himself while shaving. He died in his brother Henry's arms.

Upon graduation Thoreau returned home to Concord, where he met Ralph Waldo Emerson through a mutual friend. Emerson took a paternal and at times patronizing interest in Thoreau, advising the young man and introducing him to a circle of local writers and thinkers, including Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne and his son Julian Hawthorne, who was a boy at the time.

Emerson urged Thoreau to contribute essays and poems to a quarterly periodical, The Dial, and Emerson lobbied editor Margaret Fuller to publish those writings. Thoreau's first essay published there was Aulus Persius Flaccus, an essay on the playwright of the same name, published in The Dial in July 1840. It consisted of revised passages from his journal, which he had begun keeping at Emerson's suggestion. The first journal entry on October 22, 1837, reads, "'What are you doing now?' he asked. 'Do you keep a journal?' So I make my first entry to-day."

Thoreau was a philosopher of nature and its relation to the human condition. In his early years he followed Transcendentalism, a loose and eclectic idealist philosophy advocated by Emerson, Fuller, and Alcott. They held that an ideal spiritual state transcends, or goes beyond, the physical and empirical, and that one achieves that insight via personal intuition rather than religious doctrine. In their view, Nature is the outward sign of inward spirit, expressing the "radical correspondence of visible things and human thoughts," as Emerson wrote in Nature (1836).

On April 18, 1841, Thoreau moved into the Emerson house. There, from 1841–1844, he served as the children's tutor, editorial assistant, and repair man/gardener. For a few months in 1843, he moved to the home of William Emerson on Staten Island,and tutored the family sons while seeking contacts among literary men and journalists in the city who might help publish his

writings, including his future literary representative Horace Greeley.

Thoreau returned to Concord and worked in his family's pencil factory, which he continued to do for most of his adult life. He rediscovered the process to make a good pencil out of inferior graphite by using clay as the binder; this invention improved upon graphite found in New Hampshire and bought in 1821 by relative Charles Dunbar. (The process of mixing graphite and clay, known as the Conté process, was patented by Nicolas-Jacques Conté in 1795). His other source had been Tantiusques, an Indian operated mine in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. Later, Thoreau converted the factory to produce plumbago (graphite), which was used to ink typesetting machines.

Once back in Concord, Thoreau went through a restless period. In April 1844 he and his friend Edward Hoar accidentally set a fire that consumed 300 acres (1.2 km2) of Walden Woods. He spoke often of finding a farm to buy or lease, which he felt would give him a means to support himself while also providing enough solitude to write his first book.

Civil Disobedience and the Walden years: 1845–1849

"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."
— Henry David Thoreau, Walden, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

Thoreau needed to concentrate and get himself working more on his writing. In March 1845, Ellery Channing told Thoreau, "Go out upon that, build yourself a hut, & there begin the grand process of devouring yourself alive. I see no other alternative, no other hope for you." Two months later, Thoreau embarked on a two-year experiment in simple living on July 4, 1845, when he moved to a small, self-built house on land owned by Emerson in a second-growth forest around the shores of Walden Pond. The house was in "a pretty pasture and woodlot" of 14 acres (57,000 m2) that Emerson had bought, 1.5 miles (2.4 km) from his family home.

On July 24 or July 25, 1846, Thoreau ran into the local tax collector, Sam Staples, who asked him to pay six years of delinquent poll taxes. Thoreau refused because of his opposition to the Mexican-American War and slavery, and he spent a night in jail because of this refusal. (The next day Thoreau was freed, against his wishes, when his aunt paid his taxes.) The experience had a strong impact on Thoreau. In January and February 1848, he delivered lectures on "The Rights and Duties of the Individual in relation to Government" explaining his tax resistance at the Concord Lyceum. Bronson Alcott attended the lecture, writing in his journal on January 26:

Heard Thoreau's lecture before the Lyceum on the relation of the individual to the State– an admirable statement of the rights of the individual to self-government, and an attentive audience. His allusions to the Mexican War, to Mr. Hoar's expulsion from Carolina, his own imprisonment in Concord Jail for refusal to pay his tax, Mr. Hoar's payment of mine when taken to prison for a similar refusal, were all pertinent, well considered, and reasoned. I took great pleasure in this deed of Thoreau's.
—Bronson Alcott, Journals (1938)

Thoreau revised the lecture into an essay entitled Resistance to Civil Government (also known as Civil Disobedience). In May 1849 it was published by Elizabeth Peabody in the Aesthetic Papers. Thoreau had taken up a version of Percy Shelley's principle in the political poem The Mask of Anarchy (1819), that Shelley begins with the powerful images of the unjust forms of authority of his time – and then imagines the stirrings of a radically new form of social action.

At Walden Pond, he completed a first draft of A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, an elegy to his brother, John, that described their 1839 trip to the White Mountains. Thoreau did not find a publisher for this book and instead printed 1,000 copies at his own expense, though fewer than 300 were sold. Thoreau self-published on the advice of Emerson, using Emerson's own publisher, Munroe, who did little to publicize the book.

In August 1846, Thoreau briefly left Walden to make a trip to Mount Katahdin in Maine, a journey later recorded in "Ktaadn," the first part of The Maine Woods.

Thoreau left Walden Pond on September 6, 1847. At Emerson's request, he immediately moved back into the Emerson house to help Lidian manage the household while her husband was on an extended trip to Europe. Over several years, he worked to pay off his debts and also continuously revised his manuscript for what, in 1854, he would publish as Walden, or Life in the Woods,

recounting the two years, two months, and two days he had spent at Walden Pond. The book compresses that time into a single calendar year, using the passage of four seasons to symbolize human development. Part memoir and part spiritual quest, Walden at first won few admirers, but later critics have regarded it as a classic American work that explores natural simplicity, harmony, and beauty as models for just social and cultural conditions.

American poet Robert Frost wrote of Thoreau, "In one book ... he surpasses everything we have had in America."

John Updike wrote in 2004,

"A century and a half after its publication, Walden has become such a totem of the back-to-nature, preservationist, anti-business, civil-disobedience mindset, and Thoreau so vivid a protester, so perfect a crank and hermit saint, that the book risks being as revered and unread as the Bible."

Thoreau moved out of Emerson's house in July 1848 and stayed at a home on Belknap Street nearby. In 1850, he and his family moved into a home at 255 Main Street; he stayed there until his death.

Later Years: 1851–1862

In 1851, Thoreau became increasingly fascinated with natural history and travel/expedition narratives. He read avidly on botany and often wrote observations on this topic into his journal. He admired William Bartram, and Charles Darwin's Voyage of the Beagle. He kept detailed observations on Concord's nature lore, recording everything from how the fruit ripened over time to the fluctuating depths of Walden Pond and the days certain birds migrated. The point of this task was to "anticipate" the seasons of nature, in his words.

He became a land surveyor and continued to write increasingly detailed natural history observations about the 26 square miles (67 km2) township in his journal, a two-million word document he kept for 24 years. He also kept a series of notebooks, and these observations became the source for Thoreau's late natural history writings, such as Autumnal Tints, The Succession of Trees, and Wild Apples, an essay lamenting the destruction of indigenous and wild apple species.

Until the 1970s, literary criticsdismissed Thoreau's late pursuits as amateur science and philosophy. With the rise of environmental history and ecocriticism, several new readings if this matter began to emerge, showing Thoreau to be

both a philosopher and an analyst of ecological patterns in fields and woodlots. For instance, his late essay, "The Succession of Forest Trees," shows that he used experimentation and analysis to explain how forests regenerate after fire or human destruction, through dispersal by seed-bearing winds or animals.

He traveled to Quebec once, Cape Cod four times, and Maine three times; these landscapes inspired his "excursion" books, A Yankee in Canada, Cape Cod, and The Maine Woods, in which travel itineraries frame his thoughts about geography, history and philosophy. Other travels took him southwest to Philadelphia and New York City in 1854, and west across the Great Lakes region in 1861, visiting Niagara Falls, Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Mackinac Island. Although provincial in his physical travels, he was extraordinarily well-read and vicariously a world traveler. He obsessively devoured all the first-hand travel accounts available in his day, at a time when the last unmapped regions of the earth were being explored. He read Magellan and James Cook, the arctic explorers Franklin, Mackenzie and Parry, David Livingstone and Richard Francis Burton on Africa, Lewis and Clark; and hundreds of lesser-known works by explorers and literate travelers. Astonishing amounts of global reading fed his endless curiosity about the peoples, cultures, religions and natural history of the world, and left its traces as commentaries in his voluminous journals. He processed everything he read, in the local laboratory of his Concord experience. Among his famous aphorisms is his advice to "live at home like a traveler."

After John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, many prominent voices in the abolitionist movement distanced themselves from Brown, or damned him with faint praise. Thoreau was disgusted by this, and he composed a speech—A Plea for Captain John Brown—which was uncompromising in its defense of Brown and his actions. Thoreau's speech proved persuasive: first the abolitionist movement began to accept Brown as a martyr, and by the time of the American Civil War entire armies of the North were literally singing Brown's praises. As a contemporary biographer of John Brown put it: "If, as Alfred Kazin suggests, without John Brown there would have been no Civil War, we would add that without the Concord Transcendentalists, John Brown would have had little cultural impact."

Death

Thoreau contracted tuberculosis in 1835 and suffered from it sporadically afterwards. In 1859, following a late night excursion to count the rings of tree stumps during a rain storm, he became ill with bronchitis. His health declined over three years with brief periods of remission, until he eventually became

bedridden. Recognizing the terminal nature of his disease, Thoreau spent his last years revising and editing his unpublished works, particularly The Maine Woods and Excursions, and petitioning publishers to print revised editions of A Week and Walden. He also wrote letters and journal entries until he became too weak to continue. His friends were alarmed at his diminished appearance and were fascinated by his tranquil acceptance of death. When his aunt Louisa asked him in his last weeks if he had made his peace with God, Thoreau responded: "I did not know we had ever quarreled."

Aware he was dying, Thoreau's last words were "Now comes good sailing", followed by two lone words, "moose" and "Indian". He died on May 6, 1862 at age 44. Bronson Alcott planned the service and read selections from Thoreau's works, and Channing presented a hymn. Emerson wrote the eulogy spoken at his funeral. Originally buried in the Dunbar family plot, he and members of his immediate family were eventually moved to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery (N42° 27' 53.7" W71° 20' 33") in Concord, Massachusetts.

Thoreau's friend Ellery Channing published his first biography, Thoreau the Poet-Naturalist, in 1873, and Channing and another friend Harrison Blake edited some poems, essays, and journal entries for posthumous publication in the 1890s. Thoreau's journals, which he often mined for his published works but which remained largely unpublished at his death, were first published in 1906 and helped to build his modern reputation. A new, expanded edition of the journals is underway, published by Princeton University Press. Today, Thoreau is regarded as one of the foremost American writers, both for the modern clarity of his prose style and the prescience of his views on nature and politics. His memory is honored by the international Thoreau Society.

Personal Beliefs

"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."
— Thoreau

Thoreau was an early advocate of recreational hiking and canoeing, of conserving natural resources on private land, and of preserving wilderness as public land. Thoreau was also one of the first American supporters of Darwin's theory of evolution. He was not a strict vegetarian, though he said he preferred that diet and advocated it as a means of self-improvement. He wrote in Walden: "The practical objection to animal food in my case was its uncleanness; and besides, when I had caught and cleaned and cooked and eaten my fish, they seemed not to have fed me essentially. It was insignificant and unnecessary, and cost more

than it came to. A little bread or a few potatoes would have done as well, with less trouble and filth."

Thoreau neither rejected civilization nor fully embraced wilderness. Instead he sought a middle ground, the pastoral realm that integrates both nature and culture. His philosophy required that he be a didactic arbitration between the wilderness he based so much on and the spreading mass of North American humanity. He decried the latter endlessly but felt the teachers need to be close to those who needed to hear what he wanted to tell them. He was in many ways a 'visible saint', a point of contact with the wilds, even if the land he lived on had been given to him by Emerson and was far from cut-off. The wildness he enjoyed was the nearby swamp or forest, and he preferred "partially cultivated country." His idea of being "far in the recesses of the wilderness" of Maine was to "travel the logger's path and the Indian trail," but he also hiked on pristine untouched land. In the essay "Henry David Thoreau, Philosopher" Roderick Nash writes: "Thoreau left Concord in 1846 for the first of three trips to northern Maine. His expectations were high because he hoped to find genuine, primeval America. But contact with real wilderness in Maine affected him far differently than had the idea of wilderness in Concord. Instead of coming out of the woods with a deepened appreciation of the wilds, Thoreau felt a greater respect for civilization and realized the necessity of balance." On alcohol, Thoreau wrote: "I would fain keep sober always... I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor... Of all ebriosity, who does not prefer to be intoxicated by the air he breathes?"

Social and political influence

"Thoreau's careful observations and devastating conclusions have rippled into time, becoming stronger as the weaknesses Thoreau noted have become more pronounced ... Events that seem to be completely unrelated to his stay at Walden Pond have been influenced by it, including the national park system, the British labor movement, the creation of India, the civil rights movement, the hippie revolution, the environmental movement, and the wilderness movement. Today, Thoreau's words are quoted with feeling by liberals, socialists, anarchists, libertarians, and conservatives alike."
— Ken Kifer

Thoreau's political writings had little impact during his lifetime, as "his contemporaries did not see him as a theorist or as a radical, viewing him instead as a naturalist. They either dismissed or ignored his political essays, including Civil Disobedience. The only two complete books (as opposed to essays) published in his lifetime, Walden and A Week on the Concord and Merrimack

Rivers (1849), both dealt with nature, in which he loved to wander."Nevertheless, Thoreau's writings went on to influence many public figures. Political leaders and reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, President John F. Kennedy, civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and Russian author Leo Tolstoy all spoke of being strongly affected by Thoreau's work, particularly Civil Disobedience, as did "right-wing theorist Frank Chodorov devoted an entire issue of his monthly, Analysis, to an appreciation of Thoreau."Thoreau also influenced many artists and authors including Edward Abbey, Willa Cather, Marcel Proust, William Butler Yeats, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Upton Sinclair, E. B. White, Lewis Mumford, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alexander Posey and Gustav au also influenced naturalists like John Burroughs, John Muir, E. O. Wilson, Edwin Way Teale, Joseph Wood Krutch, B. F. Skinner, David Brower and Loren Eiseley, whom Publishers Weekly called "the modern Thoreau." English writer Henry Stephens Salt wrote a biography of Thoreau in 1890, which popularized Thoreau's ideas in Britain: George Bernard Shaw, Edward Carpenter and Robert Blatchford were among those who became Thoreau enthusiasts as a result of Salt's advocacy.

Mahatma Gandhi first read Walden in 1906 while working as a civil rights activist in Johannesburg, South Africa. He first read Civil Disobedience "while he sat in a South African prison for the crime of nonviolently protesting discrimination against the Indian population in the Transvaal. The essay galvanized Gandhi, who wrote and published a synopsis of Thoreau's argument, calling its 'incisive logic . . . unanswerable' and referring to Thoreau as 'one of the greatest and most moral men America has produced.'" He told American reporter Webb Miller, "[Thoreau's] ideas influenced me greatly. I adopted some of them and recommended the study of Thoreau to all of my friends who were helping me in the cause of Indian Independence. Why I actually took the name of my movement from Thoreau's essay 'On the Duty of Civil Disobedience,' written about 80 years ago."

Martin Luther King, Jr. noted in his autobiography that his first encounter with the idea of non-violent resistance was reading "On Civil Disobedience" in 1944 while attending Morehouse College. He wrote in his autobiography that it was

Here, in this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and his choice of jail rather than support a war that would spread slavery's territory into Mexico, I made my first contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times.

I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation

as is cooperation with good. No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than Henry David Thoreau. As a result of his writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest in Albany, Georgia, a bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.

American psychologist B. F. Skinner wrote that he carried a copy of Thoreau's Walden with him in his youth. and, in 1945, wrote Walden Two, a fictional utopia about 1,000 members of a community living together inspired by the life of Thoreau. Thoreau and his fellow Transcendentalists from Concord were a major inspiration of the composer Charles Ives. The 4th movement of the Concord Sonata for piano (with a part for flute, Thoreau's instrument) is a character picture and he also set Thoreau's words.

Anarchism

Thoreau's ideas have impacted and resonated with various strains in the anarchist movement, with Emma Goldman referring to him as "the greatest American anarchist." Green anarchism and Anarcho-primitivism in particular have both derived inspiration and ecological points-of-view from the writings of Thoreau. John Zerzan included Thoreau's text "Excursions" (1863) in his edited compilation of works in the anarcho-primitivist tradition titled Against civilization: Readings and reflections. Additionally, Murray Rothbard, the founder of anarcho-capitalism, has opined that Thoreau was one of the "great intellectual heroes" of his movement. Thoreau was also an important influence on late 19th century anarchist naturism. While globally, Thoreau's concepts also held importance within individualist anarchist circles in Spain, France, and Portugal.

Contemporary Critics

Although his writings would later receive widespread acclaim, Thoreau's ideas were not universally applauded by some of his contemporaries in literary circles. Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson judged Thoreau's endorsement of living alone and apart from modern society in natural simplicity to be a mark of "unmanly" effeminacy and "womanish solitude", while deeming him a self-indulgent "skulker." Nathaniel Hawthorne was also critical of Thoreau, writing that he "repudiated all regular modes of getting a living, and seems inclined to

lead a sort of Indian life among civilized men." In a similar vein, poet John Greenleaf Whittier detested what he deemed to be the "wicked" and "heathenish" message of Walden, decreeing that Thoreau wanted man to "lower himself to the level of a woodchuck and walk on four legs."

In response to such criticisms, English novelist George Eliot, writing for the Westminster Review, characterized such critics as uninspired and narrow-minded:
People—very wise in their own eyes—who would have every man's life ordered according to a particular pattern, and who are intolerant of every existence the utility of which is not palpable to them, may pooh-pooh Mr. Thoreau and this episode in his history, as unpractical and dreamy.

All Things Are Current Found

ALL things are current found
On earthly ground,
Spirits and elements
Have their descents.

Night and day, year on year,
High and low, far and near,
These are our own aspects,
These are our own regrets.

Ye gods of the shore,
Who abide evermore,
I see you far headland,
Stretching on either hand;

I hear the sweet evening sounds
From your undecaying grounds;
Cheat me no more with time,
Take me to your clime.

Henry David Thoreau

Away! Away! Away! Away!

Away! away! away! away!
Ye have not kept your secret well,
I will abide that other day,
Those other lands ye tell.

Has time no leisure left for these,
The acts that ye rehearse?
Is not eternity a lease
For better deeds than verse?

'Tis sweet to hear of heroes dead,
To know them still alive,
But sweeter if we earn their bread,
And in us they survive.

Our life should feed the springs of fame
With a perennial wave,
As ocean feeds the babbling founts
Which find it in their grave.

Ye skies dropp gently round my breast,
And be my corselet blue,
Ye earth receive my lance in rest,
My faithful charger you;

Ye stars my spear-heads in the sky,
My arrow-tips ye are;
I see the routed foemen fly,
My bright spears fixed are.

Give me an angel for a foe,
Fix now the place and time,
And straight to meet him I will go
Above the starry chime.

And with our clashing bucklers' clang
The heavenly spears shall ring,
While bright the northern lights shall hang
Beside our tourneying.

And if she lose her champion true,
Tell Heaven not despair,
For I will be her champion new,
Her fame I will repair.

Henry David Thoreau

Conscience

Conscience is instinct bred in the house,
Feeling and Thinking propagate the sin
By an unnatural breeding in and in.
I say, Turn it out doors,
Into the moors.
I love a life whose plot is simple,
And does not thicken with every pimple,
A soul so sound no sickly conscience binds it,
That makes the universe no worse than 't finds it.
I love an earnest soul,
Whose mighty joy and sorrow
Are not drowned in a bowl,
And brought to life to-morrow;
That lives one tragedy,
And not seventy;
A conscience worth keeping;
Laughing not weeping;
A conscience wise and steady,
And forever ready;
Not changing with events,
Dealing in compliments;
A conscience exercised about
Large things, where one may doubt.
I love a soul not all of wood,
Predestinated to be good,
But true to the backbone
Unto itself alone,
And false to none;
Born to its own affairs,
Its own joys and own cares;
By whom the work which God begun
Is finished, and not undone;
Taken up where he left off,
Whether to worship or to scoff;
If not good, why then evil,
If not good god, good devil.
Goodness! you hypocrite, come out of that,
Live your life, do your work, then take your hat.
I have no patience towards

Such conscientious cowards.
Give me simple laboring folk,
Who love their work,
Whose virtue is song
To cheer God along.

Henry David Thoreau

Epitaph On The World

Here lies the body of this world,
Whose soul alas to hell is hurled.
This golden youth long since was past,
Its silver manhood went as fast,
An iron age drew on at last;
'Tis vain its character to tell,
The several fates which it befell,
What year it died, when 'twill arise,
We only know that here it lies.

Henry David Thoreau

Friendship

I think awhile of Love, and while I think,
Love is to me a world,
Sole meat and sweetest drink,
And close connecting link
Tween heaven and earth.

I only know it is, not how or why,
My greatest happiness;
However hard I try,
Not if I were to die,
Can I explain.

I fain would ask my friend how it can be,
But when the time arrives,
Then Love is more lovely
Than anything to me,
And so I'm dumb.

For if the truth were known, Love cannot speak,
But only thinks and does;
Though surely out 'twill leak
Without the help of Greek,
Or any tongue.

A man may love the truth and practise it,
Beauty he may admire,
And goodness not omit,
As much as may befit
To reverence.

But only when these three together meet,
As they always incline,
And make one soul the seat,
And favorite retreat,
Of loveliness;

When under kindred shape, like loves and hates
And a kindred nature,
Proclaim us to be mates,

Exposed to equal fates
Eternally;

And each may other help, and service do,
Drawing Love's bands more tight,
Service he ne'er shall rue
While one and one make two,
And two are one;

In such case only doth man fully prove
Fully as man can do,
What power there is in Love
His inmost soul to move
Resistlessly.

_____

Two sturdy oaks I mean, which side by side,
Withstand the winter's storm,
And spite of wind and tide,
Grow up the meadow's pride,
For both are strong

Above they barely touch, but undermined
Down to their deepest source,
Admiring you shall find
Their roots are intertwined
Insep'rably.

Henry David Thoreau

Great God, I Ask For No Meaner Pelf

Great God, I ask for no meaner pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself,
That in my action 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 that it may be,
They may not dream how thou'st distinguished me.

That my weak hand may equal my firm faith
And my life practice what 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.

Henry David Thoreau

I Am A Parcel Of Vain Strivings Tied

I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
By a chance bond together,
Dangling this way and that, their links
Were made so loose and wide,
Methinks,
For milder weather.

A bunch of violets without their roots,
And sorrel intermixed,
Encircled by a wisp of straw
Once coiled about their shoots,
The law
By which I'm fixed.

A nosegay which Time clutched from out
Those fair Elysian fields,
With weeds and broken stems, in haste,
Doth make the rabble rout
That waste
The day he yields.

And here I bloom for a short hour unseen,
Drinking my juices up,
With no root in the land
To keep my branches green,
But stand
In a bare cup.

Some tender buds were left upon my stem
In mimicry of life,
But ah! the children will not know,
Till time has withered them,
The woe
With which they're rife.

But now I see I was not plucked for naught,
And after in life's vase
Of glass set while I might survive,
But by a kind hand brought

Alive
To a strange place.

That stock thus thinned will soon redeem its hours,
And by another year,
Such as God knows, with freer air,
More fruits and fairer flowers
Will bear,
While I droop here.

Henry David Thoreau

I Am The Autumnal Sun

Sometimes a mortal feels in himself Nature
-- not his Father but his Mother stirs
within him, and he becomes immortal with her
immortality. From time to time she claims
kindredship with us, and some globule
from her veins steals up into our own.

I am the autumnal sun,
With autumn gales my race is run;
When will the hazel put forth its flowers,
Or the grape ripen under my bowers?
When will the harvest or the hunter's moon
Turn my midnight into mid-noon?
I am all sere and yellow,
And to my core mellow.
The mast is dropping within my woods,
The winter is lurking within my moods,
And the rustling of the withered leaf
Is the constant music of my grief...

Henry David Thoreau

I Knew A Man By Sight

I knew a man by sight,
A blameless wight,
Who, for a year or more,
Had daily passed my door,
Yet converse none had had with him.

I met him in a lane,
Him and his cane,
About three miles from home,
Where I had chanced to roam,
And volumes stared at him, and he at me.

In a more distant place
I glimpsed his face,
And bowed instinctively;
Starting he bowed to me,
Bowed simultaneously, and passed along.

Next, in a foreign land
I grasped his hand,
And had a social chat,
About this thing and that,
As I had known him well a thousand years.

Late in a wilderness
I shared his mess,
For he had hardships seen,
And I a wanderer been;
He was my bosom friend, and I was his.

And as, methinks, shall all,
Both great and small,
That ever lived on earth,
Early or late their birth,
Stranger and foe, one day each other know.

Henry David Thoreau

I Was Made Erect And Lone

I was made erect and lone,
And within me is the bone;
Still my vision will be clear,
Still my life will not be drear,
To the center all is near.
Where I sit there is my throne.
If age choose to sit apart,
If age choose, give me the start,
Take the sap and leave the heart.

Henry David Thoreau

Indeed, Indeed I Cannot Tell

Indeed indeed, I cannot tell,
Though I ponder on it well,
Which were easier to state,
All my love or all my hate.
Surely, surely, thou wilt trust me
When I say thou dost disgust me.
O, I hate thee with a hate
That would fain annihilate;
Yet sometimes against my will,
My dear friend, I love thee still.
It were treason to our love,
And a sin to God above,
One iota to abate
Of a pure impartial hate.

Henry David Thoreau

Inspiration

Whate'er we leave to God, God does,
And blesses us;
The work we choose should be our own,
God leaves alone.

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.

Always the general show of things
Floats in review before my mind,
And such true love and reverence brings,
That sometimes I forget that I am blind.

But now there comes unsought, unseen,
Some clear divine electuary,
And I, who had but sensual been,
Grow sensible, and as God is, am wary.

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.

I hear beyond the range of sound,
I see beyond the range of sight,
New earths and skies and seas around,
And in my day the sun doth pale his light.

A clear and ancient harmony
Pierces my soul through all its din,
As through its utmost melody--
Farther behind than they, farther within.

More swift its bolt than lightning is,
Its voice than thunder is more loud,
It doth expand my privacies
To all, and leave me single in the crowd.

It speaks with such authority,
With so serene and lofty tone,
That idle Time runs gadding by,
And leaves me with Eternity alone.

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 grey wall or some chance place,
Unseasoning Time, insulting June,
And vexing day with its presuming face.

Such fragrance round my couch it makes,
More rich than are Arabian drugs,
That my soul scents its life and wakes
The body up beneath its perfumed rugs.

Such is the Muse, the heavenly maid,
The star that guides our mortal course,
Which shows where life's true kernel's laid,
Its wheat's fine flour, and its undying force.

She with one breath attunes the spheres,
And also my poor human heart,
With one impulse propels the years
Around, and gives my throbbing pulse its start.

I will not doubt for evermore,

Nor falter from a steadfast faith,
For thought the system be turned o'er,
God takes not back the word which once He saith.

I will not doubt the love untold
Which not my worth nor want has bought,
Which wooed me young, and woos me old,
And to this evening hath me brought.

My memory I'll educate
To know the one historic truth,
Remembering to the latest date
The only true and sole immortal youth.

Be but thy inspiration given,
No matter through what danger sought,
I'll fathom hell or climb to heaven,
And yet esteem that cheap which love has bought.

Fame cannot tempt the bard
Who's famous with his God,
Nor laurel him reward
Who has his Maker's nod.

Henry David Thoreau

Let Such Pure Hate Still Underprop

Let such pure hate still underprop
Our love, that we may be
Each other's conscience,
And have our sympathy
Mainly from thence.
We'll one another treat like gods,
And all the faith we have
In virtue and in truth, bestow
On either, and suspicion leave
To gods below.

Two solitary stars--
Unmeasured systems far
Between us roll;
But by our conscious light we are
Determined to one pole.

What need confound the sphere?--
Love can afford to wait;
For it no hour's too late
That witnesseth one duty's end,
Or to another doth beginning lend.

It will subserve no use,
More than the tints of flowers;
Only the independent guest
Frequents its bowers,
Inherits its bequest.

No speech, though kind, has it;
But kinder silence doles
Unto its mates;
By night consoles,
By day congratulates.

What saith the tongue to tongue?
What hearest ear of ear?
By the decrees of fate
From year to year,

Does it communicate.

Pathless the gulf of feeling yawns;
No trivial bridge of words,
Or arch of boldest span,
Can leap the moat that girds
The sincere man.

No show of bolts and bars
Can keep the foeman out,
Or 'scape his secret mine,
Who entered with the doubt
That drew the line.

No warder at the gate
Can let the friendly in;
But, like the sun, o'er all
He will the castle win,
And shine along the wall.

There's nothing in the world I know
That can escape from love,
For every depth it goes below,
And every height above.
It waits, as waits the sky,
Until the clouds go by,
Yet shines serenely on
With an eternal day,
Alike when they are gone,
And when they stay.

Implacable is Love--
Foes may be bought or teased
From their hostile intent,
But he goes unappeased
Who is on kindness bent.

Henry David Thoreau

Light-Winged Smoke

LIGHT-WINGED Smoke, Icarian bird,
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight,
Lark without song, and the 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.

Henry David Thoreau

Like A Soul

Sending
In delinquency
To disappoint
The amber of water
At a high soul

Henry David Thoreau

Low-Anchored Cloud

Low-anchored cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain-head and source of rivers,
Dew-cloth, dream-drapery,
And napkin spread by fays;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the daisied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades;
Spirit of lakes and seas and rivers,
Bear only perfumes and the scent
Of healing herbs to just men's fields!

Henry David Thoreau

Men Say They Know Many Things

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 that any body knows.

Henry David Thoreau

Mist

Low-anchored cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain head and source of rivers,
Dew-cloth, dream drapery,
And napkin spread by fays;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the dasied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades;
Spirit of the lake and seas and rivers,
Bear only purfumes and the scent
Of healing herbs to just men's fields!

Henry David Thoreau

My Life Has Been The Poem

My life has been the poem
I would have writ,
But I could not both live
and utter it.

Henry David Thoreau

Nature

O Nature! I do not aspire
To be the highest in thy choir, -
To be a meteor in thy sky,
Or comet that may range on high;
Only a zephyr that may blow
Among the reeds by the river low;
Give me thy most privy place
Where to run my airy race.

In some withdrawn, unpublic mead
Let me sigh upon a reed,
Or in the woods, with leafy din,
Whisper the still evening in:
Some still work give me to do, -
Only - be it near to you!

For I'd rather be thy child
And pupil, in the forest wild,
Than be the king of men elsewhere,
And most sovereign slave of care;
To have one moment of thy dawn,
Than share the city's year forlorn.

Henry David Thoreau

On Fields O'Er Which The Reaper's Hand Has Pass'D

On fields o'er which the reaper's hand has pass'd
Lit by the harvest moon and autumn sun,
My thoughts like stubble floating in the wind
And of such fineness as October airs,
There after harvest could I glean my life
A richer harvest reaping without toil,
And weaving gorgeous fancies at my will
In subtler webs than finest summer haze.

Henry David Thoreau

Pray To What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong

Pray to what earth does this sweet cold belong,
Which asks no duties and no conscience?
The moon goes up by leaps, her cheerful path
In some far summer stratum of the sky,
While stars with their cold shine bedot her way.
The fields gleam mildly back upon the sky,
And far and near upon the leafless shrubs
The snow dust still emits a silver light.
Under the hedge, where drift banks are their screen,
The titmice now pursue their downy dreams,
As often in the sweltering summer nights
The bee doth drop asleep in the flower cup,
When evening overtakes him with his load.
By the brooksides, in the still, genial night,
The more adventurous wanderer may hear
The crystals shoot and form, and winter slow
Increase his rule by gentlest summer means.

Henry David Thoreau

Prayer

Great God, I ask for no meaner pelf
Than that I may not disappoint myself,
That in my action 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 that it may be,
They may not dream how thou'st distinguished me.

That my weak hand may equal my firm faith
And my life practice what 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.

Henry David Thoreau

Rumors From An Aeolian Harp

There is a vale which none hath seen,
Where foot of man has never been,
Such as here lives with toil and strife,
An anxious and a sinful life.
There every virtue has its birth,
Ere it descends upon the earth,
And thither every deed returns,
Which in the generous bosom burns.

There love is warm, and youth is young,
And poetry is yet unsung.
For Virtue still adventures there,
And freely breathes her native air.

And ever, if you hearken well,
You still may hear its vesper bell,
And tread of high-souled men go by,
Their thoughts conversing with the sky.

Henry David Thoreau

Salmon Brook

SALMON Brook,
Penichook,
Ye sweet waters of my brain,
When shall I look,
Or cast the hook,
In your waves again?

Silver eels,
Wooden creels,
These the baits that still allure,
And dragon-fly
That floated by,
May they still endure?

Henry David Thoreau

Sic Vita

I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
By a chance bond together,
Dangling this way and that, their links
Were made so loose and wide,
Methinks,
For milder weather.

A bunch of violets without their roots,
And sorrel intermixed,
Encircled by a wisp of straw
Once coiled about their shoots,
The law
By which I'm fixed.

A nosegay which Time clutched from out
Those fair Elysian fields,
With weeds and broken stems, in haste,
Doth make the rabble rout
That waste
The day he yields.

And here I bloom for a short hour unseen,
Drinking my juices up,
With no root in the land
To keep my branches green,
But stand
In a bare cup.

Some tender buds were left upon my stem
In mimicry of life,
But ah! the children will not know,
Till time has withered them,
The woe
With which they're rife.

But now I see I was not plucked for naught,
And after in life's vase
Of glass set while I might survive,
But by a kind hand brought

Alive
To a strange place.

That stock thus thinned will soon redeem its hours,
And by another year,
Such as God knows, with freer air,
More fruits and fairer flowers
Will bear,
While I droop here.

Henry David Thoreau

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 they 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.

Henry David Thoreau

Song Of Nature

Mine are the night and morning,
The pits of air, the gull of space,
The sportive sun, the gibbous moon,
The innumerable days.

I hide in the solar glory,
I am dumb in the pealing song,
I rest on the pitch of the torrent,
In slumber I am strong.

No numbers have counted my tallies,
No tribes my house can fill,
I sit by the shining Fount of Life
And pour the deluge still;

And ever by delicate powers
Gathering along the centuries
From race on race the rarest flowers,
My wreath shall nothing miss.

And many a thousand summers
My gardens ripened well,
And light from meliorating stars
With firmer glory fell.

I wrote the past in characters
Of rock and fire the scroll,
The building in the coral sea,
The planting of the coal.

And thefts from satellites and rings
And broken stars I drew,
And out of spent and aged things
I formed the world anew;

What time the gods kept carnival,
Tricked out in star and flower,
And in cramp elf and saurian forms
They swathed their too much power.

Time and Thought were my surveyors,
They laid their courses well,
They boiled the sea, and piled the layers
Of granite, marl and shell.

But he, the man-child glorious, -
Where tarries he the while?
The rainbow shines his harbinger,
The sunset gleams his smile.

My boreal lights leap upward,
Forthright my planets roll,
And still the man-child is not born,
The summit of the whole.

Must time and tide forever run?
Will never my winds go sleep in the west?
Will never my wheels which whirl the sun
And satellites have rest?

Too much of donning and doffing,
Too slow the rainbow fades,
I weary of my robe of snow,
My leaves and my cascades;

I tire of globes and races,
Too long the game is played;
What without him is summer's pomp,
Or winter's frozen shade?

I travail in pain for him,
My creatures travail and wait;
His couriers come by squadrons,
He comes not to the gate.

Twice I have moulded an image,
And thrice outstretched my hand,
Made one of day and one of night
And one of the salt sea-sand.

One in a Judaean manger,

And one by Avon stream,
One over against the mouths of Nile,
And one in the Academe.

I moulded kings and saviors,
And bards o'er kings to rule; -
But fell the starry influence short,
The cup was never full.

Yet whirl the glowing wheels once more,
And mix the bowl again;
Seethe, Fate! the ancient elements,
Heat, cold, wet, dry, and peace, and pain.

Let war and trade and creeds and song
Blend, ripen race on race,
The sunburnt world a man shall breed
Of all the zones and countless days.

No ray is dimmed, no atom worn,
My oldest force is good as new,
And the fresh rose on yonder thorn
Gives back the bending heavens in dew.

Henry David Thoreau

Sympathy

Lately alas I knew a gentle boy,
Whose features all were cast in Virtue's mould,
As one she had designed for Beauty's toy,
But after manned him for her own strong-hold.
On every side he open was as day,
That you might see no lack of strength within,
For walls and ports do only serve alway
For a pretence to feebleness and sin.

Say not that Ccsar was victorious,
With toil and strife who stormed the House of Fame;
In other sense this youth was glorious,
Himself a kingdom wheresoe'er he came.

No strength went out to get him victory,
When all was income of its own accord;
For where he went none other was to see,
But all were parcel of their noble lord.

He forayed like the subtle breeze of summer,
That stilly shows fresh landscapes to the eyes,
And revolutions worked without a murmur,
Or rustling of a leaf beneath the skies.

So was I taken unawares by this,
I quite forgot my homage to confess;
Yet now am forced to know, though hard it is,
I might have loved him, had I loved him less.

Each moment, as we nearer drew to each,
A stern respect withheld us farther yet,
So that we seemed beyond each other's reach,
And less acquainted than when first we met.

We two were one while we did sympathize,
So could we not the simplest bargain drive;
And what avails it now that we are wise,
If absence doth this doubleness contrive?

Eternity may not the chance repeat,
But I must tread my single way alone,
In sad remembrance that we once did meet,
And know that bliss irrevocably gone.

The spheres henceforth my elegy shall sing,
For elegy has other subject none;
Each strain of music in my ears shall ring
Knell of departure from that other one.

Make haste and celebrate my tragedy;
With fitting strain resound ye woods and fields;
Sorrow is dearer in such case to me
Than all the joys other occasion yields.

Is't then too late the damage to repair?
Distance, forsooth, from my weak grasp hath reft
The empty husk, and clutched the useless tare,
But in my hands the wheat and kernel left.

If I but love that virtue which he is,
Though it be scented in the morning air,
Still shall we be truest acquaintances,
Nor mortals know a sympathy more rare.

Henry David Thoreau

Tall Ambrosia

Among the signs of autumn I perceive
The Roman wormwood (called by learned men
Ambrosia elatior, food for gods,—
For to impartial science the humblest weed
Is as immortal once as the proudest flower—)
Sprinkles its yellow dust over my shoes
As I cross the now neglected garden.
—We trample under foot the food of gods
And spill their nectar in each dropp of dew—
My honest shoes, fast friends that never stray
Far from my couch, thus powdered, countryfied,
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure,
At the post-house disgrace the Gallic gloss
Of those well dressed ones who no morning dew
Nor Roman wormwood ever have been through,
Who never walk but are transported rather—
For what old crime of theirs I do not gather.

Henry David Thoreau

The Fisher’s Boy

MY life is like a stroll upon the beach,
As near the ocean’s edge as I can go;
My tardy steps its waves sometimes o’erreach,
Sometimes I stay to let them overflow.

My sole employment is, and scrupulous care,
To place my gains beyond the reach of tides,—
Each smoother pebble, and each shell more rare,
Which Ocean kindly to my hand confides.

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 known upon the strand to me.

The middle sea contains no crimson dulse,
Its deeper waves cast up no pearls to view;
Along the shore my hand is on its pulse,
And I converse with many a shipwrecked crew.

Henry David Thoreau

The Inward Morning

Packed in my mind lie all the clothes
Which outward nature wears,
And in its fashion's hourly change
It all things else repairs.
In vain I look for change abroad,
And can no difference find,
Till some new ray of peace uncalled
Illumes my inmost mind.

What is it gilds the trees and clouds,
And paints the heavens so gay,
But yonder fast-abiding light
With its unchanging ray?

Lo, when the sun streams through the wood,
Upon a winter's morn,
Where'er his silent beams intrude,
The murky night is gone.

How could the patient pine have known
The morning breeze would come,
Or humble flowers anticipate
The insect's noonday hum--

Till the new light with morning cheer
From far streamed through the aisles,
And nimbly told the forest trees
For many stretching miles?

I've heard within my inmost soul
Such cheerful morning news,
In the horizon of my mind
Have seen such orient hues,

As in the twilight of the dawn,
When the first birds awake,
Are heard within some silent wood,
Where they the small twigs break,

Or in the eastern skies are seen,
Before the sun appears,
The harbingers of summer heats
Which from afar he bears.

Henry David Thoreau

The Moon

Time wears her not; she doth his chariot guide;
Mortality below her orb is placed.
--Raleigh

The full-orbed moon with unchanged ray
Mounts up the eastern sky,
Not doomed to these short nights for aye,
But shining steadily.

She does not wane, but my fortune,
Which her rays do not bless,
My wayward path declineth soon,
But she shines not the less.

And if she faintly glimmers here,
And paled is her light,
Yet alway in her proper sphere
She's mistress of the night.

Henry David Thoreau

The Poet's Delay

IN vain I see the morning rise,
In vain observe the western blaze,
Who idly look to other skies,
Expecting life by other ways.

Amidst such boundless wealth without,
I only still am poor within,
The birds have sung their summer out,
But still my spring does not begin.

Shall I then wait the autumn wind,
Compelled to seek a milder day,
And leave no curious nest behind,
No woods still echoing to my lay?

Henry David Thoreau

The Summer Rain

My books I'd fain cast off, I cannot read,
'Twixt every page my thoughts go stray at large
Down in the meadow, where is richer feed,
And will not mind to hit their proper targe.

Plutarch was good, and so was Homer too,
Our Shakespeare's life were rich to live again,
What Plutarch read, that was not good nor true,
Nor Shakespeare's books, unless his books were men.

Here while I lie beneath this walnut bough,
What care I for the Greeks or for Troy town,
If juster battles are enacted now
Between the ants upon this hummock's crown?

Bid Homer wait till I the issue learn,
If red or black the gods will favor most,
Or yonder Ajax will the phalanx turn,
Struggling to heave some rock against the host.

Tell Shakespeare to attend some leisure hour,
For now I've business with this drop of dew,
And see you not, the clouds prepare a shower--
I'll meet him shortly when the sky is blue.

This bed of herd's grass and wild oats was spread
Last year with nicer skill than monarchs use.
A clover tuft is pillow for my head,
And violets quite overtop my shoes.

And now the cordial clouds have shut all in,
And gently swells the wind to say all's well;
The scattered drops are falling fast and thin,
Some in the pool, some in the flower-bell.

I am well drenched upon my bed of oats;
But see that globe come rolling down its stem,
Now like a lonely planet there it floats,
And now it sinks into my garment's hem.

Drip drip the trees for all the country round,
And richness rare distills from every bough;
The wind alone it is makes every sound,
Shaking down crystals on the leaves below.

For shame the sun will never show himself,
Who could not with his beams e'er melt me so;
My dripping locks--they would become an elf,
Who in a beaded coat does gayly go.

Henry David Thoreau

They Who Prepare My Evening Meal Below

They who prepare my evening meal below
Carelessly hit the kettle as they go
With tongs or shovel,
And ringing round and round,
Out of this hovel
It makes an eastern temple by the sound.

At first I thought a cow bell right at hand
Mid birches sounded o'er the open land,
Where I plucked flowers
Many years ago,
Spending midsummer hours
With such secure delight they hardly seemed to flow.

Henry David Thoreau

Though All The Fates

THOUGH all the fates should prove unkind,
Leave not your native land behind.
The ship, becalmed, at length stands still;
The steed must rest beneath the hill;
But swiftly still our fortunes pace
To find us out in every place.

The vessel, though her masts be firm,
Beneath her copper bears a worm;
Around the cape, across the line,
Till fields of ice her course confine;
It matters not how smooth the breeze,
How shallow or how deep the seas,
Whether she bears Manilla twine,
Or in her hold Madeira wine,
Or China teas, or Spanish hides,
In port or quarantine she rides;
Far from New England's blustering shore,
New England's worm her hulk shall bore,
And sink her in the Indian seas,
Twine, wine, and hides, and China teas.

Henry David Thoreau

To A Marsh Hawk In Spring

There is health in thy gray wing,
Health of nature’s furnishing.
Say, thou modern-winged antique,
Was thy mistress ever sick?
In each heaving of thy wing
Thou dost health and leisure bring,
Thou dost waive disease and pain
And resume new life again.

Henry David Thoreau

What's The Railroad To Me?

What's the railroad to me?
I never go to see
Where it ends.
It fills a few hollows,
And makes banks for the swallows,
It sets the sand a-blowing,
And the blackberries a-growing.

Henry David Thoreau

Winter Memories

Within the circuit of this plodding life
There enter moments of an azure hue,
Untarnished fair as is the violet
Or anemone, when the spring stew them
By some meandering rivulet, which make
The best philosophy untrue that aims
But to console man for his grievences.
I have remembered when the winter came,
High in my chamber in the frosty nights,
When in the still light of the cheerful moon,
On the every twig and rail and jutting spout,
The icy spears were adding to their length
Against the arrows of the coming sun,
How in the shimmering noon of winter past
Some unrecorded beam slanted across
The upland pastures where the Johnwort grew;
Or heard, amid the verdure of my mind,
The bee's long smothered hum, on the blue flag
Loitering amidst the mead; or busy rill,
Which now through all its course stands still and dumb
Its own memorial, - purling at its play
Along the slopes, and through the meadows next,
Until its youthful sound was hushed at last
In the staid current of the lowland stream;
Or seen the furrows shine but late upturned,
And where the fieldfare followed in the rear,
When all the fields around lay bound and hoar
Beneath a thick integument of snow.
So by God's cheap economy made rich
To go upon my winter's task again.

Henry David Thoreau

Within The Circuit Of This Plodding Life

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