

The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods Library

The Lewis C. Dawes Collection

A Guide to the Collection

THE LEWIS C. DAWES COLLECTION

Permission to Publish:

Requests for permission to publish material from the collection should be directed to the Curator.

Copyright:

The Thoreau Institute Library does not hold copyright on all materials in its collections. Researchers who obtain permission to publish from the Curator are responsible for identifying and contacting the persons or organizations that hold copyright.

Source of Acquisition:

Series I: Anthony D. Howd (grandson of Lewis C. Dawes)

Series II: Jennifer Howd (great-granddaughter of Lewis C. Dawes)

Description of Organization:

Series I: Correspondence and images

Series II: *Thoreau* (a bound volume of miscellaneous clippings)

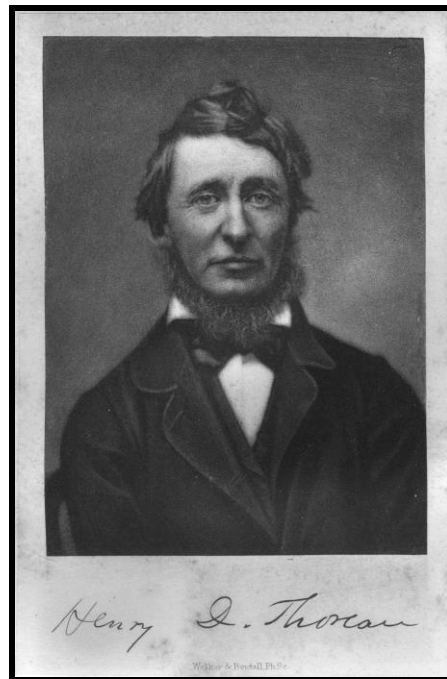
Series I: Correspondence

1. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 4 January 1895
2. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 11 January 1895
3. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 13 January 1895
4. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 22 January 1895
5. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 29 January 1895
6. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 8 February 1895
7. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 9 February 1895
8. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 11 February 1895
9. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 5 March 1895
10. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 9 March 1895
11. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 15 March 1895
12. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 24 March 1895
13. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 27 April 1895
14. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 11 May 1895
15. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, [May?] 1895
16. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 2 June 1895
17. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 15 Jun 1895
18. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 23 June 1895
19. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 29 June 1895
20. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 1 November 1895
21. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 13 November 1895
22. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 20 May 1896
23. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 8 March 1897

24. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 8 April 1897
25. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 26 April 1897
26. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 3 April 1898
27. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 12 October 1898
28. Samuel Jones to Lewis Dawes, 16 January 1899

29. Alfred W. Hosmer to Lewis Dawes, 24 February 1895, with Hosmer's autograph transcriptions of:
 - "Mr. Alcott on Thoreau" from *The Concord Freeman*, 19 August 1880
 - Hosmer, Horace R.:
 - "Reminiscences of Thoreau" from *The Concord Enterprise*, 15 April 1891
 - "Reminiscences of Thoreau II" from *The Concord Enterprise*, 22 April 1891
30. Alfred W. Hosmer to Lewis Dawes, 25 January 1895

Series I: Images



Photogravure by Walker & Boutall, London

Images by Alfred Hosmer:

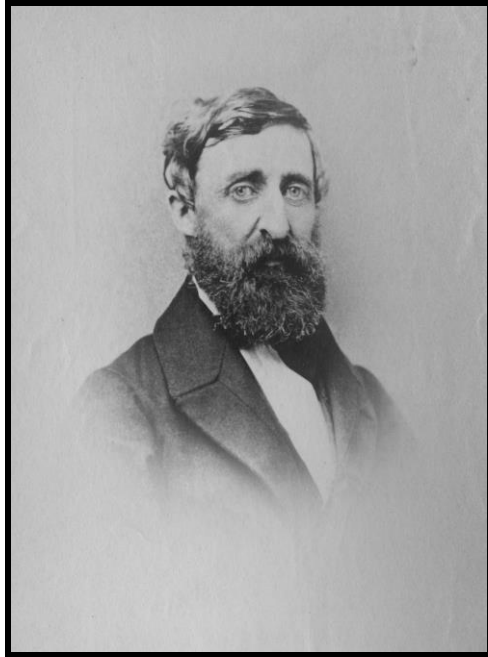
—Captions in *italic* by Alfred Hosmer, 25 January 1895—



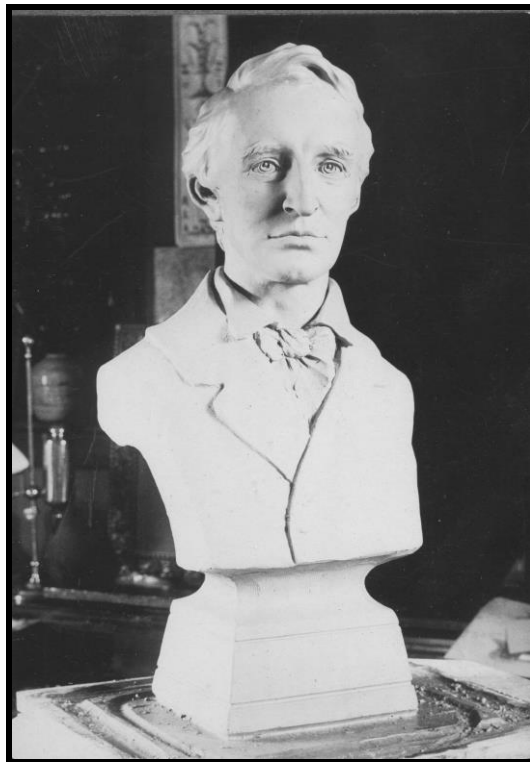
Copy of Samuel Rowse 1854 crayon portrait



Copy of Benjamin Maxham 1856 daguerreotype



Copy of the E.S. Dunshee 1861 ambrotype



"Henry David Thoreau, from the bust in the Concord Library by Walton Ricketson . . . with compliments of the artist. Photo from the clay."



Walden Pond: *"My garden is a perfect ledge..."*



Walden Pond: *showing bar on the left — at extreme low water — at the present rate this bar will probably be out this summer and then will again be covered, not to show itself above water for 15 years or more —*



The Old Marlborough Road



Thoreau Family Graves



Minot House



Site of Walden house



Great Meadows

— *The figure on horseback is Daniel C. French, the Sculptor—*



Flint's Bridge



Fairhaven Bay

*Baker Farm is the cleared land across the bay in the centre of the picture,
the wooded point jutting into the bay being "the Island."*



Fairhaven Cliffs



Conantum

— Cliffs on right and the meadow between the two lines of water is Orchis Meadow. The river makes a bend here, forming the Island —



The Old Manse



Conantum looking from Baker Farm across the bay



*On Old Marlborough Road — showing the Irishman Quinn's house
through the trees in the centre of the picture*



Brister's Spring



Hemlocks
North branch, or Assabet swimming place



Hawthorne and Thoreau's graves — The gravestones in the Thoreau lot were originally red sandstone, but through the action of the elements began to scale off, and some 8 years ago or so, they were taken away, and the stones in the other picture put in place of them— a great mistake to my way of thinking —



Thoreau's birthplace



Thoreau-Alcott House

Series II: Thoreau (A bound volume of miscellaneous pieces)

1. Ripley, George. Review of Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (New York *Tribune*, 13 June 1849). Copy (typescript).
2. "A Yankee Diogenes" from *Putnam's Monthly*, October 1854.
3. Alcott, Amos Bronson. "The Forester" from *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1862.
4. Weiss, John. "Thoreau" from *The Christian Examiner*, July 1865.
5. Conway, Moncure. "Thoreau" from *The Eclectic Monthly of Foreign Literature*, August 1866 (reprinted from *Frasier's Magazine*)
6. "Editor's Easy Chair" from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February 1869.
7. Hecker, I.T. "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism" from *The Catholic World*, June 1878.
8. Stevenson, Robert Louis. "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions" from *Littell's Living Age*, 1883 (reprinted from *The Cornhill Magazine*)
9. Japp, Alex H. "Thoreau's Pity and Humor" from *Littell's Living Age*, 1883 (reprinted from *The Spectator*)
10. Watts, Theodore. Reviews of *Early Spring in Massachusetts*, from the journal of Henry David Thoreau and F.B. Sanborn's *American men of Letters — Henry D. Thoreau* from *The Athenæum*, 28 October 1882.
11. Salt, Henry. "Henry D. Thoreau" from *Temple Bar*, November 1886.
12. Allen, Grant. "Sunday at Concord" from *The Fortnightly Review*, May 1888.
13. Jones, Samuel Arthur:
 - "Thoreau and His Biographers" from *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, August 1891.
 - "Thoreau's Inheritance" from *The Inlander*, February 1893.
 - "Thoreau and His Works" from *The Inlander*, February 1894.

14. Stewart, George. "Henry David Thoreau" from *The Canadian Magazine*, December 1894.
15. Dawes, Lewis C. "The Humanism of Thoreau" (Original typescript, ca. 1895, with autograph corrections by Samuel Jones). 29 pp.
16. *Sermon Delivered by Rev. Joseph Osgood, D.F.D. on the Fiftieth Anniversary of His First Occupation of the Pulpit of the First Parish Church, Cohasset, Sunday, July 17, 1892* (Boston: A.T. Bliss, 1893):
 - Cover "A Fifty years Pastorate, Rev. Joseph Osgood D.D. 1842-1892"
 - Joseph Osgood's "Ellen Devereur Osgood" (pp. 73-75)

Thoreau's Humanism
By Lewis C. Dawes
With corrections by Samuel Jones

On several occasions during the past few years in conversation I have with different people referred to Thoreau. Sometimes the reference has been quite incidental, such as mentioning his name by way of illustration, or quoting a sentiment of his apropos of the subject in hand; or again, I have specifically asked for an opinion upon him. With hardly an exception these innocent references, or deliberate enquiries, have brought down a shower of abuse, or of ridicule, upon the "Concord loafer." Men and women, young and old, ignorant and educated have alike condemned him both for what they imagined he was and for what they thought he taught. Now, as I had early conceived a very considerable liking for the man, I was not a little pained to find an ill opinion of him so generally held, and had it not been that the majority of critics were by their own admission but superficially familiar with his life and writings, I would have been driven to the conclusion that the world was right in its censure. I have no memoranda of the aspersions, but the gist of them was that he was supremely selfish, evaded all the common duties of life, lived by himself and for himself, was a misanthrope, and that his air-drawn philosophy shot so wide of common sense and the actual conditions of existence, that it was, if not pernicious, at least quite useless for any help it might be to ordinary dwellers on the earth.

But there are some who have condemned Thoreau in the cold deliberation of print; in fact there have been a great many adverse criticisms published at one time or another. Two quotations will however suffice to show the general drift of the lot, one is by an American who knew him in his life, and the other is from a Scotchman who knew him in his works. The earlier and more severe is by Lowell, — who charges Thoreau with having no humor and sums up his other faults in this manner: "Was he indolent, he finds none of the activities which attract or employ the rest of mankind worthy of him. Was he wanting in the qualities that make success, it is success that is contemptible and not himself that lacks persistency and purpose. Was he poor, money was an unmixed evil. Did his life seem a selfish one, he condemns doing good as one of the weakest of superstitions." Farther on Lowell says: "His letters show him more cynical as he grew older;" but this final charge is contradicted so flatly, not only by other biographers, but by the letters themselves that it deserves no argument beyond a mere denial. Now, whether the opinion of Mr. Lowell were his deliberate judgment, or were influenced by personal feeling, we shall never know, but we do know that when the editor of the *Atlantic* he struck out a passage from one of

Thoreau's contributions, which was a liberty the latter would not tolerate.¹ Colonel Higginson. Who spoke from a personal knowledge of Thoreau, says: "It is hard for one who thus knew him to be quite patient with Lowell in what seems almost wanton misrepresentation." That Mr. Lowell was not graced with perfect magnanimity is shown in the "Fable for Critics" by his treatment of Margaret Fuller, who had depreciated his earlier poetry, and it is not impossible that Thoreau was also brought under the lash for injuring his self-esteem. The other author who censures Thoreau is Stevenson, who says he was a prig and a "skulker;" spoke of "his engrossing design of self-improvement" and adds that in his whole works he finds no trace of pity. Stevenson in a later note, however, confesses that he criticized from inadequate knowledge and that fuller information has shown him that Thoreau was in some ways a less serious writer but in all ways a nobler man.

I would beg of your patience a little to show that this multiplied disapproval is not fair to Thoreau, who was a man that did justly, loved mercy, after his fashion of loving, and walked reverently, if not humbly, with his God. "He learned," observed Dr. Jones, "that his life is not from the Divine *design* a soul-wearying struggle, but, truly lived, a pastime worthy of the soul. This Dr. Jones, by the way, was the first resident physician of Englewood, having practiced here many years ago before moving to Ann Arbor where he now lives. He is an admiring student of Thoreau; has published several excellent articles about him and compiled his complete bibliography.

Broadly speaking, an author is known by his writings. Those who are particularly interested will inquire into his way of life to learn how closely his practice agreed with his expressed principles; but this enlightenment is sought only by the more ardent worshippers, the majority will be content with the record left in the author's books. It is peculiarly unfortunate for Thoreau's fame that this should be so, for few have by the style of their writing laid themselves open to more criticism from unsympathetic readers. As the secret of the sea is only comprehended by those who brave its dangers, so no one may hope to understand Thoreau who is not willing to encounter dangerous paradoxes and frightful exaggerations. I am afraid the literary mariner must also have a certain liking for his strange language to get all the god there is in it, for the hyperboles are so outrageous at times that the inner meaning can only be reached by an intuition of sympathy. In his ordinary writing when recording in his journal the aspects of natural objects the style is monotonously plain, but as he begins to reason upon the significance of things, and to feel after their spiritual import, he wrests his words into extraordinary meanings and constructs, as it were, a new language to vehicle his thought.

¹ Note by Samuel Jones: "Go on to state specifically that Thoreau resented this: 'called down' Lowell — knew Lowell's inimical tone."

Thoreau was well aware of this eccentricity of style and it argues a good deal of human nature in him that he could so justly value its effect upon others. Had he been altogether self-absorbed and regardless of the opinion of the world, he never would have written to Blake the letter in which he says: "I trust that you realize what an exaggerator I am, — that I lay myself out to exaggerate whenever I have an opportunity, — pile Pelion upon Ossa, to reach heaven so. Expect no trivial truth from me unless I am on the witness stand. I will come as near to lying as you can drive a coach-and-four." Elsewhere he writes: "My companion tempts me to certain licenses of speech, to reckless and sweeping expressions, which I am wont to regret that I have used. I find that I have used more harsh, extravagant and cynical expressions concerning mankind and individuals that I intended. . . . He asks for a paradox, an eccentric statement, and too often I give it to him." Admissions of this sort are not made by a prig, nor is there anything priggish in the confession: "Just as shabby as I am in my outward apparel, ay, and more lamentably shabby, am I in my inward substance. If I should turn myself inside out my rags and meanness would indeed appear. I am something to him that made me, undoubtedly, but not much to any other than he has made." Thoreau, to be sure, does not often give way to these moods of self-abasement, but the occasional cry for charity is all the more appealing.

For several years Thoreau lived with Emerson; first in 1841 when 24 years of age, and later in 1847, while Mr. Emerson was abroad. Mrs. Emerson was in ill health much of the time, and it must have been a relief to Emerson to know that his family were under such efficient care, for Thoreau was not above the homeliest domestic work, and with his habits of industry, we may well imagine that Emerson's house and garden were never so well cared for as during their master's absence. A hint of this is given in the following extract from a letter to Emerson: "I have banked up the young trees against the winter and the ice, and I will look out in my careless way, to see where a pale is loose, or a nail drops out of its place. The broad gaps at least I will occupy. I heartily wish I could be of good service to this household." Thoreau's letters to Mrs. Emerson when he was a tutor in her brother-in-law's house on Staten Island, and those to Emerson while he was abroad, are among the most charming in his published correspondence. For Mrs. Emerson had a truly filial regard, and she was one of the few people who touched the spring of tenderness that lay within him. That she evidently treated him with the loving-kindness of a mother, is shown by his letters to her, in one of which he says: "You must know that you represent to me woman, for I have not traveled very far or wide, — and what if I had? . . . I thank you for your influence for two years. I was fortunate to be subjected to it, and am now to remember it. . . . You have helped to keep my life "on loft," as Chaucer says of Griselda, and in a better sense. You always seemed to look down at me as from some elevation — some of your high humilities — and I was the better for having to look up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your expectation; for could there be any accident so sad as to be respected for something better than we are?"

His correspondence with Mr. Emerson also shows the gentle side of his nature, for intermixed with letters devoted to transcendental discussions and business matters, are newsy ones about the family that would win the heart of any father separated from his young children and invalid wife by the Atlantic ocean. He tells Emerson what the children do and how they look, and reports verbatim their funny speeches, even going so far as to give phonetically the baby talk of the youngest member of the household. These letters are not the prosy reports of a family doctor, but are humorous with appreciation of the absurdities and whimsicalities of child life and child talk. With all his remoteness of mind and stoicism of behavior towards the world at large, Thoreau ever maintained a sweet relationship with children. It was no philosopher's austere concern in the young of the human race, but a very human sympathy with their interests and pleasures; and the proof of its genuineness is the love the children bore for him. He would play with them by the hour, telling them stories and performing sleight-of-hand tricks for their amusement; but their chiefest delight was when he led them trooping through the woods and fields in quest of nuts and berries; and the facility with which he adjusted their squabbles and soothed their disappointments showed a rare discernment of the working of their little minds.

If in spite of the myriad small services rendered when in Emerson's household, and which can hardly be given a money value to check against his board bill, it is still maintained that he was a pensioner, it can be said for Thoreau that he himself was not indifferent to his obligations and several times in his correspondence he expresses gratitude to his older friend, as, for instance, when he says: "At the end of this strange letter I will not write what alone I had to say — to thank you and Mrs. Emerson for your long kindness to me." Thoreau had, no doubt, a sincere regard for Emerson, but the quality of friendliness in him is best seen in his relations with other men. He was, in a way, a disciple of Emerson and lived on the closest terms of intimacy with him, but their intercourse seemed to lack that absolute congeniality which distinguishes a true friendship; there is much mutual admiration, but little personal sympathy. Evidence of an imperfect understanding is seen in the character Emerson delineated in his memoir. He tries to be just and gives examples of Thoreau's humor and kindness, but the impression gathered from reading the sketch is rather of a severely righteous man whose cold and mystical philosophy had destroyed, in large measure, his capacity for human feeling. In the volume of letters which Emerson edited this view is still further emphasized. The letters are so selected with the purpose of showing the stoicism and mental aloofness of the writers, and so evident is that design that Thoreau's sister complained that they portrayed her brother in a very unfair light, and she adds by way of proof instances of his kindness and helpfulness at home. Notwithstanding the protests at the time from Sophia Thoreau and later contradictions from his friends, the great name of Emerson has overborne the testimony and we must hold him largely responsible for the one-sided view of Thoreau which has come down to us.

It is to Thoreau's other friends that we must look for that affectionate regard which neither a stoic nor a cynic could inspire. Ellery Channing was one of them. That erratic genius was a life-long friend of Thoreau and also his frequent companion on walks and expeditions. He was a poet, with all a poet's craving for sympathy and admiration, and that he could have loved Thoreau, his opposite in so many ways, speaks volumes for the latter's human kindness. Channing, withal, was no mere sentimentalist or Thoreau would never have said of him in writing to Ricketson: "He will accept sympathy and aid, but he will not bear questioning unless the aspects of the sky are particularly auspicious. . . . Nor need I suggest how witty or poetic he is, and what an inexhaustible fund of good-fellowship you will find in him." Channing's biography entitled "Thoreau the Poet Naturalist" is a mine of information to any one who has the patience to dig out the ore, but a careless reader who wishes for light upon the misconstrued character of Thoreau will have only confusion worse confounded from its perusal. We may, however, pick out a few sentences to show Channing's opinion of the human side of Thoreau. He says: "In the best and practical sense no one had more friends, or was better loved." "To those in need of information, to the farmer-botanist naming this new flower, the boy with his puzzle of birds or roads, or the young woman seeking for books — he was always ready to give what he had." "Literally his views of life were high and noble. Those who loved him never had the least reason to regret it." Thoreau writing of the winter evenings spent with Channing in the Walden hut says: "We made that small house ring with boisterous mirth and resound with the mummer of much sober talk, making amend then to Walden vale for long silences. Broadway was still and deserted in comparison. At suitable intervals there were regular salutes of laughter, which might have been referred indifferently to the last uttered or the forthcoming jest. We made many a 'bran new' theory of life over a thin dish of gruel, which combined the advantages of conviviality with the clear-headedness which philosophy requires."

The friends whom Thoreau gathered about him were not confined to Concord neighbors or to New Englanders, pestered with their heritage of discontent and general contrariness. Horace Greeley knew and liked the man and helped him in the publication of some of his essays. He also tried, without success, to persuade Thoreau to accept the position of tutor in his family. It was at the time of his first meeting Greeley in New York that he was introduced to Whitman, whose works he admired in spite of the grossness that offended the ideal purity of his mind. He speaks of Whitman as "a remarkably strong though course nature, of a sweet disposition and much prized by his friends." A warm admirer of Thoreau was Thomas Cholmondeley, a well-traveled English gentleman of literary taste. He lived for a time with Thoreau in Concord and corresponded with him until the latter's death, his letters reflecting the affectionate esteem in which he held Thoreau.

Of other friends, nearer to him geographically speaking, Thoreau had several among whom were, Harrison Blake, a clergyman of Worcester, A.B. Alcott, the farmer Edmund Hosmer, and F.B. Sanborn of Concord, and Daniel Ricketson, a well-to-do New Bedford Quaker. This short catalogue, which might easily be extended, will suffice to show that the personality, no less than the philosophy, of Thoreau attracted men of various fortune, condition and intellectual caliber. No one in whom the milk of human kindness was all curdled, and whose disposition was without a trace of loveliness could win the admiration and affection of such a company. Emerson tells us: "He grew to be revered and admired by his townsmen who had at first known him only as an oddity," and at his funeral he spoke of him as "a friend, knowing not only the secret of friendship, but almost worshipped by those few persons who resorted to him as their confessor and prophet, and knew the deep value of his mind and great heart." Dr. Emerson writes: "He was by no means unsocial, but a kindly and affectionate person especially with children. . . . With grown persons he had tact and high courtesy, though with reverence."

If we wrong Thoreau by saying he lacked the social instinct, waywardly as that instinct was manifested, we do him greater in ascribing to him a selfishness that ignored the near and uncongenial duties of life. Notwithstanding his superlative dislike of mere money-getting work and unimaginative labor of all kinds, he ever fulfilled his obligations to his family. In his earlier years he worked with his father at the trade of pencil-making, and having won the highest diploma for his wares, he declared he would never make another pencil, but in spite of his vow he later returned to the trade and followed it at intervals to help in the support of his mothers and sisters. He touches on this matter in the beginning of a letter to Blake where he says he isn't in the mood to write "for I feel and think rather too much like a business man, having some very irksome affairs to attend to these months and years on account of my family. This is the way I am serving King Admetus, confound him! If it were not for my relations I would let the wolves prey on his flocks to their bellies' content." Another occupation was land-surveying, which was more congenial in as much as it kept him out of doors. The net profits he derived from authorship were small, nor were his lectures remarkably successful, probably due to the fact that he scorned the idea of speaking merely to entertain his auditors. "I take it for granted," he said, "when I am invited to lecture anywhere that there is a desire to hear what I think on some subject, though I may be the greatest fool in the country, and not that I should say pleasant things merely, or such as the audience will assent to; and I resolve accordingly that I will give them a strong dose of myself. They have sent for me and engaged to pay me, and I am determined that they shall have me, though I bore them beyond all precedent." A very foolish doctrine this from the standpoint of a money-making lecturer, but his mother and sister didn't starve for all his independence, neither did they lack his help in the work about home. Channing calls him a household treasure, raising the best melons, planting the

orchard with choice trees, acting as extempore mechanic and fond of his sister's flowers and kittens. Ricketson protests that Thoreau was neither unsocial, impracticable nor ascetic. "A more original man never lived," he writes, "nor one more thoroughly a personification of civility. Having been an occasional guest at his home I can assert that no man could hold a finer relationship with his family than he."

Thoreau's lack of popularity as an author never drew from him one word of complaint against public opinion, though writing was a purpose formed early in his life; on the contrary he records in a humorous way the return of seven hundred unsold copies of his first published book, *The Week*, and congratulated himself on having a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which he wrote himself.

Perhaps the keenest suffering he ever endured was at the time he renounced love so that his brother, to whom he was devotedly attached, might win his suit. So completely is this episode veiled that no reference was made to it till lately, though "the story," as Mr. Salt says, "is related on the authority of Emerson, Alcott and other friends who were in position to know the truth." Thoreau was an exception to most poets in this experience, for he never profaned its memory by publishing his grief in a variety of metrical wailings. He alludes to it in one poem called "Sympathy," but hides the real circumstances under the mask of a "gentle boy." It is also surmisable that he refers to this renunciation in his diary where he speaks of "an act in my life in which I had been most disinterested and true to my highest instinct, but completely failed in realizing my hopes."² We should bear this act in mind in estimating Thoreau's life for it may reasonably be considered a pivotal event. But instead of leading him to treat the relationship of love with scorn, or with indifference, he idealized it out of all resemblance to human passion: he purified it so completely of earthly admixture that it became, to his imagination, a devotion fit only for ethereal beings. His strange discourse on Friendship and the deep-reaching mutual demands it makes, were also not unlikely the indirect result of his chivalrous sacrifice, and its influence may account for much that appears to be so cold and impassive in his philosophy.

What was Thoreau's philosophy? He himself denied teaching any, and he certainly had left no formulated expression of his doctrines. A few principles he did accent by persistent iteration, and, what is more to the purpose, he lived them without variableness or shadow of turning. Self-reliance, industry, purity of life and thought, and an unyielding belief in the benignant purpose of creation were dominant notes of his creed. The word expediency is not found in his dictionary; he would do right as God gave him to see the right, whatever came of conduct so uncommon and ill-bred. In Mill's essay on liberty we read: "The

² Note by Samuel Jones: "'Because the girl's parents would not let her have *either* of the Thoreaus. She was still living in 1890."

general average of mankind are not only moderate in intellect, but also moderate in inclination; they have no tastes or wishes strong enough to incline them to do anything unusual, and they consequently do not understand those who have, and class all such with the wild and intemperate whom they are accustomed to look down upon." Now Thoreau did have strong tastes and wishes, and did do things unusual. He wished to learn the meaning of life, and to live it, not according to the customs and laws of men in which he saw much that was frivolous and unjust, but according to the dictates of conscience, and to keep the conscience awake and unsophisticated was his unremitting purpose. It led him far afield from the customary paths of travel and kept him aloof from many ordinate interests and superior to common temptations. What other men regarded as essentials, were to him but superfluities, and the gods he worshipped most devoutly were only minor deities to them. For this we may charge him with unworldly unwisdom, but is it not a little arrogant of us to condemn him utterly? If his ways are not our ways, still it is possible that his ways may be right. You remember how Browning, under cover³ of an Arabian physician, tells of a Jew named Lazarus, who was reported to have been brought back from death through the power of a certain mighty leech, how ever after the man's behavior was most strange in that he was indifferent to the interest of the world, uneager in its affairs, unvexed by what went on about him, but aroused to terrible earnestness by some incident that seemed but trivial to his fellow-townsmen. It was the good fortune of Lazarus to know the hereafter to be real, and to view the present by the light he reflected from it. Thoreau had no such experience to direct his judgment, but he cherished an inner light and brought within its focal point the commonly received opinions of the world, and as they stood the test he adopted or rejected them. He recognized the cruelty of hunting and laid aside his gun; the iniquity of slavery was to him so abhorrent, that he "seceded," as he says, from Massachusetts, and he proved the sincerity of disloyalty by suffering imprisonment for refusing to pay the poll tax. The defilements of trade so nauseated him, that he kept clear of its contact; and the superstition of the church led him to withdraw from its communion. Let it not be urged that his life was merely negative. What he denounced he also foreswore and left us an example of one who so regulated his desires that their attainment did not depend upon the works that he condemned. He diminished his wants beneath the limits of ill-gotten wealth and conquered a leisure, without which, a high authority tell us, we cannot become wise. His church was all out doors and his service the communion of nature and he put to test the difficult saying that the pure in heart shall see God.

"There's not a Spring,
Or leaf but hath his morning-hymn —Each Bush

³ Note by Samuel Jones: "'Under cover' — a trifle clumsy: get a synonym for this *idea*."

And Oak doth know I AM"
"When Seasons change, then lay before thine eye
His wondrous Method; Mark the various Scenes
In heav'n; Hail, Thunder, Rain-bows, Snow, and ice,
Calmes, Tempestes, Light, and darkness, by his means;
Thou canst not misse his Praise; each tree, herb, flower
Are shadows of his wisdom, and his pow'r."

Thoreau was a protestant from the beginning, not unfit for the company [of] Job and Martin Luther, and while he may have erred in protesting too much, his very excesses are a refreshment when so much that is evil passes by the name of good. The doctrine of individualism he firmly believed, and the tenor of much that he wrote was that the force of example in life is superior in reforming power to the influence of laws. In one of his letters he says: "If you would convince a man that he does wrong, do right. . . . Men will believe that they see. Let them see." And again in a letter to Blake: "If I ever did a man any good, in their sense, of course it was something exceptional and insignificant compared with the good or evil which I am constantly doing by being what I am." "The fate of the country," he writes elsewhere, "does not depend of what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning." This belief in the efficiency of mere passive excellence has found many advocates besides Thoreau.

"That the end of life," says Walter Pater, "is not action but contemplation — *being* as distinct from *doing* — a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality."

One of the most misrepresented acts of Thoreau's was the Walden experiment, from which the prevailing opinion that he was a recluse and a "skulker" has its source. He went to the hut on Walden Pond to try living for awhile under the simplest conditions, or, as he expressed it, to "front only the essential facts of life" and see what life had to teach. He wanted to love so as to cut away all that was not life and discover whether the residue was mean to sublime. He stayed there only a couple of years and the fruit of his meditation is his most successful book. "Thoreau," says Dr. Emerson, "is absurdly misconceived by most people. He did not wish that every one should live in isolated cabins in the woods, on Indian corn and beans and cranberries. His own Walden camping was but a short experimental episode, and even then this really human and affectionate man constantly visited his friends in the village, and was a most dutiful son and affectionate brother." To the charge that he was a "skulker," Burroughs replies: "In the great army pf mammon, the great army of the fashionables. The complacent and church going, Thoreau was a Skulker, even a deserter if you please — yea, a traitor fighting on the other side." Another biographer writes: "till within a few years ago the name of Thoreau stood to me for morbid sentiment, weak rebellion and contempt for society. If I met his name

in general literature, it was usually with an implied protest against his teaching and aims. . . . A particular study on which I was engaged led me into frequent contact with Thoreau. I found that his friends loved him, and that he loved them; that in spite of an outer coating of stoicism and protest, he was true and tender of heart, . . . that in one word the common view of Thoreau was quite wrong, or at any rate needed many qualifications."

In reviewing his published works in 1865 a classmate of his, who confessed to a "late but ever-deepening regard," speaks of his "sincere and truly religious life, which, both in what he did, and what it refrained to do, has a stimulus for all who long to keep themselves unspotted from the world;" and George William Curtis whose mind was eminently sane and wholesome remembered Thoreau's life as truly heroic and virtuous, and perceived in his works a spirit of sweetness and content.

No adequate survey can be obtained of Thoreau without thoughtfully considering his action at the time of the John Brown excitement. Thoreau was made actually sick by it, and for a while he was incapacitated for the usual employment that held him by so strong a bond. Any one who cares to be roused by fervent words should read his speeches relating to slavery, and those he delivered with such stinging effect at the time of John Brown's arrest and execution. His reverence for Brown is what might have been expected, — for ten years previously, when speaking on the subject of slavery, he said: "Is there not a sort of bloodshed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death." Moncure D. Conway, who witnessed the scene, describes with what tender solicitude Thoreau cared for a fugitive slave who was harbored at his father's house; how he brought him his food, bathed his swollen feet and comforted him with assurances of protection.

If we may count no man happy till the hour of his death, surely Thoreau is to be envied, for none ever passed from life more peacefully or cheerfully than he. His Concord friends, who were constant visitors, ministered to his comfort in every way, and he said of their kindnesses: "I should be ashamed to stay in this world after so much has been done for me. I could never repay my friends." A touching incident of his last illness was his craving for the company of children, and he begged that they might be allowed to come and see him. Through weeks and months of suffering he calmly foresaw death, and awaited its coming in the strong faith that since it must come, therefore, it must be good. Then it was that the husk of acerbity altogether fell away and revealed the lovable and tender spirit which posterity has so persistently denied him.

"let me be,
While all around in silence lies,
Moved to the window near, and see
Once more, before my dying eyes,

Bathed in the sacred dew of morn
The wide aerial landscape spread —
The world which was ere I was born,
The world which lasts when I am dead;

Which never was the friend of *one*,
Nor promised love it could not give,
But lit for all its generous sun,
And lived itself, and made us live.

Thus feeling, gazing, might I grow
Composed, refreshed, ennobled, clear;
Then willing let my spirit go
To work or wait elsewhere or here!"⁴

⁴ Note by Samuel Jones: "Retain this most apt quotation by all means. Whenever you have quoted from other writers than Thoreau, give the reference to work and pages."



The Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods
44 Baker Farm
Lincoln, MA 01773-3004

781-259-4730

curator@walden.org