

The Western Thoreau Centenary: Selected Papers

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INTRODUCTION

The five papers which I have selected for this monograph were delivered at The Western Thoreau Centenary held at Utah State University June 21-23, 1962. In sponsoring this commemoration of the life and achievement of Henry David Thoreau on the hundredth anniversary of his death, Utah State University was acting as host to a Western regional meeting of The Thoreau Society, Inc. Dr. Lewis Leary of Columbia University, then president of the Society, gave me, as director of the tentatively planned project, official approval, friendly encouragement, and a free hand. Though Dr. Leary was unable to attend, the Society was officially represented by Gladys E. H. Hosmer, vice-president, and Dr. Walter Harding, secretary-treasurer and president-elect.

From the first planning stages of The Western Thoreau Centenary, I had the full cooperation of Dr. King Hendricks, head of the English Department, Dr. Carlton Culmsee, dean of the College of Humanities and Arts, and Dr. M. R. Merrill, academic vice-president, who approved not only the idea but also—and more practically—the appropriation of University funds to finance it. Coming as it did during the year-long, nation-wide celebration of the centenary of The Land-Grant College and State University System, this special recognition of Thoreau, who is now generally considered one of America's greatest writers and moral philosophers, seemed to us an appropriate way for Utah State University to participate imaginatively in the ideal of the Land-Grant Centennial: "Let our future be nourished by the past."

As a result of this cooperation, Dr. Walter Harding was finally contracted by the University as early as November, 1961, to deliver three one-hour lectures, and it was around him as a nucleus that I conceived the idea of inviting other scholars, particularly in Western America, to participate and make it a full-scale commemorative occasion. As plans developed, *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* generously carried detailed announcements in three successive numbers. *American Quarterly*, *College English*, and *Western Humanities Review* also each carried a notice. A typed letter inviting participation as well as attendance was

sent to the head of the English Department in almost every college west of the Mississippi River. Over one hundred responses expressed genuine interest in the occasion, and papers were submitted from Arizona, California, Wyoming, Montana, and Alberta, Canada. I sent a special invitation to Mrs. Hosmer and was especially pleased at her gracious acceptance. Her presence lent a charming and authentic New England tone to the affair—and she was an inimitable house guest.

Having some anxiety about how such a venture as The Western Thoreau Centenary would turn out, I was pleased alike by the generally high quality of the papers and by the enthusiastic response of the two hundred people who attended one or more of the six sessions. I would never, of course, have been in a position to undertake such a project if I had not belonged to The Thoreau Society; and my membership, in turn, would have been highly improbable if I had not visited Concord in 1956 and 1959 while doing research at Harvard. My very special thanks, therefore, go to Dr. D. Wynne Thorne, Director of Utah State University Research Council, who approved my two projects for research at Harvard that enabled me to meet some of the leading Thoreau scholars, to join The Thoreau Society, and eventually to arrange for their support in sponsoring The Western Thoreau Centenary.

The five papers comprising this monograph represent a wide range of subject, tone, and point of view, and this is an entirely normal situation. Uniformity of point of view would be particularly surprising in a series of papers about Thoreau since he appeals to a wide variety of people for any of a number of traits of style or character or philosophy.

Mrs. Hosmer's paper is a composite of two half-hour talks she gave. They were tape recorded and adapted by her and me into the present form. I have felt for years that some of her views on Thoreau and her experience with Thoreau materials should be on record, and I feel privileged to place them there.

Two of the three papers presented by Dr. Harding at the Centenary have by now been published: "Five Ways of Looking at Walden" in the autumn issue of *The Massachusetts Review* and "Thoreau's Last Days and Death" in the December 1962 issue of *American Heritage* under the title "This is a Beautiful World; But

I Shall See a Fairer." This latter paper will eventually serve as the concluding chapter in a biography of Thoreau which Dr. Harding is now writing. I chose for inclusion here "The Influence of Civil Disobedience," which is likely the most comprehensive statement yet available on the nature and import of Thoreau's most famous essay.

It is true, I believe, that those who read only "Civil Disobedience" are likely to get an exaggeratedly negative view of Thoreau's attitude toward government. Admittedly, he believed, as did Jefferson and Paine, that "That government is best which governs least"; and the word, "governs," in this context means for him "coerces." Yet after a visit to Eastern Canada, where he had seen the inhabitants "suffering between two fires, — the soldiery and the priesthood," he observed that "a private man was not worth so much in Canada as in the United States." He then went on — directly contrary to the gist of "Civil Disobedience" — to concede that "What makes the United States government on the whole, more tolerable — I mean for us lucky white men — is the fact that there is so much less government with us." Thoreau's prime concern was that the fullest possible development of the individual's personality should receive no hindrance nor impairment, and he saw a continual threat to this ideal through governmental curtailment of fundamental freedoms. Even though he made significant concessions toward government and other social institutions, perhaps he would have been surprised at the notion that one hundred years after his death the greatest threat to individuals and minority groups in America would be coming *not* from the United States government, which was acting as referee and often as the only available champion of the individual, but from parochial local governments and fascist-minded factions. If Thoreau could observe life in United States today, he would likely say, "A private man is worth more under the aegis of the United States government than as the victim of local bigotries."

Dr. Rose presents in his papers an interesting interpretation of Thoreau's striving for perfection — individually and artistically as well as socially and politically. His paper is an imaginative and ingenious performance in close reading and formal analysis. In it he relates Thoreau to several other notable writers who have seen art and life in certain significant parallels and interrelationships.

Since Mr. Drake was prevented by very serious illness in his

family from coming to Logan to read his paper, it was read for him. Mr. Drake is widely known and respected as a Thoreau scholar by his two excellent essays which appeared in Sherman Paul's book, *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*. (1962) and by his thesis "A Formal Study of H. D. Thoreau," (U. of Iowa, 1948) from which they are derived. I have read them with almost entire agreement and with a special pleasure in the structuring of his ideas and in his lucid style. After having read and re-read his present paper, however, I still feel that he has over-emphasized two negative elements in Thoreau's life and thought. It seems to me that he has over-stated his case by asserting that Thoreau held society in utter contempt and that he felt a complete sense of failure after *Walden*.

It is interestingly ironic that in my paper I have recognized in Thoreau's thought a set of attitudes regarding society and of values in his own life which are virtually the opposite of Mr. Drake's assumptions and assertions. Mr. Drake (and others) may feel, of course, that I have exaggerated in one direction, as I feel he has in the other. I attempted in my paper to distinguish between Thoreau's admittedly sharp denunciations of mankind, which generally allows itself to become engrossed by the machinery of society (its institutions and traditions), and actual human beings, themselves — his neighbors — to whose welfare I contend Thoreau was dedicated in a very enlightened sense. In the extent to which Mr. Drake and I do differ on these matters, we do so with mutual respect and entire good will; and I, for my part, can hardly wait till I can go to Tucson and have a long talk with him — preferably over two tall glasses of iced "pond water."

These five papers represent, then, as Thoreau criticism generally has done for over a century, a wide diversity of views by people of varied backgrounds and temperaments. Individuals continue to find different enthusiasms in contemplating Thoreau's life as they make differing critical interpretations of his writings. It is inevitable that he has come to mean many things to people in our time that his contemporaries did not value or even see in him. It is interesting to conjecture which, if any, of his qualities the human race will find useful as it evolves through the next century; but it is no doubt better to keep our feet on the ground, to enjoy as Thoreau tried to "One world at a time."

Remarks on Thoreau, Concord, and Walden

Gladys E. H. Hosmer

It is a pleasure to come to Logan and to this beautiful valley to extend to you the greetings of the national Thoreau Society and the regrets of the president, Dr. Lewis Leary of Columbia University, who was prevented by other commitments from being here. The Thoreau Society is very happy, indeed, to cooperate with Utah State University in sponsoring this Western Thoreau Centenary, and I assure you that it is a very great pleasure to me personally to come and participate, to renew my acquaintance with some long-time Thoreau devotees and to meet new ones.

THE CONCORD OF THOREAU

My title for this informal talk should be the "Concord of Thoreau," rather than "Thoreau of Concord," for I shall try to tell you about some of the things that I would like to show you if you came to Concord—and many students of Thoreau do come to my door seeking answers to innumerable questions. I live in the old Frank B. Sanborn house on Elm Street where Ellery Channing, the poet, spent the last ten years of his life and where Walt Whitman visited and described the view from his window over the meadows across the Sudbury River in his *Specimen Days*.

I knew little of Thoreau in my girlhood days in Boston. At the end of my college years I came to Concord and met and married Herbert B. Hosmer, a young man whose family had been one of the twelve who, with Rev. Peter Bulkeley and Major Simon Willard, had settled that town in 1635. My husband's uncle, Alfred W. Hosmer, was one of the early Thoreau enthusiasts, and as a boy my husband had accompanied Uncle Fred on walks to the Concord hills, ponds, rivers, and swamplands about which Thoreau wrote. He showed me where the rarest wild flowers grew and the likeliest places to find Indian arrowheads so I learned by word of mouth much that made my later reading of Thoreau's works clear and vivid. Professor Taylor is correct in

saying that each one of us finds something different yet equally satisfactory in Thoreau's writings.

First, I would take you to see the locations significantly related to Thoreau which have been marked with bronze tablets, the gift of a generous member of the Thoreau Society.

The birthplace on the old Virginia Road, a mile or two out of the village, is an old farmhouse and looks very much as it did when Thoreau was born there on July 12, 1817, when his grandmother lived there. Although the house has been moved to a neighboring site, the environment is not much changed. There are jet planes from the nearby air base roaring overhead, and a creeping tide of small developments is headed that way.

The "Texas" house across the railroad tracks was built by Thoreau and his father, and the family lived there while he was at Walden Pond. It was known as the Texas house, because that section of Concord was considered a little bit far away from the center of the town—toward the southwest. The site of the jail, where Thoreau was imprisoned for a night for failing to pay his tax as a protest against the Mexican War and from which he was bailed out against his will, probably by his aunt, is at the edge of the town parking space near the Millbrook. The fourth tablet is on the house at 73 Main Street, where Thoreau died on May 6, 1862. The house was later purchased by Louisa May Alcott for her family. Not far from the Main Street house is the Concord Free Public Library with its excellent Thoreau collection of books, manuscripts, survey maps, and the Rowse portrait of Thoreau. Any day you should go to the library, you would find at the circulation desk a volume of Thoreau's *Journal* opened to that day of the month.

If you are good walkers, I would take you to some of Thoreau's favorite haunts. We would go to Walden Pond, where Roland Robbins, who calls himself "the pick and shovel archaeologist," established the exact site of the hut by locating the four corners, hearthstone, and chimney base. The hut furniture is in the local Antiquarian Society's museum on the Lexington Road, along with more than 200 items connected with the Thoreau family. On Author's Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, close to those of Emerson, Hawthorne, and the Alcotts, is Thoreau's grave, much visited by tourists, especially those from the Far

Eastern countries. The rivers, slow-moving, are best seen by canoe, and are unchanged except according to season; likewise the lovely wooded Eastern brook country seems impervious to time. But Conantum and the Second Division are being so rapidly "developed" that many of us echo Thoreau's words: "Thank God that they cannot cut down the clouds!"

THE SAVING OF WALDEN POND.

The job of vice-president of the Thoreau Society, when I accepted it, was clear: vice-presidents always came from Concord and they had the task of seeing that the annual meeting-place was engaged and that there was lunch for an indeterminate and indeterminable number of guests. To my consternation, in a very short time, the Walden affair occurred, and the chairmanship of the Save Walden Committee descended on my reluctant shoulders.

Fortunately, the other people on the committee were very efficient, each in his own way. Among them was that writer of "purple prose," Truman Nelson, who was invaluable, Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, and Miss Dorothea K. Harrison, nationally known landscape architect. I still did the chores. Even now, after five years, letters come to me from all over the country asking what we did and how we did it, for the decision we gained made legal history. Never before have ten tax-payers brought a suit against a state, in this case, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

To go back to the beginnings: When the automobile age began to grow up, the shores surrounding Walden Pond were owned privately by the Emersons, the Forbes family, into which Ralph Waldo Emerson's daughter Edith had married, and by a Concord worthy named Heywood. For years Concord boys had gone swimming in the pond, bringing their picnics and fishing tackle, and occasionally a boat. Then, all of a sudden, at the end of World War I, people from out of town began coming in droves in their little Fords and other cars. There was a good deal of consequent disorder, rubbish, and undesirable rowdyism and many complaints were made to the Town Fathers.

The owners of the Pond did not feel that it was up to them to pick up the litter, nor could the Town afford to police the area,

although frequently Concord police had to be called in to break up fights or to investigate thefts from cars. So the Emersons, Forbes, and Heywoods put their heads together to determine what was to be done; and they decided to give the land to the State with the provision that its care and oversight should be vested in the Middlesex County Commission. The pond itself, being an area of over 14 acres, is legally a "great pond" to which the public has access for fishing.

As perhaps you know, county government in New England is a very weak system, unlike in the Central and Western States. The towns are locally autonomous, and only a few functions are controlled by county commissioners. There is a movement on foot to abolish county government completely, and I think that it will be eventually successful. However, the Walden donors believed that the commissioners, who were neighbors, would be the best people to run the area with funds appropriated by the Legislature.

For some time this worked very well in accordance with the deed, which stated: "The sole purpose of this deed is to preserve the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau, its shores and woodlands, for people who enjoy nature." Fishing, swimming, picnicking, and boating were permitted. Modest bathhouses and toilet facilities were installed in the woods at the sandy beach, and life-guards and men to rake up the beach were hired in summer. Then the character of the County Commissioners changed. They became men from the little cities on the outskirts of Boston, and the enterprise began to take on a political complexion; in short, it became a patronage job.

The Red Cross had been conducting for many years a good swimming program for some hundreds of children. Due to increasing crowds, the Chapter asked the County Commissioners if it could be arranged for them to use a beach of their own. At that time I was sitting on the Red Cross Board, and I thought it a good idea; I visualized it as a sand-dumping project along the shore adjoining the regular beach, with some policing to keep the crowds away from the instruction area.

All of a sudden one day someone burst into my house, excitedly, and said: "Do you know that they are cutting down trees at Walden?"

"Oh," I said, "it's just that they are cleaning up along the new beach."

"No," she said, "not at all; you go down and see!"

I found that on an acre and a half of woodland 150 trees had been cut down, with the wood carted off or burned. Then the contractor moved in bulldozers and pushed the sloping bank with what little top soil was on it down into the shoreline and pond, leaving a denuded, raw steep gravel area.

A group of us from in and around Concord held the first of our protest conferences with the County Commissioners, which got us nowhere. Not only the situation at the beach, but other parts of the pond, notably the site of Thoreau's hut, gave us concern. "That pile of rocks," said the County Commission chairman, referring to the cairn that marked the hut site to which each visitor adds a stone, "is an eyesore. I'd like to get it out of there!"

We arranged for a conference to be held at the pond between the Commissioners, Walter Gropius, an internationally known architect and planner, Alvan G. Whitney, a distinguished conservationist from New York State, and Norman Newton, president of the American Society of Landscape Architects and we were told, after we arrived, that the Commissioners were too busy to come!

About this time, the Thoreau Society held its annual meeting in Concord, and the informal Save Walden Committee was officially commissioned as the Society's agent in the matter. We held at least one more frustrating meeting with the Commissioners before they informed us that we were not in their plans for a 20-year "face-lifting" for Walden, and therefore they would have nothing more to do with us. Evidently they had looked up the Thoreau Society and found that we were a relatively small body of people, at that time about 500, with small annual dues, and therefore without funds to fight. We murmured something about taking the matter to court. "Go to court," they said, "and see how far you get!" So we hired the best lawyer we could, Frederick Fisher of the Boston firm of Hale and Dorr, and went to court.

Before Judge Dewing of the lower court rendered his decision, he came out to Walden and saw the havoc. He immedi-

ately issued an injunction forbidding further devastation, including the commissioners' plan for the building of a 100-foot cement bathhouse. The Commissioners appealed.

Meanwhile, Truman Nelson had written an appeal for funds, addressed to 1500 Thoreau Society members and likely friends, and we got \$3,000, a pretty good return percentagewise, which was encouraging.

We called one of the Boston papers and said that we had to have a little publicity before we went to court. No one could have been more surprised than the Save Walden Committee at the reaction. Not only did we get publicity in the Boston papers, but in papers all over the world, including the "London Times," as well as radio and television coverage. Money began to come in, so that we were able to keep abreast of our bills. Sentiment built up, not only in this country, but all over the map—England, Japan, Italy, France, Canada, and Australia. Ultimately, we raised \$11,000, nearly all of which went for legal fees. Before we went into the Superior Court, Judge Forte decided that there was so much controversial evidence involved in this unique case that we should have a hearing before a Master. We had a hearing that lasted ten gruelling days. When we came back to the Superior Court there was a new judge sitting. He was not at all sympathetic to the case, and we lost. But we decided that since we had already gone so far, we could go further. We appealed to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

By this time, the County Commissioners were getting worried. They had thought that we would have dropped out of the case long before. They, of course, had tax money to back their case; but it irked them to spend it so unproductively, to say nothing of possible loss of prestige!

At the trial, one of the justices asked a leading question, which showed us that he was familiar with the Concord area. Again we felt encouraged, and our hopes were justified by a favorable decision handed down on May 3, 1960. The County Commissioners were ordered to restore the ravished area as nearly as possible to its natural state and to maintain the shore line. Trees were to be replanted, and erosion remedied. No hard road; no bathhouse. For the first time in legal history "judicial notice" was taken of a book; in this case, *Walden*.

While we had won, if the County Commissioners did not do what they were told to do, we would have to start over again. What we wanted now was a reversed decision from the Superior Court. The Save Walden Committee went to see the Attorney General at the State House, and he appointed our attorney as Deputy Assistant Attorney General to represent the Commonwealth. We obtained the reversal; if in the future the decree is not obeyed, the officials responsible will be held in contempt of court.

Although the Save Walden Committee was officially discharged, we have been appointed by The Thoreau Society to stay on the job as "watch-dogs."

Thoreau and the Integrity of the Individual

J. GOLDEN TAYLOR

I made my first acquaintance with Thoreau some thirty years ago by what is likely still the standard procedure — reading a few fragments from *Walden* in an anthology. Through the years I gradually read more widely as with ever-increasing fascination I discovered the quality of his social criticism, his humor, and his humanity. I was glad to accept his humane invitation to “consider the way in which we spend our lives,” and I have pondered his pages longer than those of any other writer. The culmination to this absorbing activity came in my sustained endeavor during the past decade to identify in Thoreau’s ten thousand printed pages the essential nature of the man’s spirit and to distinguish between this and his popularly exaggerated, but inconsequential peculiarities.

The essence of Thoreau’s life and thought is still generally obscured by popular distortion and occasionally by careless scholarship. To qualify as a genuine devotee of Thoreau — or as a member of the Thoreau Society — I will say at the outset, it is not necessary for a person to achieve prodigies of economy, strength, misanthropy, austerity, asceticism, nor oddity. A person need not build his own house for \$28.12½ nor subsist in it on twenty-seven cents’ worth of groceries a week nor dig a cellar 6x6x7 feet in two hours. It is not necessary to hoe two and one half acres of beans regularly or to walk in the woods half of every day. It is not necessary to remain a bachelor nor, much less, to prefer the association of woodchucks to that of people (which, incidentally, Thoreau did not). It is not necessary to guarantee to drink nothing more potent than the water of Walden Pond nor to smoke nothing more noxious than dried lily stems. It is of the essence, however, for a person who undertakes to respect Thoreau to be morally sensitive and self-reliant, to have a serious, enlightened concern about the quality of human life (his own and that of the society about him), and to set out thoughtfully discovering who he is and actively becoming that person. While Thoreau implicitly made this commitment to life, at the same time he realistically recognized

what has been called "the constant of human failure" in realizing ideals as when he wrote: "We are constantly invited to be what we are; as to something worthy and noble. I never waited but for myself to come round; none ever detained me, but I lagged or tagged after myself." This invitation to life is really Thoreau's basic challenge to mankind, for he assumed that it is available to everyone. It is not something extrinsic which one receives in the mail; it is a mystical, pragmatically personal motivation, some commanding rhythm in the mind that he must irresistibly follow.

Thoreau sets forth the moral and social dimensions of his personality fully and forcefully on the printed page; and, though he often does so with mystifying subtlety, with indirection, with paradox, with a variety of tone and technique, he does come through to the mature and painstaking reader with a uniquely refreshing, tonic effect. I believe that one cannot really read Thoreau and ever be exactly the same person again, and I am convinced that the change is significantly for the better. Likely without dreaming that his phrase would ever be used to describe himself, Thoreau expressed this idea not, it is important to note, as a question but as an exclamation: "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!" I do not know of any books to which this statement is more applicable than to those written by Thoreau himself. It is this power in Thoreau's writings to create sparks of sentient life in the reader that Krutch recognizes when he observes of Thoreau: "Many of his ardent admirers are those who have accepted him as some kind of teacher, who cherish his writings almost as though they were sacred books, who feel with him a communion of spirit often personal and almost secret."

Thoreau's impact on seven generations of readers transcends conventional literary criteria concerning validity of ideas and felicity of style; the variety and intensity of his influence can be explained best, it seems to me, by the fact that Thoreau was, to a most unusual degree and in every phase of his life, the living embodiment of his lines. Mankind stands startled and admiring before the phenomenon of a man who can practice what he preaches — particularly when his philosophy makes it impossible for him to indulge the comforts of the world or enjoy the approval of society. The centrality of Thoreau's life and experience as the

basis for his thought and the determination of his action is nowhere better stated than in his journal entry of 1839: "All things are up and down, east and west, to *me*. In me is the forum out of which go the Appian and Sacred ways, and a thousand beside, to the ends of the world. If I forget my centralness, and say a bean winds with or against the sun, and not right or left, it will not be true south of the equator." This cannot be disposed of as mere egoism or arrogant repudiation of the universe. It is because he can see so clearly the indispensability of moral self-determination in his own life that he can respect mankind's potentiality so profoundly and be dissatisfied with any moral mediocrity. It is not only *what* Thoreau said or *how* he said it that counts (though these are, of course, indispensable characteristics of his excellence): it is that his words have the confirmation and legitimacy of his actual life looming behind them. The central quality of Thoreau's character, which pervades hundreds of his best passages, is his uncompromising integrity.

But just what does integrity mean for Thoreau? Being a good Latin scholar, he knew that the root meaning of integrity is derived from integer (untouched, whole, entire < *in-*, not+base of *tangere*, to touch), a whole number as distinguished from a fraction. By extension, then, integrity means for Thoreau wholeness and completeness of personality, purity and perfection of character, harmonious and truthful development of one's whole moral and spiritual potentialities. Negatively stated integrity implies for him freedom from any division or impairment or stultification or contamination of the mind and spirit: "Now that the republic — the *res-publica* — has been settled, it is time to look after the *res-privata* — the private state — to see . . . that the private state [the individual] receive no detriment." Thoreau often identifies negatively the conditions he feels are inimical to the development of integrity in the individual; ten such conditions are: incessant work and business, alienation from nature, excessive gregariousness and the resultant dependence on second-hand thoughts, exploitation and social evil, fatalism and the idea of inherited guilt, fear of experiment, absolutistic economic and social customs, subservience to traditional religion, abdication of conscience to the state, condoning of slavery and aggressive war.

It is according to these implications of integrity that he

wrote: "The best and bravest deed is that which the whole man — heart, lungs, hands, fingers, and toes — at any time prompts. . . . This is the meaning of integrity; this is to be an integer, and not a fraction." Later in his journal he expressed the positive side of this same idea when he said: ". . . I feel . . . that I am under an awful necessity to be what I am." But since he was "a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot," his commitment "to be what I am" — to achieve integrity — became not only an immensely serious personal quest but an elemental drive to identify himself mystically with something deep in nature herself: "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. . . . I wished to do again, or for once, things congenial to my highest inmost and most sacred nature. I wished for leisure and quiet to let my life flow in its proper channels, with its proper currents. . ." He also stated this ideal negatively by analogy: "If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man." He reiterated somewhat more belligerently the negative side when he said: "I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion."

Though these statements focus on the core concept of Thoreau's resolutely self-reliant individualism, the unimpaired wholeness which is for him integrity, he wrote much more explicitly and relentlessly on this point. Theoretically and practically man-centered and secular, his view is essentially humanistic. In it he assumes a vigorous freedom of the will and a full measure of responsibility for choice and action. Though he uses traditional religious terminology about God and the devil, these terms are metaphorical, poetic. Since transcendental theory holds that

There is something proudly thrilling in the thought that this obedience to conscience and trust in God, which is so solemnly preached in extremities and arduous circumstances, is only to retreat to one's self, and rely on our own strength. In trivial circumstances I find myself sufficient to myself, and in the most momentous I have no ally but myself, and must silently put by their harm by my own strength, as I did the former. As my own hand bent aside the willow in my path, so must my single arm put to flight the devil and his angels. God is not our ally when we shrink, and [he is] neuter when we are bold. If by trusting in God you lose any particle of your vigor, trust in Him no longer.

When you trust, do not lay aside your armor, but put it on and buckle it tighter. If by reliance on the gods I have disbanded one of my forces, then was it poor policy. I had better have retained the most inexperienced tyro who had straggled into the camp, and let go the heavenly alliance. I cannot afford to relax discipline because God is on my side, for He is on the side of discipline. And if the gods were only the heavens I fought under, I would not care if they stormed or were calm. I do not want a countenance, but a help. And there is more of God and divine help in a man's little finger than in idle prayer and trust.

there is nothing in the universe more divine than the soul of man, Thoreau is here expressing his characteristic determination not to violate his sense of unimpaired wholeness by calling in any outside aid:

Thoreau would here seem to have expressed a sort of triumphant integrity of an absolute kind. Equating "obedience to conscience and trust in God" with retreating to one's self and relying on one's own strength — one's little finger, even so — is about as severely humanistic as one can get. This is a long way from the Puritan sense of dependence; yet it is the secular equivalent of the Christian virtue of patient struggle for salvation under persecution, whose value the Apostle James said was "That ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Thoreau is virtually setting out with Paul to prove all things and hold fast that which is good — good for him, that is; and elsewhere employing a New Testament paradox he asserts: "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." Again like the Apostle James, Thoreau would keep himself "unspotted from the world."

Having repudiated the supports of tradition and the backing of institutions, Thoreau sought values of his own defining with something akin to a Puritan's dedication, a Quaker's inner light, and a Pragmatist's experimental individualism. He early resolved in his pursuit of integrity to give his readers a strong dose of himself; and he, therefore, communicated to any who could comprehend what he had lived to learn. It is no coincidence that his life and writings remarkably coincide since he assessed himself and society according to the same standards and with the same candor. Conceiving idealistically that "Every man is tasked to make

his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour," he yet confessed quite modestly to Blake: "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. Every man's position is in fact too simple to be described. I have sworn no oath. 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." Thoreau is far removed from the will-less boobs who lie down before the supposed necessities of mechanistic or theological determinism: "Thus men will lie on their backs talking about the fall of man and never make an effort to get up!" He assumed man's greatest responsibility, the highest of the arts, is to "effect the quality of the day."

Though actually falling short of his ideal, he resolutely pursued his conscious plan to make his life a sustained experiment in the achievement of the unimpaired wholeness which he defined as integrity, to form his life by conscious endeavor till it became virtually a work of art. "He is the true artist," Thoreau once asserted, "whose life is his material; every stroke of the chisel must enter his own flesh and bone and not grate dully on marble." Again, relaxing somewhat from the more vivid figurative statement of the ideal, he observed: "Even the wisest and best are apt to use their lives as the occasion to do something else in than to live greatly. But we should hang as fondly over this work as the finishing and embellishment of a poem." He expressed essentially the same idea in a couplet:

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

Despite the self-abnegation of these lines, he actually lived and uttered his life with such an unusual degree of success that I would re-phrase them to read:

Thoreau defined and lived a life *most* fit
Because he did both live and utter it.

A rare exhilaration comes to the reader of Thoreau who senses the thoroughness with which his essence pervades his writ-

ing. In the mystical Miltonic sense his "life blood" is in his lines — he is having, one hundred years after his death, "a life beyond life." Thoreau recognized and affirmed this mystical kinship which produces a sort of immortality for men and their values in so far as they have the inherent potency to appeal to succeeding generations of readers:

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. I know, for instance, that Sadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Sadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me. By the identity of his thoughts with mine he still survives. It makes no odds what atoms serve us. . . . He had no more interior and essential and sacred self than can come naked into my thought this moment. Truth and a true man is something essentially public, not private. . . . By living[,] the life of a man is made common property.

Though Thoreau was at times strongly attracted by mystical associations to such dead demigods, he was not in any sense other-worldly; and he was usually capable of a genuine, sympathetic participation in the world of mortals. In the first place he felt the need to front life realistically and self-reliantly — not lose himself in the sentimental heaven of some utopian society like Brook Farm of which he said, ". . . I think I had rather keep bachelor's hall in hell than go to board in heaven." He continually reaffirmed that nothing is more important than trying to live well though the results are often poor: "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. But is this fact of 'our life' commonly but a puff of air, a flash in the pan, a smoke, a nothing? It does not afford arena for a tragedy."

As Thoreau admitted, his neck tended to get a bit stiff at the mere thought of most of the institutions invented by man; but he could relax it enough, occasionally, to turn from his purposive life and cast a sympathetic glance upon mankind, upon actual men and women. In a mezzo-cammin piece he pragmatically rationalized his "unexpanded" condition, which in his terminology meant a failure to achieve the wholeness of integrity; and,

Here I am thirty-four years old, and yet my life is almost wholly unexpanded. How much is in the germ? There is such an interval between my ideal and the actual in many instances that I may say I am unborn. There is the instinct for society, but no society. Life is not long enough for one success. Within another thirty-four years that miracle can hardly take place. Methinks my seasons revolve more slowly than those of nature. I am differently timed. . . . Let a man step to the music which he hears, however measured. Is it important that I should mature as soon as an apple tree? Aye, as soon as an oak?

with no suggestion that society has impaired his integrity, he lamented his inability to develop his "instinct for society":

Though he uses the term society, as here, loosely to mean both men and their institutions, Thoreau usually made careful distinctions. Society is ordinarily for Thoreau not the collection of individual human beings, themselves; it is rather the social machinery — the institutions, traditions, and conventions through which people operate — and stagnate. It is not humanity that he deplures, but the ingrained stolidity of social actions, the friction of the social machinery. Perhaps his most extreme denunciation of society in this sense is his assertion that "Wherever a man goes men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions." Calling unjust laws the friction in the machine of government, he urged: "Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine." He would have the state learn "to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor;" nevertheless the individual cannot wait but at crucial moments must act from principle, which "is essentially revolutionary." "It not only divides States and Churches, it divides families; ay, divides the *individual*, separating the diabolical in him from the divine." He looked upon religious and political institutions the same way. As men who were capable of serving not only with their bodies and minds but with their consciences, were "commonly treated as enemies by it"; so also, "men of sterling worth and probity, the salt of the earth, and confessedly the very best of our citizens, though the Church may have called them infidels. They are only more faithful than the rest. They did not go off at half-cock." When he asserts that some of the poor doctrines of the church are rejected and "properly pass for *wind*," Thoreau is indulging a vigorous disgust for institutional religious thinking. Theology is a most apropos *double entendre* for flatulence.

Being one's genuine self, even at the expense of being alien to the respected institutions of society, is a basic value for Thoreau. He goes farther than this, seeming to imply that duty is not only equal to being — but probably transcends it: "An act of integrity is to an act of duty — what the French verb *etre* is to *devoir*. Duty is *ce que devrait etre*." He has thus made room for the oughtness of duty to society without any implied impairment of the integrity which he identifies with being, in the individualistic sense. It has not been made sufficiently clear in any assessment of his thought I have read that Thoreau had a sense of duty worth mentioning, much less of brotherly love. Several rungs above an abstract sense of duty in the Old Testament moral hierarchy was recorded that fine old injunction "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," which, I dare say, a humanist like Thoreau has more effectually incorporated into his life than most of the descendants of the Christians who borrowed it from the Hebrews. Surprising as it may seem to those content with commonplace, oversimplified platitudes about Thoreau, he not only went beyond duty to love; it is in his associating his integrity, "whole and entire," with love — finding, in fact, his chief resource and validation in love — that his theory of integrity rises to its highest ideal: "I know of no redeeming qualities in me but a sincere love for some things, and when I am reproved I have to fall back on to this ground. . . . My love is invulnerable. . . . Therein I am whole and entire. Therein I am God-propped." It is only on this altruistic basis of genuine love for humanity that service and magnanimity are possible. Thoreau states without reservation his ideal of service to society without which his life would be narrow and conventional if not meaningless. Without an outlet of service to society his or any man's life would become as unpalatable and unprofitable as the waters of Great Salt Lake. It is very strange indeed that any man can be called a misanthrope who wrote:

I would fain communicate the wealth of my life to men, would really give them what is most precious in my gift. I would secrete pearls with the shellfish and lay up honey with the bees for them. I will sift the sunbeams for the public good. I know no riches I would keep back. I have no private good, unless it be my peculiar ability to serve the public. This is the only individual property. Each one may thus be innocently rich.

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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.

Thoreau knew how hard it is for the individual to develop a gift worth giving to society; he knew also how seldom society values the best the individual is able to give. What he wished to give is likely what society continues to need most — a general elevation of the mind and spirit above commonplace vulgarities, what he called the heart. “How hard it is to be greatly related to mankind! . . . Our intercourse with the best grows soon shallow and trivial. They no longer inspire us. After enthusiasm comes insipidity and blankness. . . . If I could help infuse some life and heart into society, should I not do a service?” By varying the figure from “Heart” to “soul” he recurs a little later to the same theme when he says, paraphrasing the opening lines of the first of Paine’s Crisis Papers: “These would be times that tried men’s souls, if men had souls to be tried.” This is exaggeration, of course, but not really negativism or misanthropy. Often, indeed, men appear not to have souls — that is, not to live by principle or to have mature moral sensibilities, yet Thoreau thinks they can and hopes they will. This is the tone sustained throughout “Life without Principle”, which, receiving his deathbed validation, is virtually his special handbook for the achieving of integrity. It ends with his challenging yet optimistic dawn symbol and his encouraging “I do not make an exorbitant demand, surely.” After all, he was a man and certainly valued what he called the soul; and when he was in a more realistic mood, others elicited his admiration: “Minnott, and Rice, and Melvin, and Goodwin, and Puffer even.” He could become ecstatic about Hubbard, “a man of a certain New England probity and worth, immortal and natural.” For Thoreau the prime value in the world was the integrity of the individual: he demanded it for himself and he strove to conserve it for others. He had a remarkable talent for identifying the enemy, becoming a relentless critic of the ingrained vulgarities and the organized inanities known as society. He devastated whatever weaknesses he found in every major institution and venerated tradition in the

America of his time; but this does not mean that he hated society, and certainly not that he despised mankind — the human beings involved in it. Rather he criticized with intensity only because he cared intensely about the human condition and the humanity he observed becoming engrossed by institutions that put a premium on non-thinking, non-feeling, and non-living, that, in other words, destroyed the integrity of the individuals who *belonged* to them.

Thoreau's respect for actual human beings went far beyond the presumption to tolerate those who adhered to standards different from his own. Throughout *Walden* he revealed a broad, pragmatic pluralism: "As for . . . my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits." Later he gave even more explicit recognition of his belief that the integrity of each separate individual must be custom designed and custom made by himself and not inherited, borrowed, or stolen from somebody else:

I would not have anyone adopt my mode of living on any account; for, besides 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. The youth may build or plant or sail, only let him not be hindered from doing that which he tells me he would like to do.

It seems to me that with this sort of inclusiveness Thoreau has pretty well joined the human race; certainly this quality of encouraging "as many different persons in the world as possible" indicates a good deal more social resiliency than he is popularly thought to have had. But more than merely accepting this diversity as expedient or tolerable, he recognizes as primary and indispensable each individual's struggle "to find out and pursue *his own way*," which is just another way of achieving integrity. But he goes still further in *Walden*: he encourages the individual not to be thrown off the track of his genius by any nut shell or mosquito wing on the rails — nor by the disapproval of "the world": ". . . I would not stand between any man and his genius; and to him who does this work . . . with his whole heart and soul and life, I would say persevere, even if *the world* call it doing evil as

it is most likely they will." Thoreau hoped mankind would find his writings socially useful; and, when he stated in *Walden* what he had learned about life by the direct approach, he reported it with the implicit invitation to the world to try out and adapt his findings:

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. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. 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.

What, then, is the nature of Thoreau's sense of integrity and what is its relevance to our time? In the 108 years since he made these broadly humane utterances in *Walden* "the world" of which he spoke has shown no particularly remarkable movement toward respect for the worth of the individual. The most venerated institutions have not generally made it their major concern to encourage their members to "persevere" in the ordeal of self-discovery and self-realization. Institutions know that it is easier to control people with slogans, creeds, platitudes than with a philosophy of pragmatic individualism.

Yet a few notable individuals since Thoreau's time have been kin to his spirit. Thoreau's excellent contemporary, George Eliot, for example, contended exactly as Thoreau did ". . . that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas . . . is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy." This, she adds, is the doctrinaire and absolutist approach of those who have not lived ". . . a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human." In our most humane contemporary, Albert Schweitzer, whose life spans almost the whole period from Thoreau's time to the present, is found a Thoreau-like indictment. The spirit of

the times, says he, is one of personal "spiritual decadence" in which "The organized political, social and religious associations of our time are at work to induce the individual man not to arrive at his convictions by his thinking but to make his own such convictions as they keep ready-made for him. . . . Thus, his whole life long, the man of today is exposed to influences which are bent on robbing him of all confidence in his own thinking." Many people would agree with Krutch, the eminent Thoreau scholar I have cited before, who said that ". . . the world's respect for the individual has declined since Thoreau's day." The late Judge Learned Hand spoke with a Thoreau-like commitment to the integrity of the individual when he said to the alumni of Harvard during its tercentenary year:

It is the business of the soul to impose her own order upon the clamorous rout; to establish a hierarchy [of values] appropriate to the demands of her own nature, and by the mere fiat of her absolute choice, if that be based on self knowledge. . . . For I insist that our forebears meant that salvation was not to be gained by propitiating demons, or averting evil, or conforming to tradition, or by escape into action, or by any other anodyne or evasion. They founded this institution in the faith that by enlightenment men would gain insight into their own being, and that in proportion as they succeeded, they should be free to follow their heart's desire.

Thoreau said a century ago — with his writings and his life — that nothing is more central to the individual person than following the "heart's desire" based on "self-knowledge." Those persons who do this are most significant inherently and are most valuable to society. I believe it has not heretofore been made sufficiently clear to the general public that Thoreau knew how to value the uniqueness of every person because he knew the value of himself. If there should evolve a better society, it will be when there are enough good people of all kinds who have conducted on themselves Thoreau's experiment in the achievement of integrity. Thoreau was, as Henry James aptly put it, "Emerson's independent moral man made flesh — living for the ages, and not for Saturday and Sunday."

The Influence of Civil Disobedience

WALTER HARDING

I think if that mythical fellow "the man in the street" were asked to summarize what he knows about Henry David Thoreau, his answer would most likely be, "Oh, he's the fellow who spent half his life in a shanty at Walden Pond and the other half in jail." That at least is the general impression that most people seem to have of Thoreau. But as a prosaic matter of fact, Thoreau spent only two of his forty-four years at Walden Pond and only one night in jail. The exaggeration in the popular mind of those two events is an excellent example of what we might call hyperbolic synecdoche — the symbolic exaggeration of an outstanding part at the expense of the whole — just as on a quite different, in fact very different level, Mr. Jimmy Durante is known as "The Nose," and once Mr. Frank Sinatra was known as "The Voice." Of those two adventures of Thoreau — his life at Walden and his life in jail — I have been asked to talk tonight about the latter — his "civil disobedience." I would like to speak first a little bit about the circumstances under which he went to jail and then about the amazing wide repercussions that night in jail has had.

One of the very odd things about Thoreau's night in jail is that famous as it is, no one is exactly certain just when it occurred. For many years, through an ambiguous reference to the incident in his book *Walden*, scholars assumed that it occurred in the summer of 1845. But we now know through certain external evidence that I need not go into here that it occurred a year later, in the summer of 1846, and probably — though we cannot be conclusive about it — it happened about the 23rd or 24th of July of that year. Apparently, he was released before his arrest could be entered in the books because there is no official notation about it in the records of Concord jail. What night it occurred we cannot be certain, but that it did occur we are certain, and that is what is important.

Why was Thoreau arrested? For the answer to that question we must go back a number of years before 1846. The period of the 1830's and the 1840's was a period of great political fermenta-

tion in this country, particularly over the question of slavery. A long latent moral repulsion to the existence of slavery in a country that professed to be a democracy began to bubble towards the surface. Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau's home town, was one of the most active centers of this fermentation. And various members of Thoreau's own family — particularly his mother and sisters — were leaders in the movement. Seven members of the Thoreau household were dues-paying members of abolitionist organizations. Various anti-slavery periodicals arrived regularly in the Thoreau family mail. Given these circumstances, it is little to be wondered at that Thoreau himself very early became strongly concerned over the slavery question.

Then in 1843 his fellow townsman Amos Bronson Alcott, later to become famous as the father of the "Little Women" and long an object of Thoreau's personal admiration for his courage to stand up for his scruples of conscience — Alcott announced that he would refuse to pay any taxes that would underwrite a government that supported slavery. Since income taxes were then non-existent, Alcott chose to center his protest on the poll tax and refused to pay it. He was promptly arrested but was released before he could be jailed because Squire Hoar, the town's leading citizen who apparently did not want a blot on the Concord escutcheon, paid the taxes without Alcott's knowledge or consent and to his great disappointment. Alcott's in-laws, apparently for the same reason that motivated Squire Hoar, arranged to pay his taxes in advance in the future to prevent the incident from occurring again.

Alcott may have been foiled in his own personal attempt at civil disobedience but at least he planted the seed of an idea in Thoreau's mind and he too began to refuse to pay his poll taxes — apparently that very same year of 1843.

It is interesting to note that although Thoreau gives the impression in his essay that his own protest was against the War with Mexico of 1845, he actually started his protest two years before that war was declared. When he came to write the essay he simply capitalized on the then current unpopularity of the war in the North — an unpopularity so great that several state legislatures — including that of Thoreau's own state of Massachusetts — passed resolutions condemning the war. It was their feeling (and

also Thoreau's) that the War with Mexico was primarily a political move by the Southern states who wished to extend the dominions of slavery. (You may recall that Attorney-General Robert Kennedy expressed a similiar opinion of that war in a comment he made in Indonesia on his recent round-the-world trip.)

Why no one protested Thoreau's refusal for three years is not known. But one afternoon in July of 1846 when he came in to Concord village from his Walden Pond cabin to pick up a pair of shoes which had been repaired by the local cobbler, he was accosted by his old friend Samuel Staples, the local constable. Staples reminded Thoreau that his poll taxes were overdue and offered to lend him the money if he were short of cash. Thoreau pointed out that his refusal to pay was on moral grounds rather than financial, and Staples reluctantly informed him that he was being placed under arrest.

Thoreau was locked up in the village jail — the only jail, incidentally, that I know of that has its site now marked by a bronze plaque — and Staples went on about his business. Thoreau tells in "Civil Disobedience" of his jail experience:

The night in prison was novel and interesting enough. The prisoners in their shirt-sleeves were enjoying a chat and the evening air in the doorway, when I entered. But the jailer said, "Come, boys, it is time to lock up;" and so they dispersed, and I heard the sound of their steps returning into the hollow apartments. My roommate was introduced to me by the jailer as "a first-rate fellow and a clever man." When the door was locked, he showed me where to hang my hat, and how he managed matters there. The rooms were whitewashed once a month; and this one, at least, was the whitest, most simply furnished, and probably the neatest apartment in the town. He naturally wanted to know where I came from, and what brought me there; and, when I had told him, I asked him in my turn how he came there, presuming him to be an honest man, of course; and, as the world goes, I believe he was. "Why," said he, "they accuse me of burning a barn; but I never did it." As near as I could discover, he had probably gone to bed in a barn when drunk, and smoked his pipe there; and so a barn was burnt. He had the reputation of being a clever man, had been there some three months waiting for his trial to come on, and would have to wait as much longer; but he was quite domesticated and contented, since he got his board for nothing, and thought that he was well treated.

He occupied one window, and I the other; and I saw that if one stayed there long, his principal business would be to look out the window. I had soon read all the tracts that were left there, and exam-

ined where former prisoners had broken out, and where a grate had been sawed off, and heard the history of the various occupants of that room. . . .

I pumped my fellow-prisoner as dry as I could, for fear I should never see him again; but at length he showed me which was my bed, and left me to blow out the lamp.

It was like traveling into a far country, such as I had never expected to behold, to lie there for one night. It seemed to me that I never had heard the town clock strike before, nor the evening sounds of the village; for we slept with the windows open, which were inside the grating. . . . [It was] — a wholly new and rare experience to me. It was a closer view of my native town. I was fairly inside of it. I never had seen its institutions before. . . . I began to comprehend what its inhabitants were about.

In the morning, our breakfasts were put through the hole in the door, in small oblong-square tin pans, made to fit, and holding a pint of chocolate, with brown bread, and an iron spoon. When they called for the vessels again, I was green enough to return what bread I had left; but my comrade seized it, and said that I should lay that up for lunch or dinner. Soon after he was let out to work at haying in a neighboring field, whither he went every day, and would not be back till noon; so he bade me good-day saying that he doubted if he should see me again.

And he did not see Thoreau again — at least in jail — for the evening before, after dark, a heavily veiled woman appeared at the Staples' door, paid the tax for Thoreau and asked that he be released. Although there is still some question about it, it is now pretty generally agreed that that woman was Thoreau's Aunt Maria who was shocked to find her nephew in jail. Staples, a rugged New England individualist in his own right, announced, when he learned of the payment, that he had already taken off his shoes for the evening and was not going to put them back on even for Henry Thoreau. So it was morning before Thoreau was released. Staples in later years reported that Thoreau was the only prisoner in all his years of experience as a constable who was angry at being freed from prison. Through no act of his own Thoreau had become unjailable and thus was deprived of making a vivid protest against the evils of slavery. The whole point of his refusal to pay taxes had been destroyed. In succeeding years apparently his family, as had Alcott's, paid his taxes in advance for him against his wishes so that he never had the opportunity again.

Bronson Alcott, quite understandably, was tremendously pleased at Thoreau's action. When Ralph Waldo Emerson said that he thought it was "mean and skulking, and in bad taste," Alcott defended it "on the grounds of dignified non-compliance with the injunction of civil powers." When, according to the legend at least, Emerson asked Thoreau what he was doing in jail, Thoreau, disappointed that Emerson himself was not willing to take a strong stand against slavery, replied, "Why are you not here?"

I suppose that little anecdote is one of the most famous in American literature. Some years ago when Henry Seidel Canby wrote his biography of Thoreau, he did his best to demolish that legend by demonstrating that it would have been almost impossible for Emerson to have visited Thoreau in jail that evening. But the story has been handed down in the Emerson family itself as authentic and the interview could have just as logically occurred after Thoreau's release the next morning as in the jail itself.

Even that legend — if legend it be — has had its own influence. I was amused a few years ago to pick up the daily newspaper and discover that in the comic strip "Bringing Up Father" Jiggs was calling on one of his old pals in jail for drunkenness, and when Jiggs asked Paddy how come he was in jail, Paddy's reply was, "How come you're not?"

The fact that Thoreau had gone to jail — even if only for a night — inevitably aroused the curiosity of his neighbors and he was so flooded with inquiries as to his motives that he finally wrote out an explanation of his actions and delivered it as a lecture entitled "The Relation of the Individual to the State" at the local lyceum. At the request of the editor, Elizabeth Peabody of the famed "Peabody Sisters of Salem," it was published in the one and only issue of that exceedingly short-lived Transcendental periodical *Aesthetic Papers* in the spring of 1849 under the title of "Resistance to Civil Government." Later it was gathered into his collected works under the title of "Civil Disobedience."

What are the central ideas of that essay? They are perhaps best summarized by a few direct quotations from the essay:

Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. . . .

Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? 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. . . .

. . . . A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. . . .

Those who, while they disapprove of the character and measures of a government, yield to it their allegiance and support are undoubtedly its most conscientious supporters, and so frequently the most serious obstacles to reform. . . .

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?

. . . . If it [the law] is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. . . .

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also in prison. . . . If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. . . .

A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood.

Then Thoreau adds this important modification:

One cannot be too much on his guard in such a case, lest his action be biased by obstinacy or an undue regard for the opinions of men. Let him see that he does only what belongs to himself and to the hour. . . .

And finally he describes his goal of a Utopian government where there would be no need for civil disobedience:

The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarch to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the

rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellowmen. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

There, in highly condensed form, is the theory of civil disobedience. It incidentally is not original with Thoreau. Scholars have traced the ideas back as far as Boethius in Western civilization and Mencius in the Oriental. But Thoreau so effectively presented these ideas that he is now generally given the credit for them.

How effective, how influential was Thoreau's essay in his own lifetime? It had practically no effect at all. Thoreau's own experience in jail, as we have shown, ended abortively. After being delivered twice from the lecture platform in Concord, and then published in the equally abortive *Aesthetic Papers*, the essay itself was almost completely forgotten. I have been unable to discover a single reference to the essay in writing or in print for the remainder of Thoreau's lifetime. After Thoreau's death it was gathered into his collected works and re-published in 1866. But again it failed to create a stir and was permitted to lie fallow until the end of the century.

Parenthetically I should add, to be completely fair to Thoreau, that he himself did not forget the principles he enunciated in his own essay. When in 1854 the Negro Anthony Burns was arrested in Boston under the Fugitive Slave Act and returned to slavery in Virginia, Thoreau spoke out promptly, vigorously, and courageously. At an anti-slavery meeting held in Framingham, Massachusetts, on July 4th of that year, he read a paper entitled "Slavery in Massachusetts," which is best summarized in his own words — "My thoughts are murder to the state."

Then, in 1859, when John Brown made his attack on Harpers Ferry, Thoreau's was the first voice to speak out in his defense.

Abolitionists quaked in their shoes, fearing that Brown's action was bad "public relations" for their cause. They cautioned Thoreau against defending Brown, but he replied that he was not asking for advice, he was announcing a meeting, and at the Concord Town Hall delivered his fiery "Plea for Captain John Brown," repeating it again in Boston and Worcester. Later he helped one of Brown's men escape to Canada and another to defy arrest by federal marshals. So Thoreau did not forget his own principles. But let us turn to their wider influence.

About 1900 the Russian novelist and philosopher Count Leo Tolstoy somewhere, somehow, ran across the essay and was struck with its implications on his own attempts to better the conditions of the Russian serfs under Czarist domination. But so far as I have been able to find out, the only direct action he ever took with Thoreau's ideas was to write a letter to the *North American Review* asking the American people why they did not pay more attention to the voice of Thoreau than to those of their financial and industrial millionaires and their successful generals and admirals.

True credit for the rediscovery of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" should go to a young Hindu law student by the name of Mohandas K. Gandhi who was studying at Oxford University in England about 1900. Gandhi, because of his religion, was a vegetarian. Having difficulty finding food proper to his diet on the university campus, he quite naturally got in touch with some of the English vegetarians — one Henry Stephens Salt in particular. Salt was, by chance, the author of an excellent biography of Thoreau and the editor of several collections of Thoreau's works. Gandhi caught some of Salt's enthusiasm for Thoreau and began to read whatever of his works he could lay hold of. After his graduation from Oxford, Gandhi established himself as a lawyer in South Africa, devoting himself primarily to the defense of violators of the discriminatory laws passed against the members of his own race. To unite the Indian residents of South Africa he established a newspaper entitled *Indian Opinion*. And therein, in the issue of October 26, 1907, he printed Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," later reprinting it in pamphlet form for wider distribution. He accompanied the essay with editorials advocating the use of civil disobedience against the offensive legislation. He of-

fered prizes for student essays on the most effective methods of passive resistance. And he led direct action against the laws, deliberately violating them to bring about mass arrest. Progress was at first slow, but gradually the movement gained momentum and eventually the government was forced to choose between enforcing the laws and glutting the jails with hundreds and even thousands of violators. The laws were one by one repealed or became dead letters. Civil disobedience had triumphed.

Word of the effectiveness of Gandhi's Thoreauvian methods soon spread to his native land, where a movement to free the country from British domination was getting under way. Gandhi, at the strong request of his native countrymen, returned to India to lead the movement. For thirty years he conducted civil disobedience campaigns the length and breadth of the country. When the British government, wishing to establish a lucrative monopoly, forbade the manufacture of salt, Gandhi led followers to the seashore, there to symbolically violate the law by producing salt through sea water evaporation a cupful at a time. As he fully expected, he was immediately arrested and jailed. But the government found it had not solved its problem. In the eyes of his countrymen Gandhi had become a martyr to their own cause and they rushed forward by the hundreds and thousands to join his movement and to duplicate his violation of the law. Webb Miller, the late great United Press foreign correspondent describes the scene in his autobiography, *I Found No Peace*:

Mme. Naidu [one of Gandhi's followers] called for prayer before the march started and the entire assemblage knelt. She exhorted them: "Gandhi's body is in jail but his soul is with you. India's prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows." Wild, shrill cheers terminated her speech.

Slowly and in silence the throng commenced the half-mile march to the salt deposits. A few carried ropes for lassoing the barbed-wire stockade around the salt pans. About a score who were assigned to act as stretcher-bearers wore crude, hand-painted red crosses pinned to their breasts; their stretchers consisted of blankets. Manilal Gandhi, second son of Gandhi, walked among the foremost of the marchers. . . .

The salt deposits were surrounded by ditches filled with water and guarded by four hundred native Surat police in khaki shorts and brown turbans. Half a dozen British officials commanded them. The police carried lathis — five-foot clubs tipped with steel. Inside the stockade twenty-five native riflemen were drawn up.

In complete silence the Gandhi men drew up and halted a hundred yards from the stockade. A picked column advanced from the crowd, waded the ditches, and approached the barbed-wire stockade, which the Surat police surrounded, holding their clubs at the ready. Police officials ordered the marchers to disperse under a recently imposed regulation which prohibited gatherings of more than five persons in any one place. The column silently ignored the warning and slowly walked forward. I stayed with the main body about a hundred yards from the stockade.

Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows. They went down like tenpins. From where I stood I heard the sickening whacks of the clubs on unprotected skulls. The waiting crowd of watchers groaned and sucked in their breaths in sympathetic pain at every blow.

Those struck down fell sprawling, unconscious or writhing in pain with fractured skulls or broken shoulders. In two or three minutes the ground was quilted with bodies. Great patches of blood widened on their white clothes. The survivors without breaking ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down. When every one of the first column had been knocked down stretcher-bearers rushed up unmolested by the police and carried off the injured to a thatched hut which had been arranged as a temporary hospital.

Then another column formed while the leaders pleaded with them to retain their self-control. They marched slowly toward the police. Although every one knew that within a few minutes he would be beaten down, perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear. They marched steadily with heads up, without the encouragement of music or cheering or any possibility that they might escape serious injury or death. The police rushed out and methodically and mechanically beat down the second column. There was no fight, no struggle; the marchers simply walked forward until struck down. There were no outcries, only groans after they fell. There were not enough stretcher-bearers to carry off the wounded; I saw eighteen injured being carried off simultaneously, while forty-two still lay bleeding on the ground awaiting stretcher-bearers. The blankets used as stretchers were sodden with blood.

In prison Gandhi went on a hunger strike protesting what he considered his illegal arrest. As he sank lower and lower, more and more sympathy was aroused for him, not only in India but around the world. Rather than risk having him die on their hands, the government freed him. As soon as he was physically able he violated the salt law once again and was once again put into prison. It was a cat and mouse game, but eventually the government was

forced by public opinion to abandon the law. Gandhi then turned his attention to other unjust laws. The action and the reaction were repeated again and again. To make a long story short, India, under Gandhi's leadership and using Thoreau's techniques of civil disobedience eventually won complete freedom in 1945.

Gandhi directed his techniques not only against unjust governmental laws but also against equally unjust religious codes. The social structure of Hinduism was based upon a caste system. The lowest group, but the largest numerically, was the so-called Untouchables. Over and over again they found the religious codes turned against them. Let us take a single striking example. The only source of water for many Indian villages was a single well. Since the upper caste Hindus used the well, the lower caste Untouchables were forbidden to go near it. They were forced to resort to the open streams and pools. Because of the vast overpopulation of India, all of these sources of water were badly polluted. The Untouchables quite understandably died off like the proverbial flies. When Gandhi found that pleas as to the inhumanity of the religious codes went unheeded, he led the Untouchables to the wells and joined them in filling jars of water. Civil police were called in to enforce the religious laws and the violators were at first attacked unmercifully. When local police, sickened by the violence used on the passive resisters, refused to enforce the laws, special military police recruited from a notoriously bloodthirsty tribe on the Himalayan border were brought in. But they too eventually found their sympathies won by the martyrdom of the Untouchables and refused to continue their violence. The laws became unenforceable and the Untouchables won their right to use the village wells. Once again Gandhi's Thoreauvian civil disobedience had won.

Some years ago Roger Baldwin, then the director of the American Civil Liberties Union, told me that he once took a long train journey with Gandhi. When Gandhi learned that Mr. Baldwin had been born and brought up in Massachusetts near Thoreau's Concord, he plied him with questions about Thoreau's life and showed him that he was carrying a copy of "Civil Disobedience" in his luggage. He said he never went anywhere — not even to jail — without a copy of the pamphlet because it epitomized the whole spirit of his life.

But we need not confine ourselves to India. "Civil Disobedience" has had a world-wide influence. Let us turn to Denmark for another example. Henry David Thoreau is virtually a folk-hero in Denmark today. Why? Because "Civil Disobedience" was used as a manual of arms by the resistance movement against the Nazi invasion during World War II. It was circulated surreptitiously throughout the war years among the Danes as a means of encouraging them to further acts of resistance. What was the result? Well, let me give a few examples. When the Nazis invoked a law requiring all Jews to wear a large six-pointed yellow star on the back of each article of clothing — the obvious purpose being to single out the Jews for further persecution — virtually every citizen in Denmark, Jew or Gentile, including even King Christian, appeared in the streets wearing the yellow star. The law was thus nullified.

When the king took part in numerous such actions, the Nazis felt obliged to retaliate. But they did not dare to execute or even to arrest the king. They took what they thought was the easiest way out by confining the king to his palace and announcing simply that he was ill. But the Danish people quickly caught on and citizens from all over the country decided to "say it with flowers." Going to their local florists, they ordered bouquets to be sent to the king — what could seemingly be more harmless? But what was the result? Every road leading into Copenhagen, the capital city, and every street within the city was soon blocked with florists delivering flowers to the king. Traffic could not move. Business could not be conducted. The entire city came to a standstill. Yet people obviously could not be punished for sending flowers. The Nazis were forced to announce that the king had suddenly miraculously recovered and to give him complete freedom of his country for the rest of the years of the invasion. These are only two of many examples of the influence of Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" in Denmark, but they may give you some idea of why the Nazis thought the Danes to be the most recalcitrant of all their subjects during the war.

But now let us return to our own country. Has "Civil Disobedience" had any influence here? First you may be surprised to learn of the amount of official resistance there has been to the essay in this our democratic country. Upton Sinclair, the novelist,

and Norman Thomas, the perennial candidate of the Socialist Party, and Emma Goldman, the anarchist editor of *Mother Earth* have each been arrested for reading Thoreau's essay from the public platform — Sinclair during a labor strike in California in the early 1930's; Thomas during a protest against the machine rule of Frank ("I am the law") Hague of Jersey City in the late 1930's; and Emma Goldman during protest rallies against the conscription act of 1917. Or again, in the 1930's, the entire edition of one issue of *Heresia*, an Italian-language newspaper in New York City, was confiscated and destroyed by the New York City police because it included a translation of "Civil Disobedience" — this despite the fact that at that very time anyone could go into any bookstore in New York City and purchase an edition of "Civil Disobedience" in English without the least difficulty. Or to cite still another example of official resistance, when, in the mid-1950's the United States Information Service included as a standard book in all their libraries around the world a textbook of American literature which reprinted Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," the late unlamented Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin succeeded in having that book removed from the shelves of each of those libraries — specifically because of the Thoreau essay.

But despite the occasional official opposition — and I in all fairness must stress that the opposition has only been very, very occasional — "Civil Disobedience" has had a continuing influence in this country. I have never been able to discover a direct connection between Thoreau's essay and the famous sit-down strikes led by the C.I.O. during the depression years, but certainly it would be difficult to discover any more practical application of the ideas that Thoreau advocated than those were.

For many years the pacifist movement in this country, (and incidentally in England, France and South America, too) although very small and comparatively uninfluential, has stimulated the publication and distribution of Thoreau's essay. I have in my files numerous editions of "Civil Disobedience" printed by such groups. Many of the conscientious objectors who were imprisoned during World War II quoted Thoreau's essay in defense of their actions. And I know of at least one who took a copy of "Civil Disobedience" to prison with him.

I understand that there is a small group of pacifists who even

now each year file a copy of "Civil Disobedience" in lieu of an income tax report, implying by the action that they refuse to underwrite our military budget. I might add that I understand in such cases the Federal Income Tax Bureau, acting as did Thoreau's Aunt Maria, steps in and pays the tax — but the significant difference that the Income Tax Bureau then confiscates that sum out of the individual's bank account or salary. But the objectors feel that at least the protest has been made. A few years ago when a number of pacifists were protesting the construction of nuclear submarines at New London, Connecticut, they conducted their protest in a rowboat named the "Henry D. Thoreau."

A more striking example of Thoreau's influence in our country today however is that of the anti-segregation movement throughout the South. The refusal of Negroes to ride segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama; the boycotting by Negroes of segregated stores in Albany, Georgia; the kneel-ins of Negroes in the white churches of Nashville, Tennessee; the "Freedom" riders in Alabama and Mississippi — each and every one of these is a very specific example of the influence of Thoreau. And let me cite as proof of that the words of two of the outstanding leaders of the movement. First, the Rev. James Robinson, former pastor of the Church of the Master in Harlem, now director of "Operation Crossroads" (the International Voluntary Work Camps) for us in Africa, and one of the most influential Negroes in this country, said in an article on "Civil Disobedience" twenty years ago, that was addressed to the group who later founded CORE (the Committee on Racial Equality):

Thoreau's Civil Disobedience was not used much by the Abolitionists for whom it was written; probably no one before Gandhi realized its significance for a new type of social movement based upon group discipline and personal conscience. As one reads this essay, it is impossible not to notice that almost every sentence is loaded with meaning for us today. . . . Substitute the economic, political, and social persecution of American Negroes today where Thoreau condemns Negro slavery — and you will scarcely find half a dozen sentences in the entire essay which you cannot apply to your own actions in the present crisis.

I have no doubt but his article led in part at least to the establishment of CORE.

And second, Rev. Martin Luther King, who is universally

recognized as the leader of the current struggles for human rights in the South today, tells us in his autobiography, *Stride Toward Freedom*:

When I went to Atlanta's Morehouse College as a freshman in 1944 my concern for racial and economic justice was already substantial. During my student days at Morehouse I read Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" for the first time. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. This was my first intellectual contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance.

And then, speaking of the boycott he organized against segregated buses in Montgomery, Alabama, he says:

At this point I began to think about Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience." I remembered how, as a college student, I had been moved when I first read this work. I became convinced that what we were preparing to do in Montgomery was related to what Thoreau had expressed. We were simply saying to the white community, "We can no longer lend our cooperation to an evil system."

Something began to say to me, "He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetuate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it." When oppressed people willingly accept their oppression they only serve to give the oppressor a convenient justification for his acts. Often the oppressor goes along unaware of the evil involved in his oppression so long as the oppressed accepts it. So in order to be true to one's conscience and true to God, a righteous man has no alternative but to refuse to cooperate with an evil system. This I felt was the nature of our action. From this moment on I conceived of our movement as an act of massive non-cooperation.

Unquestionably then Thoreau's century old essay has had and is having a powerful influence on the fight for Negro rights in our country today . . . an influence as profound as it had in South Africa fifty years ago or India of thirty years ago or Denmark of twenty years ago. Its influence has traveled around the world and now has returned home.

So much for Thoreau's influence in the past and the present. Now what about his influence tomorrow? I suppose that if they were asked to name the American author today who seems farthest away from the nineteenth century in style and subject matter

and appeal, a great many people would say Henry Miller of *Tropic of Cancer* fame — or notoriety, if you wish to call it that. Perhaps it is particularly appropriate then if I let Henry Miller forecast the future influence of Thoreau.

Over and over again in his non-fiction works Miller has written of his interest in the writings of Thoreau and in 1946 he edited a collection of Thoreau's political essays, prefacing them with an introduction from which I would like to quote as the final words on Thoreau's this evening:

There are barely a half-dozen names in the history of America which have meaning for me. Thoreau's is one of them. I think of him as a true representative of America, a type, alas, which we have ceased to coin. . . .

By living his own life in his own "eccentric" way Thoreau demonstrated the futility and absurdity of the life of the (so-called) masses. It was a deep, rich life which yielded him the maximum of contentment. If his life seems a restricted one, it was a thousand times wider and deeper than the life of the ordinary American today. He lost nothing by not mingling with the crowd, by not devouring the newspapers, by not enjoying the radio or the movies, by not having an automobile, a refrigerator, a vacuum cleaner. He not only did not lose anything through the lack of these things but he actually enriched himself in a way far beyond the ability of the man of today who is glutted with these dubious comforts and conveniences. Thoreau lived, whereas we may be said to barely exist. In power and depth, his thought not only matches that of our contemporaries, but usually surpasses it. In courage and virtue there are none among our leading spirits today to match him. As a writer, he is among the first three or four we can boast of. Viewed now from the heights of our decadence, he seems almost like an early Roman. The word virtue has meaning again, when connected with his name.

It is the young people of America who may profit from his homely wisdom, from his example even more. They need to be reassured that what was possible then is still possible today. There is no ideal condition of life to step into anywhere at any time. Everything is difficult, everything becomes more difficult still when you choose to live your own life. But, to live one's own life is still the best way of life, always was, and always will be. The greatest snare and delusion is to postpone living your own life until an ideal form of government is created which will permit everyone to lead the good life. Lead the good life now, this instant, every instant, to the best of your ability and you will bring about indirectly and unconsciously a form of government nearer to the ideal.

“A World with Full and Fair Proportions”; The Aesthetics and the Politics of Vision

EDWARD J. ROSE

Milton describes the creative individual, the poet, by saying that he “ought himself to be a true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things.” For Whitman as well as for Thoreau such a poet would have to be “Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it,” beside himself in a sane sense. It is Thoreau who emphasizes this paradoxical doubleness in his chapter on “Solitude” in *Walden*.

With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not be* affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but a spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.

Since Thoreau also observed in the chapter on “Reading” that “The works of the great poets have never yet been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them,” and in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* that “The true poem is not that which the public read”, he can be said to have a very special conception of creative action.

There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with production of this, stereotyped in the poet’s life. It is *what he has become through his work*. Not how is the idea expressed in stone, or on

canvas or paper, is the question, but how far it has obtained form and expression in the life of the artist. His true work will not stand in any prince's gallery.

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

In his recent admirable study of *Thoreau and Whitman: A Study of Their Esthetics*, Professor Charles R. Metzger strongly and correctly, I believe, asserts that Thoreau was a "Protestant communicant", that along with Emerson and Greenough, Thoreau, and Whitman, too, "frequently discuss art from a religious point of view, using religious terms such as 'soul' and 'salvation' in developing their arguments." As Milton indicates, there is a profound relationship between the poet and the poem and the creative man and a creative life. Thoreau would agree that a man ought to be a "true poem, that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things", but he would also say that this might entail a kind of healthy schizophrenia which only a Romantic Transcendentalist would be able to survive.

There was an artist in the city of Kouroo who was disposed to strive after perfection. One day it came into his mind to make a staff. Having considered that in an imperfect work time is an ingredient, but into a perfect work time does not enter, he said to himself, It shall be perfect in all respects, though I should do nothing else in my life. He proceeded instantly to the forest for wood, being resolved that it should not be made of unsuitable material; and as he searched for and rejected stick after stick, his friends gradually deserted him, for they grew old in their works and died, but he grew not older by a moment. His singleness of purpose and resolution, and his elevated piety, endowed him without his knowledge, with perennial youth. As he made no compromise with Time, Time kept out of his way, and only sighed at a distance because he could not overcome him. Before he had found a stick in all respects suitable the city of Kouroo was a hoary ruin, and he sat on one of its mounds to peel the stick. Before he had given it the proper shape the dynasty of the Candahars was at an end, and with the point of the stick he wrote the name of the last of that race in the sand, and then resumed his work. By the time he had smoothed and polished the staff Kalpa was no longer the pole-star; and ere he had put on the ferule and the head adorned with precious stones Brahma had awoke and slumbered many times. But why do I stay to mention these things? When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest

of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions; in which, though the old cities and dynasties had passed away, fairer and more glorious ones had taken their places. And now he saw by the heap of shavings still fresh at his feet, that, for him and his work, the former lapse of time had been an illusion, and that no more time had elapsed than is required for a single scintillation from the brain of Brahma to fall on and inflame the tinder of a mortal brain. The material was pure, and his art was pure; how could the result be other than wonderful?

It should be noted immediately that the experience of the artist in the city of Kouroo is simultaneously a religious, an aesthetic, and a political act. The artist's experience liberates him from his time-conditionedness; he rises above politics, but his experience is a metaphor for individual self-creation and thus is *not* non-political or apolitical. In fact, if anything, it is a fundamentally political re-commitment, since an individual cannot change the political structure unless he himself undergoes a personal revolution which in all cases must precede any social revolution. And if that personal revolution really occurs, the social revolution will follow automatically. His personal and political act has cosmic significance because it is a true revolution or resurrection, not a modification of present conditions. He creates anew; he does not patch the old.

A number of points in Thoreau's description of the creative experience of the artist in the city of Kouroo are applicable to a theory of the imagination. First, the striving for perfection is a basic or intrinsic element. Second, the quest for that perfection begins in the particular, not the general, and, literally, in the material or concrete. Third, the self-absorption in the quest is so complete that the creator and the created are both taken up, like Elijah by the chariot of the Lord, in the totality of an infinite creative experience. The sacrifice and independence of the artist in the city of Kouroo reminds us of Blake's aesthetic parody of the words of Jesus. "You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & Lands if they stand in the way of Art. Prayer is the Study of Art. Praise is the Practise of Art. Fasting &c., all relate to Art." The New England Transcendentalist understands the meaning of Blake's claim, "A Poet, A Painter, a Musician, an Architect: the Man Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian. . . . Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists". Like Joyce's

Stephan Dedalus, Thoreau's artist goes forth "to encounter . . . the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race". For the "Protestant communicant" where else but in the crucible of the self is salvation to be found, where else is the creative experience and infinity to be realized. The dialogue with the self demands a dedication and a discipline that continually reminds the individual to view himself as an independent entity, censoring no one else in the process.

There are two further points in Thoreau's parable that are of even greater import than those already mentioned. First, there is the conception of time as *kairos* — the "Moment in each Day", as Blake would say, "that Satan cannot find". It is expressed in the timeliness and timelessness of creative action. Second, there is the perfection and unity of the creative act itself, fully expressed in the sentences, "When the finishing stroke was put to his work, it suddenly expanded before the eyes of the astonished artist into the fairest of all the creations of Brahma. He had made a new system in making a staff, a world with full and fair proportions". The creative process is, indeed, the expansion of the particular into the universal. It is a kind of self-revelation. Paradoxically, identity is made to rise out of identity. "He had made a new system", a system, as Blake explains, of his own.

I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another
Man's.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to
Create.

The living form, which is the creation of eternal existence, is the practice of art. Thoreau identifies a spiritual life with the life of art. Creativity is salvation. That is why it is essential to "live deliberately, to front the essential facts of life" and at death not to discover that one has never lived at all.

The theory of the imagination and the conception of creativity that is before us is of vital importance to an understanding of the role of the poet or maker in human experience, especially with regard to American Transcendentalism. It leads us to a very special conception of nature. Spinoza says that "The intellectual love of the mind towards God is the very love with which He

loves Himself . . . in so far as He can be manifested through the essence of the human mind, considered under the form of eternity." Manifested through the essence of the human mind considered under the form of eternity, anything will reveal its perfect wholeness to the poet, or to that man who is a poet, who in the act of perceiving it, becomes himself a part of it. Being is becoming. Pure subjectivity is nothing less than pure objectivity. Suzuki, in speaking of Zen, says, "Our inner life is complete when it merges into Nature and becomes one with it". The meaning of "Nature" in this context is not, of course, in any way synonymous with an abstract, Deistic conception of nature. "Nature is already Man, or otherwise no Man could come out of it. It is ourselves who fail to be conscious of the fact." Thoreau's perception of the life in his Walden world is exceptional for its dedication to the particular and the way in which universal truths and universal "concord" rise to the surface of the deep well that is his mind yet remains undisturbed just outside his door. Thoreau's contemplative experiences are not common in the western world where contemplation is often misunderstood. Thoreau's perception, the structure of his consciousness, like the Zen Buddhist's.

consists . . . in scenting the fragrance of the laurel in bloom and in listening to a bird singing on a spring day to its heart's content. What, however, makes a difference . . . is that he sees the flowers as they really are and not in a dreamy sort of way in which flowers are not real flowers and the rivers are not really flowing rivers. Pure subjectivity, instead of vaporizing realities, as one might imagine, consolidates everything with which it comes in touch. More than that, it gives a soul to even non-sentient beings and makes them readily react to human approach. The whole universe which means Nature ceases to be "hostile" to us as we had hitherto regarded it from our selfish point of view. Nature, indeed, is no more something to be conquered and subdued. It is the bosom whence we come and whither we go.

Since nature is "already Man", man does not lose his identity. Nature is not a pseudo-pantheistic maw that gobbles up individuality. Thoreau's relationship to nature heightened his own reality.

There is . . . no escapism, no mysticism, no denial of existence, no conquering of Nature, no frustrations, no mere utopianism, no naturalism. Here is a world of the given. Becoming is going on in all its infinitely varied forms, and yet there is the realm of transcendence within all these changing scenes.

For each individual this experience is unique. It is his own. Thoreau's sense of doubleness by which he could be Indra in the sky or driftwood in the stream and be witness to himself and his actions is that kind of transcendence. It is a transcendence not at odds with immanence.

We generally imagine that we all live in the same objective world and behave in the same way. But the truth is that none of us has the same [environmental field of perception]. For each of us lives in his inner sanctum, which is his subjectivity and which cannot be shared by any other individual. This strictly individual inner structure or frame of consciousness [is] utterly unique.

Poets, like Thoreau and the Zen masters, must "express themselves at the point where time has not yet cut, as it were, into timelessness".

It may be, however, better to say that they are at the crossing or cutting point itself and that it is this point that makes the masters [and Thoreau] the instruments of communication in order that Nature may become conscious of itself. Pure Being descends from its seat of absolute identity and, becoming dichotomous, speaks to itself.

No better description than this last passage by Suzuki could be made of the experience of the artist in the city of Kouroo, and Thoreau, by placing his parable where he does in the conclusion to *Walden*, wants us to know that it sums up the meaning of the Walden experience. The poet, and Thoreau, is beside himself in a sane sense. His madness, as it is sometimes called, is his dialogue with the self, or God. It is what Buber might call an I-Thou relationship. The still point is, like Eliot's, where *kairos* intersects *kronos*. It is the point where or when, the timeless intersects time. Or another way of describing it would be to say that it is a timeless position within time. It is, of course, the moment of creation which is infinite because it is eternal. Thoreau would say with Spinoza that we understand God the more we understand individual objects under the form of eternity.

The point of view enunciated in the description of the artist in the city of Kouroo would seem at first glance to lead to political quietism, but as anyone even slightly acquainted with Thoreau knows, Thoreau was committed to political action. Thoreau, like

Milton, was a man whose aesthetic, moral, and political consciousness and responsibilities were equally developed. Thoreau did not think there were ever very many philosophers in existence, as he understood the word philosopher to mean, though he certainly granted the fact that there was no scarcity of *professors* of philosophy. But for Thoreau *professing* an unpopular belief, as rare as it is in any day, is not equal to *living* an unpopular belief. Thoreau labored in the vineyard; he was no laboratory man.

Emerson called Thoreau a "born protestant", a "protestant a outrage", adding that "few lives contain so many renunciations". Thoreau would have liked the Buddhist ring to the word "renunciation". After all, what can a government do to a creative man. "What force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I." The irony in the use of the first person singular is typical of Thoreau, for he means both "me" in a simple sense and "ego-centeredness". Those who obey a "higher law" than the I of the ego live by the sense of the self that is the over-soul. But, of course, that is the only *I*. Thoreau, like the artist in the city of Kouroo, with whom he should be identified, would agree with Blake:

I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics. If Men were Wise, the Most arbitrary Princes could not hurt them. If they are not wise, the Freest Government is compell'd to be a Tyranny. Princes appear to me to be Fools. Houses of Commons & Houses of Lords appear to me to be fools; they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life.

The wisdom of "If Men were Wise" is the wisdom that Thoreau lived by. "His true work [his own self-creation] will not stand in any prince's gallery."

In his "Plea for Captain John Brown", Thoreau makes his politics of vision more than obvious. For Thoreau has a Jeffersonian conception of the need for rebellion and the right of the minority to rise against an unjust and immoral majority rule. He quotes John Brown's words,

"I pity the poor in bondage that have none to help them; that is why I am here; not to gratify any personal animosity, revenge, or vindictive spirit. It is my sympathy with the oppressed and the wronged, that are as good as you, and as precious in the sight of God."

And he remarks, "You don't know your testament when you see it." Brown, and many a radical after him, like Joe Hill and Sacco and Vanzetti, "in teaching us how to die, have at the same time taught us how to live. If this man's acts and words", Thoreau continues, "do not create a revival, it will be the severest possible satire on the acts and words that do." Such a view of political action is in harmony with his aesthetics. In his *Journal* (May 6, 1854), the same year as that which saw the publication of *Walden*, and five years earlier than the "Plea", Thoreau writes,

There is no such thing as pure *objective* observation. Your observation, to be interesting, *i.e.*, to be significant, must be *subjective*. The sum of what the writer of whatever class has to report is simply some human experience, whether he be poet or philosopher or man of science. The man of most science is the man most alive, whose life is the greatest event. Senses that take cognizance of outward things merely are of no avail. It matters not where or how far you travel — the farther commonly the worse — but how much alive you are.

The application of Suzuki's commentary on Zen Buddhism to Thoreau could hardly receive more ample support, but even more important is the Spinozistic declaration of human rights as against human bondage, and the celebration of the same creative independence as that of the artist in the city of Kouroo. Since there is no such thing as "pure *objective* observation", and that "to be interesting" the observation must be subjective, "human experience", the experience of the artist in the city of Kouroo, is what makes man "most alive"; the creative man is he "whose life is the greatest event". The experience of the artist in the city of Kouroo is thus a metaphor for the artist of the art of living meaningfully and fully, whether he is Henry Thoreau or John Brown.

"A world with full and fair proportions" can be created only by a man who is dedicated to clarifying that radiant wholeness that is discoverable only in a free, non-compulsive act of the imagination. True art, like true charity or love, is impossible without imaginative act, the going beyond oneself in time and space. Thoreau's politics, like his aesthetics, is born of the vision of the artist in the city of Kouroo who in striving for perfection becomes a work of infinite art, one with the totality of all things because he is at one with himself. Thoreau bids us, in Frost's

words, to a "one-man revolution", for "going home from company means coming to our senses". "Our whole life is startlingly moral . . . the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are forever on the side of the most sensitive. . . . Many an irksome noise, go a long way off, is heard as music, a proud, sweet satire on the meanness of our lives." "To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts."

Spiritual Ideals and Scientific Fact: Thoreau's Search for Reality

WILLIAM DRAKE

Few men have written so much about their personal experience, and have yet concealed as much of themselves, as Henry David Thoreau. This fact has been the greatest obstacle to interpreting his life and his work. Thoreau built the structure of his expression upon a foundation of decided personal silence, which is obvious to anyone who views his writing in its entirety. Even his letters are conscious literary productions. In great part, one is faced with the difficult choice of accepting the self-portrait, or speculating about the whole man from inadequate evidence. Few have felt safe in accurately probing the silent side of Thoreau, behind the image he deliberately set forth in his writings; on the whole, he has had the rare good fortune to be accepted by posterity on his own terms, and his ideas have been evaluated in their light. He has become a personal hero to thousands, to whom he has shown a way of life. But to place Thoreau in the perspective of truth, we must, sooner or later, relate the words he wrote to the suppressed and yet undescribed inner world out of which they came.

It is not the aim of this paper to bring the unknown Thoreau into full view, but only to single out against this background one problem that concerned him deeply throughout his life as a writer. This is what he himself described as a search for "reality."

"Reality," as the philosophers know, is not a thing to be externally defined in terms of material observable fact, but is a state of mind that results from successfully coming to terms with the world one lives in. To many, there is never a question of reality, or of coming to terms with it. But those who do not share the values of the majority of men around them, or who are gifted with greater sensitivity and intellect, are conscious of "reality" and "unreality" within themselves, and search for inner stability and peace — usually not without conflict and unrest before they reach it.

Thoreau seems to have had from his earliest years the inclination toward a life of solitude, contemplation, and closeness to nature, that he finally chose deliberately as a way of life. It is revealed in youthful compositions, letters, and the earliest Journal entries, and obviously springs from deep within his personality and emotions. It represents far more than the influence of Emerson the man or Transcendentalism the movement; it seems to me these only helped him to see more quickly his own inclinations. He found in Classic Roman writers and in the Oriental scriptures further justification for the life of withdrawal and contemplation. Its positive appeal was like that of a beacon star — a guiding principle for laying the foundations of a life's effort. It set the conditions, as we shall see, which demanded of him the search for reality. This is the side of Thoreau the world knows, for it is recorded in nearly two million words of his literary effort, and has been studied and restated by countless men and women who have shared his ideals.

The opposite side to Thoreau's love of solitude is his aversion to society; and here begin disagreement and controversy, and a multitude of unanswered questions. This is because the emotional basis of his aversion is unclear; for in spite of the intellectual position Thoreau took against society, and the admiration some aspects of it have excited, he kept silence on many matters of personal feeling which alone hold the key. What is not unclear is that he had a hostility toward society from national government and business down to social chit-chat, which, like his love of nature, rose from deep in his personality and emotions. But unlike the productive nature of his love of solitude, his aversion to society clashed with personal ambition, the material needs of life, and the ordinary common meeting ground of social intercourse. Thoreau took pains to portray himself as one who lightly shrugged off these complications. But the self-portrait is underlain by an ambiguous silence in which much still remains hidden.

It should follow, then, that Thoreau found "reality" in solitude with nature, and "unreality" in society. And this is exactly what one discovers throughout his writings. In an early Journal entry — February 9, 1838, at age 20 — he advises himself: "Go into society if you will, or if you are unwilling, and take a human

interest in its affairs." But he adds, "If you mistake these Messieurs and Mesdames for so many men and women, it is but erring on the safe side, — or, rather, it is their error and not yours." He was acutely conscious of a distinct separation between the "real" man and a social role, and treated society with merciless contempt throughout his life. It represented the chief threat to his chosen way; it was an embodiment of the unreal, the unnatural, the subversion of principle.

It was through the solitary meeting with nature that he had to fashion some kind of activity that would bring him to terms with reality. The answer he found was poetry, in the broadest sense: the metaphorical use of observations gleaned from his walks. This represented the harvesting of inner revelation from the experience of the day — the experience of solitude and freedom from the touch of society — and could be made a routine activity through the Journal. Although the Journal before *Walden* was culled and much material discarded, enough remains to show that he worked by a definite technique and routine that suited his needs. In essence, this was to make a note of something seen, and then to build figurative meanings on it, playing one idea upon another in a search for the one that yielded most. After the completion of the only two books published during his lifetime, the Journal itself became the work that preoccupied him.

Both his books — the *Week on the Concord and Merrimack* and *Walden* — are extended metaphors, as I have shown elsewhere, of the adventure of exploration. Both have as their starting point the taking leave of society and embarking on a solitary voyage of discovery. Both are tales of the search for reality that end filled with hope — but which, as I believe no one has pointed out, never actually grasp the object that was sought for.

In the *Week*, Thoreau did not seek a way of life as the answer to his need, but a kind of inner spiritual revelation. The voyager dreams as he floats along, almost passively, while the experiences of the day are occasionally interrupted by speculative essays. Although Thoreau resoundingly rejected institutional Christianity, he believed at this time, and to some extent all his life, in what William James defined as the essential character of all religion: the acceptance of an unseen order of power or spiritual force, of which the material world is only a partial expression. In

the *Week*, it is the divine, as manifest in nature, that Thoreau seeks to know as reality. It is to him the ultimate reality that nature can reveal as part of itself, or which can be glimpsed through nature rightly approached. He asks the anguished question, "May we not *see* God?" The *Week* was Thoreau's first systematic attempt to relate the life of solitude in nature to the search for reality; and it was a reality of intense spiritual idealism, linked in his imagination with the sages of the East and of ancient times.

However, the *Week's* adventure of discovery is more symbolic than real. In his earlier writing, Thoreau was prone to force his imagery beyond the meaning it could legitimately convey. The *Week* lacks internal strength, for Thoreau was unable to express how the literal adventure of a boat trip can lead to revelation of spiritual meaning. It is more an unfulfilled hope or dream of adventure than an account of what he knew from experience. His similar habit of pretending to see moral significance in every aspect of nature often produces merely a conceit, whose meaning would be hard to define exactly. In a letter to Lucy Brown, of July 21, 1841, for example, he writes in typical vein: "I dream of looking abroad summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountain-side, while my eyes revolve in an Egyptian slime of health, — 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 plants put forth leaves. . . . 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." This has much of his characteristic charm of expression, which has won to his side the many who share his love of natural things. But it would not be easy to explain intelligibly how nature can be "more human than any single man or woman," or all of Christianity heard in a fluttering leaf. These surely must be admitted to be forced, as far as precise meaning is concerned, and are not the only examples of this style. But they do reflect the search for reality with which we are concerned, as does the imperfect structure of the *Week* — a search for a kind of experience in which the

spiritual ideals of a holy man could be matched with the actuality of a life in Concord, Massachusetts, in the 1840's.

Throughout the ten years of the existing portions of the Journal before *Walden*, one may follow the threads of the search — the rejection of society, over and over: "Society is always diseased, and the best is the sickest" [December 31, 1841] — and the constant experimenting with metaphoric imagery which will derive a spiritual truth from a fact of experience in nature. There seems to me to be ample evidence that Thoreau's search for reality was in essence a search for a mode of life and a literary expression suitable to it.

With the writing of *Walden*, Thoreau faced his problem more squarely, and described not a somewhat unrealistic adventure with forced meaning, but an attempt to live a life in accordance with his ideals, at least for a while, under the everyday circumstances to be met by anyone in his time. It is an interesting fact that both his published books should have as their central concern the *way* to seek, rather than the fruit of seeking — whether by boyish adventure, or by mature settling down in one place. Thoreau's preoccupation with this problem is, in my estimation, a matter of greatest importance. We are so accustomed to falling under the spell of his words and the self-confidence of his philosophy that we fail to see him as a man among men, turning away from the ownership of property, marriage, ambition, and hope of recognition, while searching for a reality whose rewards would surpass these. The only record we have is the one he meant us to have, and the only evidence of inner conflict must be read between the lines, in the mysteriously veiled passages he sometimes permitted himself to write, or in the blank silence of omission which only the biographer can fill in.

From the beginning of the Journal one sees a peculiar habit, perhaps in imitation of Emerson, of giving advice to himself while seeming to address mankind at large. This manner raises a question: did he constantly address himself in this way to counteract and conceal his doubts? Or was it only a way of rhetorically stating what he believed? Perhaps it was sometimes one, sometimes the other, and only a critic sensitive to his style and the details of his life can distinguish them. It shows, I think, that in matters of crucial importance emotionally, Thoreau practiced an art of con-

cealing, and we have only the carefully written literary end-product that shields the inner feeling, and not a true record of the man. He admired bravery, courage, heroism, and in a sense practiced these Roman virtues in the life he led. The stoic hero, we have come to know well. The man, whose chosen path was guided not merely by stoicism but a revulsion from society as well, remains partly in shadow.

Walden, Thoreau's masterpiece, is his chief answer to the problem of how to live a rewarding life beyond the offensive reach of society. But again, as in the *Week*, it is a voyage away, a search, a leave-taking, an experiment — not a permanent way of life. The reward is shown as the renewal of self through solitude and acquaintance with nature. But now nature no longer sermonizes in the fluttering leaf: she "puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask." Where is the divine which Thoreau once begged to reveal itself in nature? In the great climax of hope for resurrection and immortality which concludes *Walden*, the intoxicating force of God is not invoked; Thoreau advocates sincerity, simplicity, work, and the long view which reveals the insignificance and meanness of society, allowing it to pass by. I do not believe that anyone has drawn attention to the peculiar discrepancy between the ecstasy of *Walden's* final words, and the almost mundane, practical advice Thoreau gives for attaining it, the major ingredient of which is a lofty contempt for society. We generally take Thoreau at his own word; but I suspect that the conclusion of *Walden* is forced — that it is an expression of hope, a need, and not a true report of his own experience, even though he would have us think so. After this, the gradual cooling of his search for a "divine" reality coincides with a shift of his imagination to what may be roughly called the scientific.

Walden is filled with the detailed and fond description of nature with which Thoreau has become identified, and the continued striving to find figurative significance, on a grand scale, in the small events of the day. Is the spiritual awakening of *Walden* truly an awakening to the divine in nature, just because Thoreau constantly tells us it is? Is it largely an awakening to the meanness of man's society, so that nature, in contrast, seems to offer what man cannot? What is the real relation of one to another? How can we, as readers, judge the authenticity of divinity? Saints

and sages of former times pursued an ideal not unlike Thoreau's, but there is a difference worth pointing out. The retreat from society of a St. Francis or a Buddha, for example, was primarily to strengthen their work among men; for the vitality they drew from the spirit was derived from the giving of themselves to correct the evils of society that sickened them. In so doing many such men found an intense spiritual revelation of the kind Thoreau once wished for; in short, they saw God. In his book review of *The Paradise Within the Reach of All Men*, a relatively early piece written before the Walden experiment, Thoreau recognized the futility of attempting social perfection through mechanical inventions, and spoke, as he rarely did, of the great moral power of love as an incalculable force for change: "it can make a paradise within which will dispense with a paradise without."

By the time of *Walden*, the spiritual force that ruled the universe was, to Thoreau, a more indifferent power of nature not identified with the love of man and his contemptible society. Nature became more and more the source of personal peace, health, and activity, and Thoreau became intensified in his lofty disregard of man's imperfection. But with this changing attitude, Thoreau's sense of intoxication waned, and no longer would he write, "Love is the wind, the tides, the waves, the sunshine," or hope for the revelation of God in the fields and woods. On July 14, 1851, he wrote this cry from the heart: "Methinks my present experience is nothing; my past experience is all in all. I think that no experience which I have today comes up to, or is comparable with, the experiences of my boyhood. . . Formerly, methought, nature developed as I developed, and grew up with me. My life was ecstasy. . . This earth was the most glorious musical instrument, and I was audience to its strains. . . 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 wondered if a mortal had ever known what I knew. I looked in books for some recognition of a kindred experience, but, strange to say, I found none. Indeed, I was slow to discover that other men had had this experience. . . The maker of me was im-

proving me. When I detected this interference I was profoundly moved. For years I marched to a music in comparison with which the military music of the streets is noise and discord. 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?"

The search for reality which in the young Thoreau was the search for divinity, became in his middle years the search for a practical way of life for an idealist who could not bear the touch of society. One can read in his Journal of the last years the gradual falling off of the habit of creating metaphors and morals from his observations, as he immersed himself in the recording of facts. It is evident that this represents an abandonment not merely of a technique, but of a hope. Revelation of the divine had not yielded to his years of dedication or the incense from his altars. If it were not for the work that had gone before, the later Journal would hold only minor importance for us now. The biological science of his day was preoccupied with description and classification, and Thoreau enthusiastically filled hundreds of pages with his own observations and identifications. Whatever merits may be found in Thoreau's work as scientist and nature explorer, it is evident that the true drama of his life was that of the inner, spiritual man, who sought in vain to attain the ecstasy of self-realization by union with divine force, and who knew that he had failed.

How are we to interpret the meaning of this? Was he caught unknowingly in the larger currents of his time, in the great shift from religious idealism to scientific materialism, that shook the nineteenth century? His poetic imagination drew its vitality from the search for the inner light, for it was keyed to a technique of turning the observation of nature into a metaphor that shed a light on inner places of the spirit. When the search failed, the poetry failed with it. Thoreau's contempt for society was a contempt for one side of mankind — the arena in which, for better or for worse, the problems of good and evil must be settled, and cannot be avoided, for they are problems of man's indecency to man. Thoreau's revulsion to society barred him from realizing that the force of spirit — the divine in man — shares in mankind as a totality, is indeed part of the very society which sickened him, and that divine reality cannot be gained as a thing apart.

Thoreau's withdrawal, and his consequent anxious search for reality, led him ultimately, I believe, to barrenness of imagination and unfulfillment: the book that was never written, the friendship never achieved, the Visitor who never came. Only when it was too late, he cried out: "With all your science can you tell how it is, and whence it is, that light comes into the soul?" And only when we have penetrated the silence that still shields the inner self will we fully understand Thoreau the human being, and see his work in the perspective of truth.

Notes on the Editor and Contributors

J. GOLDEN TAYLOR, editor of the monograph and director of The Western Thoreau Centenary on which it is based, is author of *Neighbor Thoreau's Critical Humor*. He has published several reviews and articles mainly in *Western Humanities Review* dealing primarily with Thoreau and other New England writers. He has received several research grants from Utah State University Research Council, two of which provided for extended periods of research in the library at Harvard University and elsewhere in the East. He holds the Ph.D. in English from the University of Utah, in Salt Lake City, with a dissertation on *Hawthorne's Transmutations of Puritanism*. He is a life member of The Thoreau Society.

WILLIAM DRAKE, who is an Instructor in English at the University of Arizona in Tucson, spent five years as Western Regional Director of Nature Conservancy, a national non-profit nature preservation society, and while a professional conservationist he wrote numerous articles on the problems of preserving wild lands. He holds a M.A. degree from the University of Iowa, with a thesis, *A Formal Study of H. D. Thoreau*, which has proved a significant pioneer work. Two articles which he adapted from this thesis were included in Sherman Paul's *Thoreau: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (1962). He is currently working on a book tentatively titled: *Day and Night: Truth and Imagination in Thoreau and Poe*.

WALTER HARDING, who is Professor of English and chairman of the English Department at the State University Teacher's College at Geneseo, New York, was one of the founders of the Thoreau Society, has been secretary-treasurer of the Society since that time, and was this year at the annual meeting made president-elect. He has published some thirty articles and ten books dealing primarily with Thoreau and the transcendentalists. Among his books are: *Thoreau: A Century of Criticism*; *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau* (with Carl Bode); *A Thoreau Handbook*; *Thoreau: Man of Concord*. His *Variorum Edition of Walden* is in the press, and he is currently writing a biography of Thoreau. He holds the Ph.D. from Rutgers University.

GLADYS E. H. HOSMER of Concord, Massachusetts, was one of the founders of The Thoreau Society, and since 1955 she has held the office of Vice-president. As ranking officer of the Society at the Western Thoreau Centenary, she brought official greetings from Dr. Lewis Leary, president. She was a member of the Thoreau Centenary Committee and the Hall of Fame Committee, and had the honor (along with Mrs. Caleb Wheeler) of unveiling the bust of Thoreau by Malvina Hoffman at the ceremonies on May 6, 1962 when it was placed in the Hall of Fame at New York University. She holds a B.A. degree from Radcliffe and a M.A. degree from Harvard.

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