

APRIL 19 1955

changed story, but to go to the
end of Comm - talk about Walden Pond
~~that the daughter of a Thoreau enthusiast~~
~~that when my grammar-school aged daughter~~

There is an apocryphal tale circulating in my home town ~~that the daughter of a Thoreau enthusiast~~ that when my grammar-school aged daughter was asked to name the three most important bodies of water in the United States, she replied, "The Mississippi River, the Great Lakes,--and Walden Pond." Her geography teacher thinks she's a bit mixed up, but I think that her only mistake was not to have named Walden first. Certainly no other such body of water is so famed not only across the country, but around the world. Many of you will probably remember that a few years ago when a misguided park commissioner took a bulldozer to some of the trees on Walden's shore, it not only resulted in a lengthy and expensive court suit--and the defeat of the commissioner in both the courts and the next election--but also editorials of protest in newspapers from Boston to Los Angeles, from Miami to Portland, Oregon, and even as far abroad as England, France, and South America.

Why all this fuss about a three-quarter-mile-long pond on the outskirts of a rather small town in central Massachusetts? The answer is, of course, perfectly obvious--because there Henry David Thoreau wrote his masterpiece, Walden, or Life in the Woods.

Although Walden was not exactly a roaring success when it was published in 1854--it took five years to sell out the first edition of only two thousand copies--it has become, in the century since, one of the all-time best sellers of American literature. It has been issued in more than one hundred and fifty different editions--with a number of these editions having sold more than half a

million copies each. At this moment it is in print in at least twenty-four different editions in this country alone as well as in English language editions in England, India, and Japan and in translations into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Czechoslovakian, Japanese, and Sanskrit. What are the causes of this phenomenal popularity? That is the question I am going to try to answer in part at least, today.

For the past twenty-^{two}one years I have had the good fortune to be the secretary of the Thoreau Society and editor of its publications. I say "good fortune" because it has put me in touch with one of the most varied, one of the most interesting, one of the most unpredictable groups of individualists that has ever united itself around a common enthusiasm. As an English teacher I have attended a good many meetings of literary societies and by and large they are rather quiet and sedate gatherings of dignified college professors devoted to the reading of equally quiet and sedate learned papers. But not the annual Thoreau Society meetings which are held in Concord, Massachusetts, each July. I never know who is going to turn up at those meetings. It is the only literary society I know of where the professional teachers of literature are vastly outnumbered by the non-professionals. Among the regular attenders of our annual meetings are a stock broker, a retired letter carrier, a clergyman, an outspoken atheist, an entomologist, an ornithologist, a music teacher, an archeologist, a poet, a publishing company executive,

a printer, a druggist, a socialist organizer, a hardware store owner, a church organist, the author of a book entitled Why Work? (each year he gets permission from the local police to sleep on the front porch of the Concord High School), a telephone company executive, a novelist, a conservationist, an exponent of subsistence farming, a woman who announces that she "covers the culture front in Brooklyn," a professional mountain climber, a crime expert--the list could go on almost indefinitely. What is even more interesting is that when these people have been asked to state why they are sufficiently interested in Thoreau to make the annual journey to Concord--and some of our most regular attenders come from as far away as Quebec, Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas--it is very rarely that two give the same reason. They are interested in his natural history, his politics, his economics, his prose style, his anarchism, his theology, and so on and so on. The most phenomenal facet of Thoreau's appeal--and the appeal of his masterpiece, Walden--is its tremendous breadth. Walden is read, not for just one reason, but for many many.

It would be impossible for me in the brief time at my disposal today to attempt to discuss Walden from all the various angles of approach--if indeed it could ever be done. But I would like to discuss briefly some of its major appeals.

To most people, I suppose, Walden is a nature book. Certainly back at the time of its appearance it was almost universally considered to be a book about natural history and some of Thoreau's contemporaries were annoyed that he allowed anything but nature to have a part

in the book. They fussed that the lengthy opening chapter on "Economy" was a waste of time and should be skipped by the average reader. They also suggested that the reader skip over such philosophical chapters as "Where I Lived and What I Lived For," "Higher Laws" and "Conclusion." When Thoreau wrote about ants or loons or muskrats or pickeral or squirrels or snow or ice, they argued, he was superb. But, unfortunately, they thought, he was all too ready at the least excuse—or with no excuse at all—to go off into transcendental nonsense that was interesting—or indeed even comprehensible only to such "tedious archangels" as Amos Bronson Alcott or to such radical corrupters of idealistic American youth as Ralph Waldo Emerson. But on the birds, the bees, the flowers, and the weather Thoreau could write—and did write superbly. If one looks back at the anthologies of American literature that were compiled in the late nineteenth century, when Thoreau is included, they almost invariably print "The Battle of the Ants" from the "Brute Neighbors" chapter of Walden or "The Pond in Winter."

I am not at all trying to belittle Thoreau as a nature writer. I am simply stating that that was his first and widest appeal—and in fact, still is. I find as I haunt the second-hand-book stores of our country in search of more Thoreau[✓]iana for my own collection that the dealers more often than not categorize him as a nature writer rather than as a literary figure or a philosopher.

And Thoreau as a nature writer is superb. It has been claimed—and I think quite rightfully—that he invented the natural history essay—and certainly his writings are the standard by which all nature writers since his time have been judged. He has successfully avoided the traps so many nature writers fall into of being too cute, too sentimental, too technical, or just plain dull. He never indulges in the pathetic fallacy

of attributing human characteristics to the lower classes of animals. Yet neither does he write down to them. He accepts them for what they are and writes about them on their own terms. He writes about them with wit and humor—but the humor is as often at the expense of himself and his fellow man as at the expense of the animal. Take for example that passage near the end of his chapter on "Brute Neighbors" in which he talks about his checker game with the loon on Walden Pond:

As I was paddling along the north shore one very calm October afternoon, for such days especially they settle on to the lakes, like the milkweed down, having looked in vain over the pond for a loon, suddenly one, sailing out from the shore toward the middle a few rods in front of me, set up his wild laugh and betrayed himself. I pursued with a paddle and he dived again, but I miscalculated the direction he would take, and we were fifty rods apart when he came to the surface this time, for I had helped to widen the interval; and again he laughed long and loud, and with more reason than before. He manoeuvred so cunningly that I could not get within half a dozen rods of him. Each time, when he came to the surface, turning his head this way and that he coolly surveyed the water and the land, and apparently chose his course so that he might come up where there was the widest expanse of water and at the greatest distance

from the boat. It was surprising how quickly he made up his mind and put his resolve into execution. He led me at once to the widest part of the pond, and could not be driven from it. While he was thinking one thing in his brain, I was endeavoring to divine his thought in mine. It was a pretty game, played on the smooth surface of the pond, a man against a loon. Suddenly your adversary's checker disappears beneath the board, and the problem is to place yours nearest to where his will appear again. Sometimes he would come up unexpectedly on the opposite side of me, having apparently passed directly under the boat. ...Once or twice I saw a ripple where he approached the surface, just put his head out to reconnoitre, and instantly dived again. I found that it was as well for me to rest on my oars and wait his reappearing as to endeavor to calculate where he would rise;

for again and again, when I was straining my eyes over the surface one way, I would suddenly be startled by his unearthly laugh behind me. But why, after displaying so much cunning, did he invariably betray himself the moment he came up by that loud laugh? Did not his white breast enough betray him? He was indeed a silly loon, I thought. I could commonly hear the splash of the water when he came up, and so also detected him. But after an hour he seemed as fresh as ever, dived as willingly, and swam yet farther than at first.

But so much for Thoreau as a nature writer.

A second appeal of Walden is as a do-it-yourself guide to the simple life. I think it highly significant that the first real surge of interest in Thoreau in the twentieth century came during the depression years of the nineteen-thirties when large masses of people--indeed almost all of us--were required willy-nilly by the press of circumstances to adopt the simple life. We had no choice in the matter--but Thoreau was one of the very few authors who not only made this simple life bearable--he even made it appealing. A friend of mine said to me back in the thirties, "You know, Thoreau is the only author you can read without a nickel in your pocket and not be insulted."

What is perhaps more phenomenal than his appeal during the depression years is the fact that in our present day era of super-materialism and status-seeking he still continues to make the simple life appealing. Now I am not one who advocates that we all go out and find our own Walden Ponds, build our own cabins, and ignore civilization.

It was only through a profound misunderstanding of the book Walden that the idea that such an abandonment of civilization was Thoreau's aim ever got into circulation. He was very careful in Walden to say:

I would not have any one adopt my mode of living on any account; for, beside that before he has fairly learned it I may have found out another for myself, I desire that there may be as many different persons in the world as possible; but I would have each one be very careful to find out and pursue his own way, and not his father's or his mother's or his neighbor's instead.

He himself lived at Walden only two of the forty-four years of his life--roughly about four percent of his life. He went to Walden Pond to live because he had a specific purpose in mind--the writing of a book that he had found he did not have time to write if he spent his time keeping up with the proverbial Joneses. And when he had finished writing that book (incidentally that book was not Walden but its predecessor, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers), he left the pond as freely and as happily as he had gone there.

Thoreau's philosophy of the simple life does not advocate the abandonment of civilized life or a return to the jungle. He simply points out that modern life is so complex that it is impossible for each one of us to embrace all of it. We must of necessity be selective. But unfortunately our standards of selection tend to be imposed upon us by the society we live in rather than to be based on our own personal interests and desires. We live not our own lives but the lives imposed on us by those who surround us. We keep up with the Joneses instead of ourselves. And when we come to die, we discover that we have not

lived. How many of us will be able to say as Thoreau did on his death-bed:

I suppose that I have not many months to live; but, of course, I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing.

"And regret nothing." These are the key words. Are we able to say that honestly of our own lives? Thoreau, when he went to Walden Pond, said that he "wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life." And because he determined what was the essence of life—not for his parents, nor for his neighbors—but for himself, he was able to say at the end of his life that he regretted nothing.

How then does one get at the essence of life? All of Walden is devoted to answering that question. But perhaps we can find it epitomized in a brief quotation from his chapter entitled "Where I Lived and What I Lived For":

Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a

great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion.

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry,--determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? We will consider what kind of music they are like...Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance, that alluvion which covers the globe, through Paris and London, through New York and Boston and Concord, through Church and State, through poetry and philosophy and religion, till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we can call reality, and say, This is, and no mistake; and then begin, having

a point d'appui, below freshet and frost and fire,
a place where you might found a wall or a state,
or set a lamp-post safely, or perhaps a guage, not
a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future ages
might know how deep a freshet of shams and ap-
pearances had gathered from time to time...Be it
life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really
dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel
cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us
go about our business.

A third facet of Walden is its satirical criticism
of modern life and living. Strangely enough this is one side
of Thoreau that is sometimes missed by the reader. Some take
everything Thoreau says literally and seriously, ignoring the
fact that the book's epigraph reads:

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but
to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, stand-
ing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

Even as astute a critic as James Russell Lowell made the rather
astounding statement that Thoreau had no sense of humor. And
if one does not see Thoreau's humor he can be assured that he
is missing--or worse, mis-reading a major portion of Walden.

A large portion of Walden cannot--or at least should not--be
read literally. Thoreau had a rollicking, witty sense of humor and
used it extensively throughout the pages of his masterpiece. He used

just about every humorous literary device on record--puns, hyperbole, slapstick, mockery, parody, burlesque, and so on. And just about every one of these devices was used with satirical intent. It is true that now and then he gets off a pun just for the pun's sake--such as that worst--or best--of all puns in the chapter on "The Ponds" where he speaks of the patient but unlucky fishermen at Walden Pond being members of the ancient sect of "Coenobites." (At least one scholarly edition of Walden points out in a footnote that a Coenobite is "a member of a religious community," and ignores the pun about the fishermen--"See, no bites.") But such pure puns--if I may call them "pure"--are comparatively rare. Most of Thoreau's humor, as I have said, is directed at the foibles of contemporary society--and is not only directed at them, but hits with a whallop.

Unfortunately humor is almost impossible to demonstrate by excerpts. One of its essentials is that it be seen in context, for it is often its very context that makes it humorous. But let me try a few samples:

The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same.

One farmer says to me, "You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with;" and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle.

I observed that the vitals of the village were the grocery, the bar-room, the post-office, and the bank; and, as a necessary part of the machinery, they kept a bell, a big gun, and a fire-engine, at convenient places; and the houses were so arranged as to make the most of mankind, in lanes and fronting one another, so that every traveller had to run the gauntlet, and every man, woman, and child might get a lick at him. Of course, those who were stationed nearest to the head of the line, where they could most see and be seen, and have the first blow at him, paid the highest prices for their places; and the few straggling inhabitants in the outskirts, where long gaps in the line began to occur, and the traveller could get over walls or turn aside into cow-paths, and so escape, paid a very slight ground or window tax.

If I should only give a few pulls at the parish bell-rope, as for a fire, that is, without setting the bell, there is hardly a man on his farm in the outskirts of Concord, notwithstanding that press of engagements which was his excuse so many times this morning, nor a boy, nor a woman, I might almost say, but would forsake all and follow that sound, not mainly to save property from the flames, but, if we will confess the truth, much more to see it burn.

We are eager to tunnel under the Atlantic and bring the Old World some weeks nearer to the New; but perchance the first news that will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that the Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough.

If excerpting humor is dangerous, analyzing humor is even more so. Humor should stand on its own two legs--or it will fall flat on its face. To point out why something is humorous by the very act destroys

the humor. But I do want to point out once again that Thoreau's humor is not used for its own sake. It is satirical humor and aimed at the reform of existing institutions and customs that Thoreau feels need the reform. And although we laugh at it—or with it—down deep underneath we realize that there is often more validity to Thoreau's suggested reforms than to the customs of the society in which we live.

A fourth approach to Walden is ~~the~~ the belletristic. From a purely technical standpoint, Walden is good writing and is worth examining as such. It has been frequently—and quite rightfully—said that Thoreau wrote the first modern American prose. One has only to compare a passage from Walden with one from almost any one of its contemporaries to see the difference. It was the vogue at the time to be abstract, circumlocutory, periphrastic, euphemistic, and euphuistic. Walden in contrast is clear, concrete, precise, and to the point. Emerson made the point a century ago when he said:

In reading Henry Thoreau's journal, (and the same can be said of Walden) I am very sensible of the vigour of his

constitution. That oaken strength which I noted whenever he walked, or worked, or surveyed wood-lots, the same unhesitating hand with which a field-labourer accosts a piece of work, which I should shun as a waste of strength, Henry shows in his literary task. He has muscle, and ventures on and performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him, I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality. 'Tis as if I went into a gymnasium, and saw youths leap, climb, and swing with a force unapproachable,--though their feats are only continuations of my initial grapplings and jumps.

Walden, like Thoreau's cabin, is tightly constructed. Each sentence, each paragraph, and each chapter is in its carefully chosen niche and cannot be moved or removed without severe damage to the artistry of the whole. The basic unifying device of the book is the year. Although Thoreau spent two years, two months, and two days at Walden Pond, in writing the book he compressed his adventures into the cycle of one year. Walden opens with the cutting down of the pine trees in March and the construction of the cabin through the spring. In summer he moves into the cabin and tends his beanfield. In the autumn he builds his fireplace and warms his house. In the winter he observes his neighbors—human, animal, and inanimate. The with the breaking up of the ice on the pond and the renascence of spring he brings his book to a close. One of the most interesting facets of Lyndon Shanley's The Making of Walden is his revelation of how carefully Thoreau reworked and transposed his sentences to better carry out this theme of the cycle of the year.

Each individual chapter in the book has its set place in the book as a whole. There is a careful alternation of the spiritual and the mundane ("Higher Laws" is followed by "Brute Neighbors"), the practical and the philosophical ("Economy" is followed by "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"), the human and the animal ("Winter Visitors" is followed by "Winter Animals"). Adjacent chapters are tied together by contrast (as "Solitude" and "Visitors"), by chronology (as "The Pond in Winter" and "Spring"), or by carefully worded connective phrases (as after "Reading" he begins "Sounds" with, "But while we

are confined to books . . ." or after "The Bean-Field" he begins "The Village" with, "After hoeing. . ."). And the three major expository chapters ("Economy," "Higher Laws," and "Conclusion") are placed strategically at the beginning, middle, and end of the book.

Within the individual chapters the details of construction are just as carefully worked out. In "The Ponds" he starts with Walden and then takes a southwestern sweep (his favorite direction for hiking according to his essay on "Walking") across Concord from Flint's Pond to Goose Pond to Fairhaven Bay, to White Pond. In "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors," he starts with the residents of the days of the Revolution, works up through the most recent resident of the area-- Hugh Queil, who died the first autumn Thoreau was at the pond--and ends with those who visited him throughout his stay at the pond. Similar patterns can be worked out for each chapter.

Carefulness of construction continues into the individual paragraph. Although the average reader is not usually aware of it, Thoreau's paragraphs are unusually long. Walden contains only 423 paragraphs, an average of only slightly more than one page in the typical edition. But so carefully developed are they that one does not ordinarily notice their length. Their structure is so varied that there is little point in attempting to pick out typical examples. However, one of his favorite devices is at least worth mentioning--his use of the climax ending. Notice how frequently the final sentence in his paragraphs not only neatly sums up the paragraph as a whole, but usually carries it one step beyond, with an added thrust if the paragraph is satirical, with a broader concept if the paragraph is philosophical. Just as with his

chapters, many of Thoreau's paragraphs are independent essays in themselves and can stand alone. But they cannot be moved from their specific niche within the book as a whole without damage to its structure.

Thoreau's sentences too are often unusually long. It takes very little search to find one half a page in length and more than one runs on for a full page and more. But again so carefully constructed are they that the average reader has no difficulty with their syntax and is hardly aware of their complexity. Let me take just one serpentine example:

I sometimes dream of a larger and more[#] populous house, standing in a golden age, of enduring materials, and without gingerbread work, which shall still consist of only one room, a vast, rude, substantial, primitive hall, without ceiling or plastering, with bare rafters and purlins supporting a sort of lower heaven over one's head,—useful to keep off rain and snow, where the king and queen posts stand out to receive your homage, when you have done reverence to the prostrate Saturn of an older dynasty on stepping over the sill; a cavernous house, wherein you must reach up a torch upon a pole to see the roof; where some may live in the fireplace, some in the recess of a window, and some on settles, some at one end of the hall, some at another, and some aloft on rafters with the spiders, if they choose; a house which you have got into when you have opened the outside door, and the ceremony is over; where the weary traveler may wash, and eat, and converse, and sleep, without further journey; such a shelter as you would be glad to reach in a tempestuous night, containing all the

essentials of a house, and nothing for housekeeping; where you can see all the treasures of the house at one view, and everything hangs upon its peg that a man should use; at once kitchen, pantry, parlor, chamber, storehouse, and garret; where you can see so necessary a thing as a barrel or a ladder, so convenient a thing as a cupboard, and hear the pot boil, and pay your respects to the fire that cooks your dinner, and the oven that ^{BAKE} your bread, and the necessary furniture and utensils are the chief ornament where the washing is not put out, nor the fire, nor the mistress, and perhaps you are sometimes requested to move [#] from off the trap-door, when the cook would descend into the cellar, and so learn whether the ground is solid or hollow beneath without stamping.

Three hundred and fifty-one words--and yet I doubt if any attentive student has any difficulty with its meaning. I do not, however, want to give the impression that all of Thoreau's sentences are grammatical leviathans. There are sentences in Walden only ^{two} ~~five~~ words in length. One extreme is as frequent as the other and the majority are of more moderate length. Thoreau understood fully the necessity of variety in sentence structure and length. The point is that he could handle the sentence well no matter what [#] its length.

Perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of Thoreau's word choice is the size of his vocabulary. Walden is guaranteed to send the conscientious student to the dictionary. In a random sampling we find such words as integument, umbrageous, deliquium, aliment, fluviatile, and periplus. Yet Thoreau cannot be termed ostentatious in his word-usage. He simply searches for and uses the best possible word for each situation.

A second characteristic is his allusiveness. On a typical page he may echo a Biblical phrase, quote from a metaphysical poet, translate a few words from an ancient classic, make an allusion to a Greek god, cite an authority on early American history, and toss in a metaphor from a Hindu "Bible." It is true that he is usually careful to make his allusions in such a way that knowledge of the work alluded to is not essential to an understanding of Thoreau's meaning. But the serious reader has his curiosity aroused and wants his questions answered. To satisfy my own curiosity I once took a list of more than fifty different types of figures of speech--allusions, metaphors, rhetorical questions, alliteration, analogy, puns, epanorthosis, parables, similes, meiosis, anti-strophe, oxymoron, epizeuxis, anaphora, litotes, anti-thesis, portmanteau words, metonymy, contrast, personification, epistrophe, synecdoche, irony, apostrophe, hyperbole, and so on--and with no difficulty at all found excellent examples of each one in Walden. There is hardly a trick of the trade that Thoreau does not make use of. I think it significant that one of the most recent editions of Walden ~~one in fact published just this past year~~ is aimed for use as a textbook in college classes in rhetoric and grammar.

A fifth level on which to read Walden is the spiritual level. And I would not be exaggerating in the least to say that Walden has become veritably a bible--a guidebook to the higher life--for many, many people. In his chapter on "Reading," Thoreau says, "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book!" And Walden has been just such a book for many people. I spoke earlier of the fact that many of Thoreau's contemporaries went out of their

way to skip over such chapters as "Economy," "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," "Higher Laws," and "Conclusion." Ironically it is just those chapters which are most essential to Walden as a spiritual guidebook. And it is interesting to note that our contemporary anthologies of American literature are tending to print excerpts from those chapters rather than from the natural history chapters that I spoke of earlier.

It is a major thesis of Walden that the time has come for a spiritual rebirth--a renewal and rededication of our lives to higher things. It is true that we have progressed a long way from the status of the caveman. But our progress has been for the most part material rather than spiritual. We have improved our means, but not our ends.

We can unquestionably travel faster than our ancestors, but we continue to waste our time in trivial pursuits when we get there. We have cut down on the number of hours of labor required to keep ourselves alive, but we have not learned what to do with the time thus saved. We devote the major part of our national energy to devising new means of blowing up the rest of the world and ignore any attempt to make better men of ourselves.

Thoreau could hardly be called orthodox from a religious standpoint (or, as a matter of fact, from any standpoint at all), but it is significant to note that one of his favorite texts was "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world but lose his own soul?" And Walden, on its ^{highest} ~~light~~ level is a do-it-yourself guide to the saving of your own soul, to a spiritual rebirth.

As many recent critics, ~~from F. O. Matthiessen onward~~, have pointed out, the most frequently recurring symbol in Walden from the beginning of the book to the very end is the symbol of rebirth and renewal. The book as a whole, as I have said, is based on the cycle of the seasons ending with the renewal of the earth and its life with the coming of spring. The chapter on "Sounds" follows the same pattern for the day, beginning with the sounds of morning, continuing on through the afternoon, the evening, and the night, and ending with the renewal of the world from its sleep with the crowing of the cock in the morning. Thoreau speaks of the purification ceremonies of the Indians and of the Mexicans. He tells us of the strange and wonderful insect that was reborn out of the apple-tree trunk after sixty years of dormancy. The very closing words of the book are a promise of a newer and better life that can be achieved if we but strive for it:

I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

How can we approach, how can we achieve such a life? Let me quote just two more brief passages from Walden. The first is from "Higher Laws":

If one listens to the faintest but constant suggestions of his genius, which are certainly true, he sees not to what extremes, or even insanity, it may lead him; and yet that way, as he grows [#]more resolute and faithful, his road lies. [The faintest assured objection which one healthy man feels will at length prevail over the arguments and customs of mankind. No man ever follows his genius till it maled him. Though the result were bodily weakness, yet perhaps no one can say that the consequences are to be regretted, for these were a life in conformity to higher principles.] If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal,—that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself.

And the second is from his "Conclusion":

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.

Thoreau is sometimes dismissed as a misanthrope or a skulker, one who devoted himself to carping and criticism. But note that when Walden is approached on this spiritual level, it is not negative, it is positive. Thoreau is not so much complaining about the way things are but rather showing the way things might be. He is firmly convinced that the sun is but a morning star.

I have in the past few minutes approached Walden from five different angles. But I have by no means exhausted the number of such approaches. Walden can and does mean all things to all men. Therein lies its very strength. It has been tested by time and not found wanting. In its first hundred years it has grown, not diminished in stature. I have no fear as to its being lost sight of in one more century—or two—or three—or four. It will endure.